

# YOUNG PEOPLE, CREATIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

A report on the value  
of participation in the arts  
for young people

Research conducted by Anna Fiona Keogh

Commissioned by The Youth Arts Programme,  
National Youth Council of Ireland





'It's super fun. I've learnt so many new things and a real sense of belonging.' (Jenny, 14)



'Loads of my friends are nice, you achieve goals, you are treated like an adult and allowed to organise your own things.' (Sarah, 16)





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## Youth Arts Programme, National Youth Council of Ireland

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For many years NYCI has prioritised youth arts as a key medium to engage and communicate with children and young people, through NYCI's Youth Arts Programme (a partnership between NYCI, the Arts Council and the Office for the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs).

NYCI is dedicated to the development and advancement of youth arts in Ireland. It aims specifically to realise the potential of young people through good quality arts practice within youth organisations and to develop appropriate policies and activities at local, regional and national level.

**This is achieved through:**

- Encouraging and supporting young people in accessing and participating in the arts;
- Promoting exemplary models of good practice in youth organisations and in the wider youth sector;
- Promoting youth arts as a valid youth work methodology that is informed by relevant art form expertise and experience;
- Acting as a national information and resource service in the youth arts area;

- Promoting a partnership approach to work in the area of youth arts;
- Creating linkages with appropriate agencies at local, national and international level.

NYCI aims to ensure that all young people as citizens have the opportunity to participate in and engage with arts and cultural practice in Ireland as an intrinsic right (Article 27 UN Human Rights) as well as for its value and efficacy as an educational medium.

NYCI provides strategic support for arts practice in youth work, encouraging the creation of safe and supportive environments that value imagination, originality, daring and experimentation.





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## Introduction

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This is an important piece of research. Through a specific sample group and through focused questions, Anna Fiona Keogh has tried to follow the sometimes faint, often mercurial line of young people's engagement with an artform. We have tried to ascertain (in as much as we can ever quantify these things) what is unique and special about youth arts, what exactly happens in the life of a young person when they engage with an artform and what begins to happen in their creative and imaginative processes. We don't suggest that this research is exhaustive or conclusive, but it maps a patch of ground in the landscape.

I particularly like about this piece of research, that the voices of the young participants are so clearly present on every page. Their perspectives, their insights and their ideas shared with Anna Fiona are as valid and useful as any consultation with any youth arts expert.

At the Youth Arts Programme of the National Youth Council of Ireland, we would like to extend our sincere thanks, firstly to Anna Fiona Keogh, the author of this document, and to Margot Kenny, Arts Officer with NYCI at the time this research originated.

But most especially, we extend our immense gratitude to the organisations who shared their time and ideas so generously over the course of this research; the staff and participants of:

**The Base**, Ballyfermot, Dublin

**Na Crosáin**, Galway

**Young Irish Filmmakers**, Kilkenny

**Sligo Baroque Youth Orchestra**

**WYD moves**, Waterford Youth Arts

**Avondhu Development Group**, Mallow, Cork

**Model Arts and Niland Gallery**, Sligo

...without whose (and countless other organisations and projects around the country) ongoing work every day of the year, there would be no research to collect, no projects to document, no practice to celebrate.

Anne O'Gorman

Senior Youth Arts Project Officer

National Youth Council of Ireland

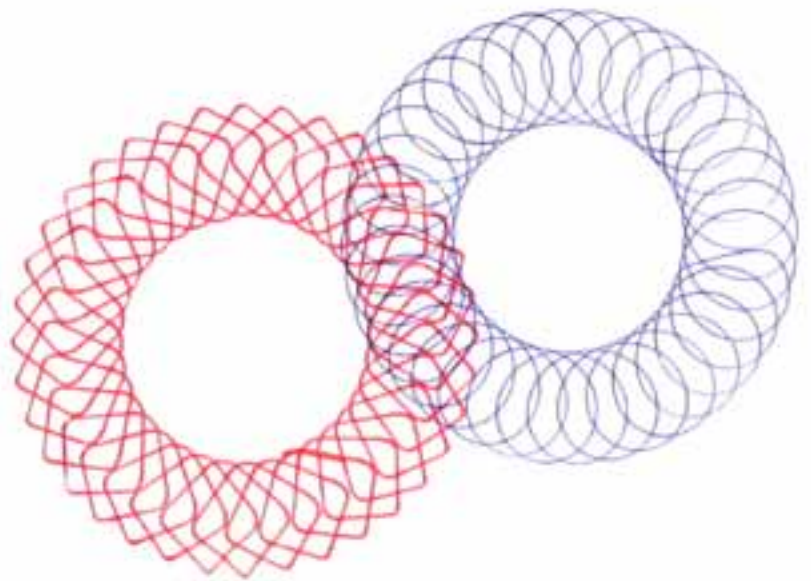
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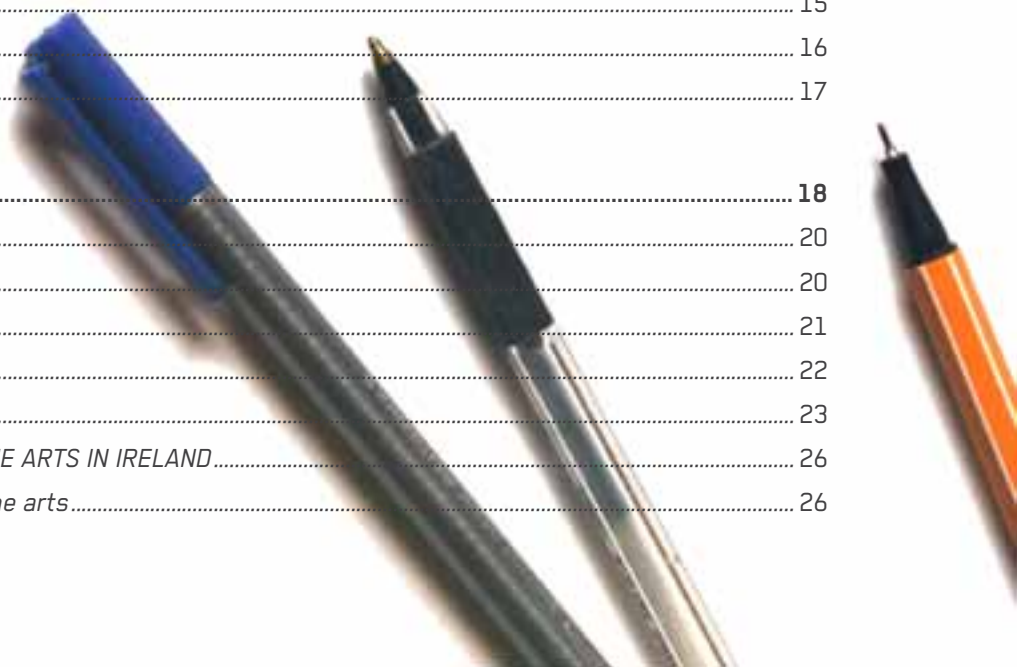
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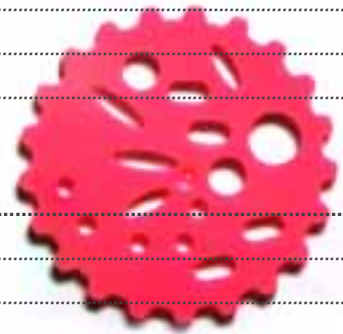
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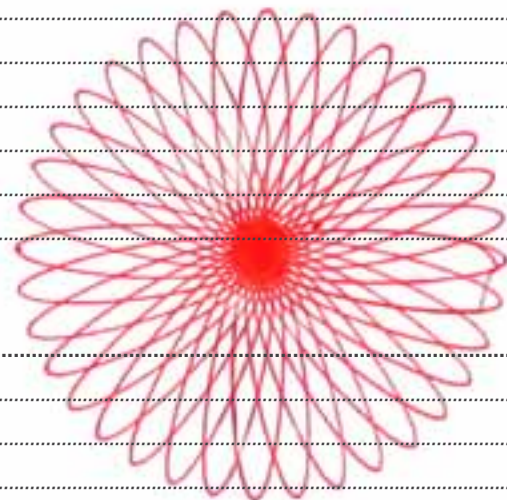


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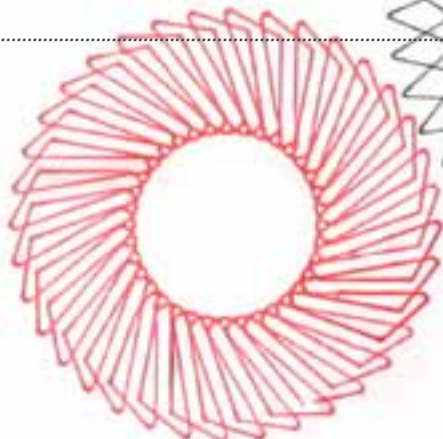
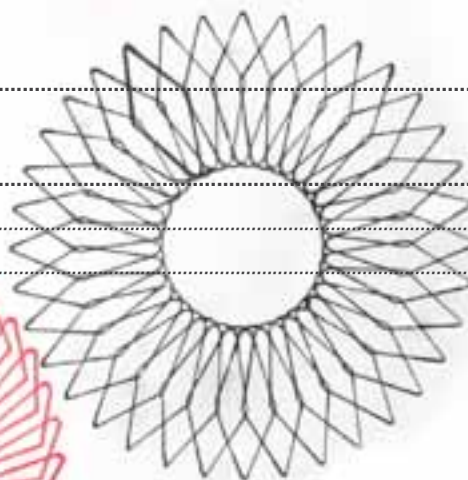
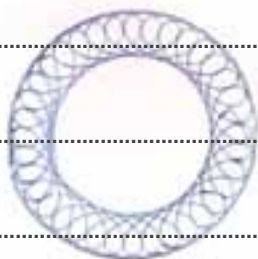


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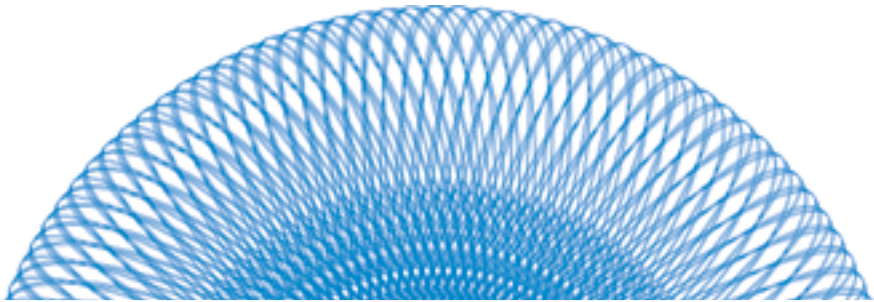


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**‘Young People, Creative Action and Social Change’ aimed to assess the value of participation in the arts to young people, and to demonstrate how participation in arts practice impacts on the individual and at a societal level.**

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In addition, the study aimed to:

- Examine a number of specific art forms, e.g. visual arts, theatre, music, dance and literature.
- Identify a number of contexts within which young people experience the above art forms.
- Explore the links between proficiency in specific art forms and development of broader cognitive, social and creative skills.
- Explore the relationship between arts experience in school and out of school.

This study also gave young people the opportunity to discuss what participating in the arts means to them. What do they get out of participating in the arts? Has participation in the arts changed them in any way?

The study involved conducting indepth research with approximately 60 young people, between the ages of 10 and 18, involved in six youth arts projects or programmes. The projects were selected on a number of criteria including diverse art forms and



geographical location. Also, we aimed for a sample which reflected the views of young people from different social backgrounds.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted with a commitment to youth-centred research and aimed to make the active participation of children and young people central to the process. The importance of making the research process accessible and relevant to all participants was at the forefront of the research practice. The data collection process was designed to be attractive to and enjoyable for, children and young people. The research methods were based on the principles of participatory research, which views research participants as local experts. The inherent value of the arts was recognised from the outset, and the methods aimed to access specific information about the value of participation in the different art forms.

Participants were fully informed about the aims and objectives of the study, in an open and honest manner, before voluntary informed written consent to participate in the research was sought from all participants. Parental consent was sought from participants under the age of 18. Youth participants were given a choice about which parts of the research they would like to participate in – survey, focus group or individual interview.

### Literature Review

The literature review aimed to collate and critically analyse relevant national and international research, including available evaluation material from a representational selection of youth arts projects and/or programmes in Ireland and internationally.

### Data Collection

Projects were selected based on a number of criteria. Firstly, each project engaged with a different art form – filmmaking, digital media (graphic design, animation), dance, theatre and music. It was considered important to include projects from different geographical locations to develop an understanding of the national context. The sample also aimed to reflect the views of participants from different social backgrounds (economic, ethnic and ability). In order to access and compare the different views and needs of young people in different age groups, the research sample was divided according to three age groups (10 – 12 years, 13 – 15 years, 16 – 18 years). Finally, every effort was made to ensure a gender balance, however, as more females participate in the arts than males, it was to be expected that more females were accessed than males.

A list of projects and programmes was provided by The National Youth Council of Ireland's Arts Programme. Project coordinators were contacted by the researcher and informed about the study. If they agreed to facilitate the research, they passed the information about the study to participants, who then made a decision about whether they wanted to participate or not.

In each project:

- Surveys were filled in by a maximum of 10 young people.

The survey aimed to find out how and why they had gotten involved with the project, what they liked or disliked about it, and whether they are involved in other arts practice. They were also asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of statements.

- One focus group adopting a participatory format was conducted with a group of young people.

Participants were asked generally about their understanding of the term 'arts', their experience of the project and specifically 'what is the value of participation in the arts?' They were asked to write

down, in a word or phrase, what they thought was the value of participating in the arts, and then to rank the values from the most important to the least important.

- Three young people were interviewed individually.

The semi-structured, qualitative interviews were divided into two parts. The first part gathered young people's opinions and insights in an open manner, allowing them to speak freely about what the value of participation in the arts is to them. The second part involved structured questions, based on the survey questionnaire, focusing on instrumental and intrinsic benefits discussed in the literature review. This format allowed the collection of data on specific questions as outlined in the project proposal, as well as data deriving from the participants.

- Two semi-structured, in-depth interviews were also conducted with project facilitators in each project or programme.

The interview schedule included questions on the organisation (history, structure, funding etc.), the particular project, the project facilitator's background, and their views on the value of participation in the arts to young people. A short case study was produced on the basis of this information and facilitators were given the opportunity to give feedback and amend the case study.

## SAMPLE

Data collection was centred on six projects or ongoing programmes, with the aim of producing a case study for each site. Data collection with young people was conducted on three levels – survey, focus group and individual interview. Each young person chose which way they wanted to participate. In total, 62 young people between the ages of 10 and 18 participated in the research. Of these 24 were boys and 38 were girls. The majority were between 13 and 15 years of age (see table 1).

**Table 1: Total participants in study**

Age group	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
10 - 12	3	13	16
13 - 15	16	17	33
16 - 18	5	8	13
	24	38	62

Of the total, 20 boys and 30 girls filled in the survey making a total of 50 (see table 2). In addition to filling in the survey, all, except 14, participated in an individual interview or focus group.

**Table 2: Number who filled in survey**

Age group	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
10 - 12	2	11	13
13 - 15	13	11	24
16 - 18	5	8	13
	20	30	50

In total, 18 young people were interviewed. Eight of these were boys and 10 were girls (see table 3).

**Table 3: Numbers who were interviewed**

Age group	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
10 - 12	2	3	5
13 - 15	4	3	7
16 - 18	2	4	6
	8	10	18

32 young people (13 boys and 19 girls) participated in the focus groups. 11 participated only in the focus group (see table 4).



**Table 4: Numbers who participated in the focus groups**

Age group	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
10 - 12	0	10	10
13 - 15	11	8	19
16 - 18	2	1	3
	13	19	32

## OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and aims to set the context for the research study. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce each of the projects which were involved in the study and outline the aims and goals of the projects as reported by the 11 project co-ordinators and facilitators interviewed for the study. Chapter 5 sets the scene for the young people's contributions by outlining how they accessed the projects, their reasons for getting involved and what they think are the barriers to involvement the arts. Chapter 6 reports the views of the young people and project facilitators on the value of participating in the arts. Finally, the findings are concluded in Chapter 7.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW





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This review of literature aims to set the context for the research study. We will begin by considering the concept of youth arts – how it is defined and the principles guiding it in the national context. We will then review relevant policies which have influenced the current approach to youth arts. We will also review relevant Irish and international research studies that have focused on youth participation in the arts.

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## YOUTH ARTS IN IRELAND

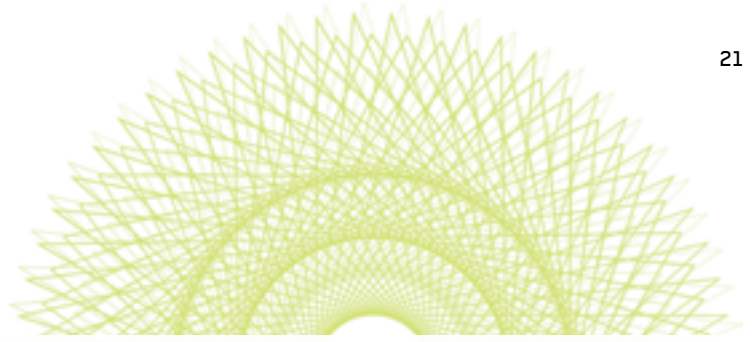
'Youth arts' is the voluntary participation of young people in arts activities outside of the formal education process. The National Youth Council of Ireland's policy document, *Arts in Their Lives*, defines youth arts as:

*'Young people taking part voluntarily in creative, cultural or expressive activity outside of the formal education process. It can encompass participation and appreciation, as well as engagement with arts work specifically created by, with and for young people.'*

This definition includes not only creating art, but consuming arts e.g. buying cds, going to the cinema, and also being an audience member.

Up until recently, the provision for youth participation in the arts has been relatively neglected both within the formal education system and public arts provision

(Hibernian Consulting et al., 2006). In order to survive, the youth arts sector has had to adapt to changing circumstances (Coughlan, 2005). In the late 1980's and early 1990's, youth arts was valued by non-arts sectors as a means to employment or as a constructive pursuit for the long-term unemployed, yielding social and community benefits. In the mid-90's, to access EU funds the youth arts sector had to focus on its worth as a mechanism to affirm cultural identity, promote intercultural and community integration and develop cultural tourism. During the economic boom the focus for funding shifted to commerce. Now youth arts activities needed to make good business sense (Coughlan, 2005). Within the arts sector, there was a shift from arts policy, supporting arts purely for their intrinsic value, to cultural policy, recognising that the arts also have valuable social and economic impacts (Everitt, 2001.) The concern was expressed that even the Arts Council implicitly devalued art as art, while favouring art as business (Coughlan, 2005: 22).



Provision has increased for young people's participation in the arts in recent years. New arts curricula have been, or are being introduced in primary education, with the significant investment in the professional development of the teachers charged with their implementation (Hibernian Consulting et al., 2006). The Arts Council has also developed an arts-in-schools programme. There has been an increase in the number of, and support for, arts organisations providing specialist programmes for young people. For example, The Ark, Europe's first custom-designed arts centre for children, opened in 1995. It seems that a key challenge for the youth arts sector now is

*'how to create and maintain a core social value regarding the intrinsic worth of the arts in young people's lives, while continuing to maximise access to funding for youth arts across a range of sectors'*

*(Coughlan, 2005: 22).*

## Wider policy context of youth arts

It is helpful to review the wider policy in order to understand the development of youth arts policy. From a general policy point of view, young people's participation in the arts is considered to be a positive recreation and leisure pursuit. It is one of the government's priorities to encourage young people into meaningful and constructive activities that will help them to realise their full potential and to become active participants in a democratic society (NYAP, 2003). This recognition of the importance of leisure and recreation in the lives of young people has been spurred on by Ireland's implementation of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)*, which it ratified in 1992. The right of young people to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts is endorsed by Article 31 of the convention. Furthermore, state parties shall

*'respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity'*

*(Article 31).*

The *National Children's Strategy 2000 – 2010* is a major initiative progressing the implementation of the UN Convention in Ireland. The strategy adopts a 'whole child perspective', recognising the multidimensional nature of all aspects of children's lives. It states that participation in sport, play, recreation and cultural activities provides children with competencies that will serve them well in later life. They are central to children's development of social and peer relationships, and contribute to the health and wellbeing, particularly of those affected by disadvantage, substance abuse, crime and social exclusion. Two objectives of the strategy relate directly to the development of youth arts in Ireland. Objective D states that children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experiences of childhood. Also, as the arts sector embraces new media as a creative and productive tool, objective E of the strategy, which states that children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive, is increasingly important.

A *National Recreation Policy for Young People* has recently been launched and provides for the promotion of positive recreational opportunities aimed principally at young people aged 12 – 18 years old. The vision of the policy is

*'for an Ireland where the importance of recreation is recognised so that young people experience a range of quality recreational opportunities to enrich their lives and promote their physical, mental, social and cultural well-being.'*

The objectives of the policy include giving young people a voice in the design, implementation and monitoring of recreation policies and facilities; the promotion of organised activities for young people and the examination of ways to motivate them to be involved; and ensuring that the recreational needs of young people are met through the development of youth-friendly and safe environments. The arts are included in activities described as structured recreation, which includes activities that young people choose to participate in involving some element of instruction and skill development such as recreational sports, games, arts, music, membership of youth groups, and other hobbies. Of the 76 points on the implementation action plan, three are relevant to the youth arts sector, and dance is the only art form specifically mentioned.

- No. 13 states that the Arts Council will promote a local partnership approach with local authorities, the youth work sector and other relevant agencies to further develop arts provision and opportunities for young people.
- No. 15 states that public authorities engaged in large-scale public infrastructural projects will be advised that a proportion of the Per Cent for Art-Scheme should be allocated specifically to innovative projects involving young people.
- No. 18 states that the Arts Council will work with the Irish Sports Council to provide improved opportunities for youth dance.

Notably, the focus in the National Children's Strategy and the National Recreation Policy for Young People is on arts activity as a suitable leisure pursuit for young people because it supports positive personal development, as well as reducing the potential of risk behaviour. There is little reference to the nature of arts participation and the quality of artistic experience.

## Youth work and youth arts

Within youth work, arts have been advocated as a popular methodological tool. The primary focus of youth work is the education of young people in non-formal settings. 'Youth work' is defined as

*'a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is – a) complementary to their formal, academic or vocational education and training; and b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations'*

*(Youth Work Act, 2001).*

The main aim of the youth work service in Ireland is to help all young people to realise their full potential and to become active participants in a democratic society. Youth projects and organisations present valuable opportunities for the social and personal development of young people.

The *Youth Work Act* (2001) provides a legal framework for the provision of youth work programmes and services by the Department of Education and Science, the Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and by National and Regional Youth Organisations. The National Youth Work Advisory Committee prepared the *National Youth Work Development Plan 2003 - 2007*, which provides a blueprint for the development of youth work and has four broad goals:

1. To facilitate young people and adults to participate more fully in, and to gain optimum benefit from, youth work programmes and services.
2. To enhance the contribution of youth work to social inclusion, social cohesion and citizenship in a rapidly changing national and global context.
3. To put in place an expanded and enhanced infrastructure for development, support and coordination at national and local level.

4. To put in place mechanisms for enhancing professionalism and ensuring quality standards in youth work.

The final report of the National Youth Arts Committee advised that 'those responsible for policy and provision in youth work should understand that the forms and materials of arts and cultural activity are particularly conducive to enacting many of the personal and social processes which characterise adolescence and young adulthood' (National Youth Council of Ireland, 1993). The employment of youth arts has tended to predominate in disadvantaged communities. This has led to excellent models of practice being developed and sustained employment opportunities for artists working in disadvantaged communities (Coughlan, 2005). However, in some respects, this has perpetuated the view that youth arts is the domain of youth work with disadvantaged young people, as opposed to being considered of intrinsic value to all young people. In addition, the expertise and professionalism of adult practitioners working within youth arts is not always recognised. There is a view that they do this work either 'as a stepping stone to the "real" arts world or because they have failed to make it in the "real" world' (Coughlan, 2005). Youth arts is not recognised as 'real' art.

The National Youth Council of Ireland's Arts Programme in particular has challenged the view that youth arts is just an instrument or recreational tool used within youth work to achieve certain youth work goals (NYCI, 2003). Young people are entitled to quality arts experiences as citizens in their own right. The youth sector, whilst prioritising the personal and social development of young people, must recognise the power and potential of youth arts as a way of exploring the artistic personality of young people. Youth arts is valuable for young people not only in its potential to develop various personal, cognitive, aesthetic and social skills, but also as it provides young people with the opportunity to develop competence in appreciating and creating art. The arts empower them to develop a critical attitude towards society, and communicate their feelings, thoughts, ideas and emotions. Young people

also contribute in a unique way to the development and enrichment of the arts as creators of art, critical audiences and participants in arts experiences.

### Policy developments in youth arts

A distinct focus on youth arts began in 1993 with the establishment of the National Youth Arts Committee (Coughlan, 2005:7). Following on from recommendations from the 1993 report of the Committee, *Making Youth Arts Work*, the National Youth Arts Initiative was set up in 1994. Supported by the Arts Council and the Youth Affairs section of the Department of Education and Science, it introduced a Youth Arts Monitoring Committee and four new posts: in The National Association of Youth Drama (NAYD), Dance Council of Ireland, Music Base and NYCI. Unfortunately, the committee more or less collapsed and the posts in the Dance Council of Ireland and Music Base were lost. However, NYCI developed the National Youth Arts Programme (NYAP) which is a partnership approach to promoting and developing youth arts in Ireland. The programme is supported by The Arts Council, the Department of Education and Science and the National Youth Council of Ireland and began in 1998. In 2008 in line with NYCI's strategic plan the National Youth Arts Programme was integrated into NYCI as the National Youth Council of Ireland's Arts Programme.

The increasing policy focus on children and young people can be traced through the various strategic plans of the Arts Council. The first *Arts Plan (1995-1997)* of the Arts Council emphasised children and young people as a discrete audience and as citizens with rights to cultural provision. The second *Arts Plan (1999-2001)* also identified youth engagement with the arts as a key element of one of three core objectives: to develop participation in and audiences for the arts. However, within the Arts Council, there was still no dedicated Youth Arts Development Officer or an effective audit system for monitoring and evaluating youth arts provision (Coughlan, 2005: 8). As has been pointed out,

*'developments in the sector (have) emerged in a hotchpotch, ad hoc manner evidencing a lack of sustained strategic vision for the development of youth arts in Ireland'*

*(Coughlan, 2005: 9).*

The third *Arts Plan 2002 – 2006* aimed to extend and enhance the arts experience of young people in the formal and informal education sector within one of the six objectives: to broaden and enrich participation in the arts. A report, *Participation of Young People in the Arts* (Coughlan, 2005), was commissioned by the Arts Council to inform the implementation of the third Arts Plan. It identified four key priorities for development which highlighted the need for clear structures and sustained supports, representative of the full spectrum of youth arts practices; adequate supports for adults engaged in youth arts in either a voluntary and/or professional capacity; a code of ethics and good practice for arts programmes organised for children and young people; specialist staff and increased resources at the Arts Council, in order to effectively formulate and administer policy. In 2002/2003, the Arts Council appointed specialist staff in the areas of both youth arts and arts education programmes, and in arts participation (Coughlan, 2005: 4).

*Arts in Their Lives: A policy on young people and the arts* was developed by The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI in 2003). In the policy, NYCI argues for a partnership approach where the arts and youth sector equally take responsibility for the artistic and cultural development of young people. Recommendations are made for each of the three avenues identified where young people have the opportunity to participate in the arts outside of the formal education sector. These avenues are:

- The arts in youth work
- Involvement in the services and provision of professional arts organisations
- Dedicated youth arts work with young people

The *National Youth Arts Programme Strategic Plan 2003-2006* identified specific strategic priorities to advance best practice in youth arts, broaden youth participation in the arts and promote and advocate the contribution made by young people to the arts. The three strategic priorities were:

1. Build strategic commitment to youth arts in relevant government agencies and departments, in arts organisations and within youth organisations.
2. Broaden the range of art forms being explored and develop a range of mechanisms aimed at ensuring greater participation and quality youth arts experiences for young people.
3. Enhance the quality of youth arts provision.

The plan argues that young people and the arts need to be placed centre stage and that the approach must facilitate integration between the formal and non-formal sectors, the aesthetic and pedagogical, the artist and the youth worker and between the array of funding and development agencies with a remit in youth arts (NYAP, 2003: 8).

In the most recent strategy document, *Partnership for the Arts in Practice 2006-2008*, the Arts Council have proposed a policy shift which will 'embrace the needs of children and young people in a comprehensive, inclusive and integrated fashion'. It argues that the arts sector is growing, thriving and increasingly confident in challenging static views and assumptions about young people's relationship to the arts, the range of activities it embodies and the nature of young people's involvement. The Council aims to develop a broader understanding of what young people contribute to the arts as well as being recipients of a range of arts experiences. They are also concerned with developing the cultural literacy of young people and their skills as critical consumers of the arts and hope to extend opportunities for young people and children to participate in, create, and respond critically to the arts. A number of priority areas to address have been identified. These are:



- The need to broaden our understanding of what young people and children contribute to and take from the arts
- within that, the need to recognise alternative cultural paradigms and the authenticity of young people's forms of artistic expression
- The need to gather, share and learn from exemplary models of young people's arts practice
- The need to support artists and arts organisations in developing skills, capacities and policies in this

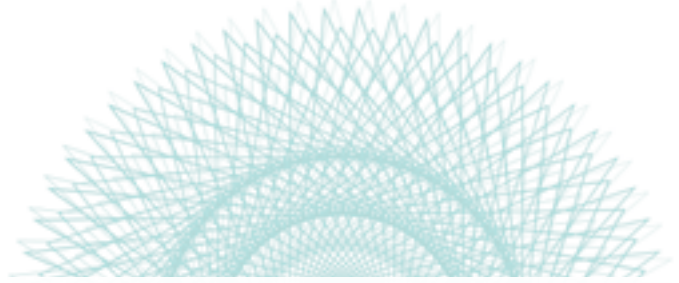
The partnership approach was predominant between 1994 and 2006, and partnerships were established with a number of national bodies or sectors, including Údaras na Gaeltachta, and the health sector (Public and the Arts). Partnership practices in youth arts evolved at local level. As of yet, there is no national cross-agency structure supporting youth arts (Coughlan, 2005).

Recently, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of young people engaging as critical consumers of arts (Arts Council, 2006). Consumerism is an important part of young people's lives in developed countries. The National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007 (2002) recognises that consumerism is probably irreversible, but 'critical consumption' can be encouraged and enhanced by effective educational programmes. In a forum exploring this topic, it was acknowledged that while there has been a growth in arts activity for children and young people, the point was frequently made that 'emphasis was usually placed on the 'hands-on' and 'doing' without creating sufficient opportunity for the development of young peoples' critical skills in responding to or making art.' (2006: 3) It was argued that critical consumption is part of the process of making young people's participation in the arts both meaningful and productive. Young people need to be identified as cultural consumers in their own right. The opportunities for young people to engage as critical consumers of the arts can be created through:

- Enriching and extending young people's experiences of participation in the arts, as creators, contributors, receivers and respondents
- Providing young people with the necessary vocabularies to develop an autonomous and influential voice on artistic and cultural issues of concern to them
- Promoting and valuing young people's forms of cultural expression

In recent years, there has also been increased focus on arts in the formal education system. An *Arts and Education Committee* was established in 2006 to advise on matters relating to arts within the formal education system. The Arts Council has also developed a particular focus on arts-in-schools since 2002. Arts-in-schools practice is a general term for what happens when skilled artists and arts organisations work for and with schools in the making, viewing and interpreting of a wide range of arts experiences within or outside the school. In *Partnership for the Arts in Practice*, the Arts Council has specified a number of





goals related to arts in schools and has established new funding programmes and initiatives to implement these goals.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS IN IRELAND

We will now review research which looks at young people's participation in, and experiences of, youth arts. The Arts Council's study *The Public and the Arts (Hibernian Consulting, 2006)* found that Irish people generally have very positive views towards the arts. Almost nine out of ten people believe that the arts play an important and valuable role in a modern society such as that of Ireland. More than four out of five (82%) say that arts education is as important as science education for children and young people. This has increased from 73% since the previous review of public attitudes towards the arts in 1994. Seven out of ten believe that spending on the arts should be safeguarded in times of economic recession. Furthermore, the top priority for people in terms of arts spending is for spending targeted at children and young people – 30% stated it was their first choice as a spending priority.

### Young people's engagement with the arts

Two studies in Ireland have focused on young people's participation in the arts. A street survey was conducted by City Arts Centre to inquire into the views of young people on arts and cultural activities (City Arts Centre, 2004). In total, 561 young people aged between 16 and 20 years were interviewed around Dublin. The study found that more young people give precedence to an arts and cultural activity where the transaction is tangible and entertaining, for example, going to the cinema, music concert etc. The study also found that dancing and musical instruments were the most enjoyable activities.

A qualitative study commissioned by the National Youth Arts Programme (NYAP) aimed to investigate, in a more detailed manner, how young people are engaging with the arts in Ireland (Roe, 2006). The study was conducted with 123 young people and 20 youth arts facilitators involved with nine projects across three geographical areas in Ireland. The aim was to examine issues such as, how young people are targeted to get involved in arts projects; the contexts in which the activities take place; the nature of young people's involvement and what are the main benefits of participation in arts activities. The findings gave an indication of the value of participation in the arts to young people which will be reviewed below. The findings also identified the importance of youth leadership programmes and young people in having a say in how youth arts structures are run as it leads to a sense of empowerment, ownership and pride in the projects. In addition, the study provided recommendations based on the findings, on how to develop effective and successful youth arts projects and structures.

Information about young people's participation in the arts can be found in two other surveys on the public attitudes towards the arts (Hibernian Consulting *et al.*, 2006) and leisure and recreation activities of young people (de Roiste and Dineen, 2005). Almost 20% of the sample in *The Public and the Arts* were young people between 15 and 25 years of age. Over three quarters (76%) of the young people who participated in the survey stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am interested in the arts" and 62% of young people said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

*"In the context of the current economic environment, the government spending on the arts should be increased (even if that means a cut or a smaller increase elsewhere in government spending)."*

In terms of consuming arts products, 48% of young people downloaded arts-related material occasionally or regularly. Attendance at any arts event is highest in

the 15-24 age group but remains high for all age groups up to 65+. Young people attended mostly film and rock/pop music events.

Another source of information about the levels of young people's participation in the arts is a study on *Young People's Views of Opportunities, Barriers and Supports to Recreation and Leisure* (de Roiste and Dineen, 2005). The research consulted 2260 young people between 12 and 18 years of age about their views on leisure and recreation. Although the study did not look specifically at arts as a category, it does provide information about young people's participation in some arts activities. For example, over half reported reading everyday or most days, with over 70% of girls reading compared to 50% of boys. Almost 90% of participants listened to music everyday or most days, with more 17 year olds listening to music than 12 year olds. Going to the cinema, also featured very highly with 23% going weekly and 73% going less often. Also, nearly a third (32.2%) of the sample reported participating in at least one community or charity group. Both boys (68%) and girls (52.6%) participated in youth clubs or groups. This is significant in that it shows that there is a lot of potential for young people to access and participate in the arts through youth groups and clubs.

In terms of hobbies, 'playing a musical instrument' was the most popular hobby among boys (28.7%) and the second most popular among girls (32.3%). This may be artificially high as some proportion of the sample who indicated 'playing music' may have meant 'listening to music' as opposed to playing a musical instrument. The high proportion may also be due to music being taken as a subject in school (de Roiste and Dineen, 2005).

Dance was the most popular among girls (34.9%), which is consistent with the findings of other research (Dowda *et al.*, 2004; Stiles *et al.*, 1993). However it was not clear whether 'dance' referred to simple social dancing at a disco for example, or structured dance, such as a dance class, where the artistic form would be developed.

Art was also popular among girls (26.9%), less so among boys (14%). In general, the research identifies a high level of interest and participation in the arts, especially by girls, across the adolescent years (de Roiste and Dineen, 2005, 62). Another indication of increased participation of young people in arts activities is the increase in the number of NAYD's member youth theatres nationally, from 33 in 1997 to 51 in 2006, the number of young participants rising from 1, 530 to 2,626 (NAYD, 1999).

A study in the UK involved interviews with 704 young people between 14 and 24 about their opinions and experiences of participation in the arts. It was identified that 57% of respondents reported media-arts (TV, videos and cinema) as their main leisure activity (Harland *et al.*, 1995). In addition, 23% mentioned participation in the arts. Painting and drawing, and playing an instrument were the most frequently mentioned activities. In school, writing (82%), drawing (66%), painting (49%), drama (41%) and computer graphics (34%) were the most cited arts activities.

## Motivating factors to access the arts

### *Understanding of 'the arts'*

One factor that may influence young people's willingness to participate in the arts is their understanding and interpretation of the term 'the arts'. In their study *Arts in their View*, Harland *et al.*, (1995) found that one in eight respondents could give no meaning to the term; one in three had a single perspective view (mentioned one art form), mostly visual art; one in five gave a double perspective view (nearly half said dance/drama and visual art) and one in five had a multi-perspective view (named three different art forms or more). Respondents also differentiated between high arts and alternative arts – one in three considered high arts not important, one in five said they were very important. Very few young people mentioned aesthetics or beauty in their definitions of arts, rather arts were related more to personal development,

a means of coming to terms with yourself, developing and discovering ideas and feelings, communication, imagination and entertainment. Expression was seen as an especially important feature, and rationale for, alternative arts.

### *Access to the arts*

NYCI (2003) identified three settings, other than formal education, through which young people in Ireland access the arts.

- Arts within youth work – youth organisations offering arts experiences as part of a more general youth work programme which has as its primary objectives the social and personal development of young people and their social inclusion in the wider community.
- Professional arts organisations – arts organisations providing arts experiences for young people as one element of a broader arts service provision. The primary objective the programmes offered by these is meaningful access to and engagement with an art form. Most rely on the formal education system as their sole point of access to young people.

- Dedicated youth arts work with young people (youth drama, youth dance) – youth arts organisations which specialise in providing art form specific programmes for young people, e.g. youth theatre, youth orchestras. These organisations declare a commitment to enabling the aesthetic formation of their members, whilst respecting and providing for their personal and social development.

In addition to these, two other avenues have been identified through which young people commonly access opportunities to participate in the arts (Coughlan, 2005):

- Audiences – young people access the arts outside formal education by attending performances, events etc that include and/or target them as audience members, readers, listeners, viewers and consumers of art products.
- Formation of the aspiring professional artist – young people who aspire or consider to a career in the arts.

The first three avenues of participation play important roles in developing youth audiences, and contribute to the formation of the young artist. Participants in youth arts activities are more likely to become audience members, because they have actively experienced making art (Coughlan, 2005:15). Similarly, participation in the making of one art form can introduce young people to other art forms. For example, a census of youth theatre members reported increased participation rates in literature (40%), visual arts (40%) and dance (50%) (NAYD, 1999).

### *Variables in arts participation rates*

Harland et al. (1995) identified various factors such as gender, class and age as variables in the levels of arts participation by young people. Females were more likely to participate in arts to males (27% to 19%). Young people in social class one and two were more likely to participate in the arts, as were young people with high educational attainment (four or more GCSEs). White Europeans were more involved in arts participation than



ethnic minorities. Arts participation was particularly low for 17-20 year olds, although involvement in audience arts increased steadily with age.) Finally, there did not seem to be an urban/rural divide in terms of participation in the arts. Proximity and accessibility of facilities were not overriding factors in explaining arts participation. The greater availability of amenities did not usually attract a higher share of young people in urban locations.

### **Influences on involvement**

Most frequently mentioned influences on involvement in the arts were family, friends and secondary school arts teachers (Harland et al., 1995). Friends and secondary teachers ranked highest as sources of 'turn-off', while family influences were rarely mentioned. Actual experiences of arts encounters or consumption were rarely viewed as demotivating. Three distinct categories of perceived obstacles to participation in arts activities emerged:

- Constraints or competing commitments or alternative interests
- Deficit of funds, resources, opportunities or facilities for arts involvement
- Personal deficiency in attitude or aptitude

Personal attitudes to the arts may also influence young people's participation. The study attempts a classification of attitudes towards the arts, citing both positive and negative outcomes.

### **Attitudes which are associated with high motivation:**

- Task-oriented: 'I want to improve/acquire new skills.'
- Physiological/therapeutic: 'I get a buzz or I find it relaxing.'
- Self-identity, expression: 'It's how I define myself.'
- Intrinsic: 'I appreciate the qualities of the art form.'

### **Attitudes which are associated with mid-level motivation:**

- Socialising: 'Meeting new people.'
- Relevance: 'It's something I relate to.'
- Situation-specific: 'I have a high regard for working with my drama teacher.'

### **Attitudes which are associated with low motivation**

- General/enjoyment: 'I get enjoyment/fun out of it.'
- Social pressure: 'I am pleasing others.'

### **Attitudes which are rarely relevant to motivation:**

- Ability-oriented: 'I want to be the best.'
- Monetary benefits: 'I want financial reward.'
- Status seeking: 'it helps my image.'

## **RESEARCH ON THE VALUE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS**

Numerous research studies have found that participation in the arts is an effective route for personal growth and can also contribute to social cohesion and community development (Hughes, 2005; Matarasso, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2004). These benefits have been referred to as 'instrumental' as they are additional benefits to the development of artistic and creative skills. Although there have been many studies exploring the benefits of participation in the arts, much of this research is not considered to be scientifically reliable (di Maggio, 2002; Hughes, 2005; McCarthy et al., 2004; Miles, 2004; Winner and Hetland, 2000). This has led to arts practitioners having to justify the usefulness of arts projects and programmes. As Matarasso (1997) articulates:

*'Evaluating the social impact of participation*

*of the arts has long been a sort of terra incognita, a continent whose existence is known, but which remains unexplored. Travellers' tales, where they existed, were full of mystery and menace, implying a land filled with dangers for the unwary. The sketchiness of the information encouraged some to argue that El Dorado lay there, while others asserted it was a desert, a wasteland best avoided.'*

*(Matarasso, 1997: iii)*

The main weakness of the research can be summarised as follows:

1. Insufficient attention to design: Often assumptions are made about the links between outcome and intervention of an arts project. Many studies identify an association between arts participation and benefits however; they do not demonstrate an exact link and cannot provide evidence that arts experiences caused the effects. This makes it difficult to clarify and explain the particular benefits of participation in the arts as opposed to other activities and can have serious implications for policy development.
2. Technical issues: Material generated is lacking in quantity, quality and longitudinal research. For example, an extensive literature review conducted by Hughes (2005) found that there is lack of baseline information, lack of controls, problems finding appropriate measures, over-reliance on anecdote; lack of use of research and literature; short-term views; small samples; difficulties; and lack of information about how qualitative data has been analysed and interpreted. McCarthy et al. (2005) also noted a lack of specific findings such as how the claimed benefits are produced, how they relate to different types of arts experiences, and under what circumstances and for which populations they are most likely to occur.
3. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks: Research

into the benefit of arts participation also often lacks an explicit theory base from which to develop plausible and testable models of change (Hughes, 2005).

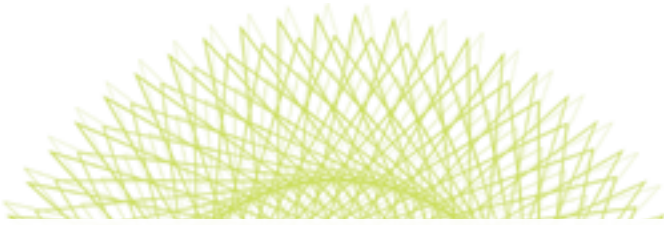
## Benefits of participation

Despite the paucity of high quality research and evaluation into the benefits of participation in the arts, some benefits have been identified through detailed reviews of the studies (see Hughes, 2005; McCarthy et al, 2005). The arts work on affective, cognitive and behavioural, as well as neurological levels (Hughes, 2005). They have been found to play a role in improving perceptual/thinking ability and emotional insight and, above all perhaps, 'in creating a context (physical, social, emotional) to facilitate personal change' (Hughes, 2005: 70). This section will outline some of the instrumental benefits of participation in the arts.

### *Personal development*

Participation in the arts is considered to be an effective avenue for personal development facilitating increased self-confidence, improved skills and educational developments which can improve people's social contacts and employability (Matarasso, 1997). Research focusing on young people identified benefits including the development of attitudes (e.g. self-discipline, self-efficacy) and behaviours (e.g. more frequent school attendance, reduced dropout rates) that improve school performance; development of more general life-skills (e.g. understanding the consequences of one's behaviour, working in teams); and development of pro-social attitudes and behaviours among 'at risk' youth (e.g. building social bonds, improving self-image) (Deasy, 2002; McCarthy *et al*, 2005; Stone *et al.*, 1997;1999).

An Irish study identified self-confidence as the main benefit leading to an increase in creative ability as well as improved social interactions. A sense of self-worth increased particularly for young people from



disadvantaged communities, allowing them to discover hidden strengths and talents (Roe, 2006). Participation in the arts also provided for an increase in social skills, including those needed for team work; social awareness leading to a desire to include and respect others; and facilitated the creation of positive role models for young people. Participation in arts projects also gave young people the opportunity to socialise and meet new people and develop peer relationships (Roe, 2006).

### **Cognitive development**

Quite a lot of research into the arts and education has focused on the development of learning skills and academic performance in school-aged youth. Benefits include improved academic performance and test scores; improved basic skills, such as reading and mathematical skills and the capacity for creative thinking; and improved attitudes and skills that promote the learning process itself, particularly the ability to learn how to learn (for summaries of studies see Deasy, 2002; Fiske *et al.*, 1999).

### **Health**

The therapeutic affects of the arts can be classified by types of effects and populations studied. These include improved mental and physical health, particularly among the elderly; improved health for patients with specific health problems; reduced stress and improved performance for caregivers; and reduced anxiety for patients facing surgical procedures (see journals such as the *Journal of American Medical Association*, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*).

### **Rehabilitation**

A study, which focuses on the use of arts in all stages of the criminal justice sector, shows very clearly that the arts have the capacity and potential to offer a range of innovative, theory-informed and practical approaches that can enhance and extend the educational,

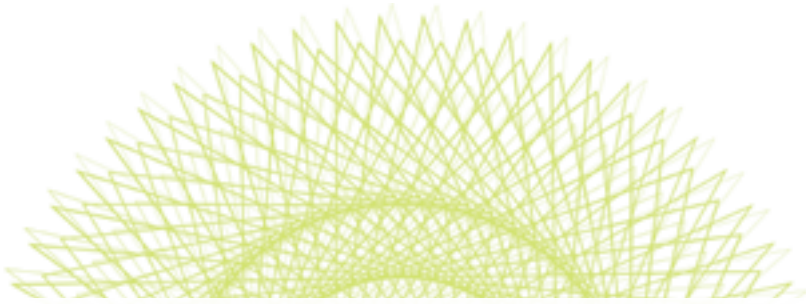
developmental and therapeutic programmes across the criminal justice sector (Hughes, 2005). Four types of impact are identified: changing individuals' personal, internal responses to drivers or triggers that lead to offending; changing the social circumstances of individuals' lives by equipping them with personal and social skills that can help them build different relationships and access opportunities in work and education; changing and enriching institutional culture and working practices; changing wider communities' views of offenders and the criminal justice system (Hughes, 2005).

### **Social and community development**

Youth and community arts can contribute to social and community development in a number of ways (Griffiths, 1993; Lowe, 2000; Matarasso, 1997; Stern, 2000; Wali *et al.*, 2002).

- Firstly benefits can contribute to social cohesion by developing networks and understanding; promoting social interaction among community members, creating a sense of community identity, and by helping build social capital.
- Secondly, those that build a community's organisational capacity through both the development of skills, and the more general process of people organising and getting involved in civic institutions and volunteer associations.
- Thirdly, community arts participation brings benefits in other areas such as environmental renewal and health promotion. It builds local image and identity and helps develop community imagination and vision.

Matarasso (1997) found also that participation in arts produces social change which can be seen, evaluated and broadly planned and represents a flexible, responsive and cost-effective element of a community development strategy. Participants in Roe's study (2006) stated that the local youth theatre improved



the community's perception of young people and that through the youth theatre, they were directly able to contribute to community development, and for example, the youth theatre group were invited to a consultation process regarding the regeneration of their area because of a play they produced on the topic.

### **Reducing social exclusion**

Research has shown that arts can impact on social exclusion (Hughes, 2005; Humphreys Weitz, 1996; Matarasso, 1997) Participatory arts projects across the United States help engage socially excluded young people by providing images and experiences of success; enhancing academic performance; stimulating knowing and learning; teaching discipline and team work; Davis 2003; Costello, 1995). In prevention work with young people, arts programmes can reduce offending behaviour and incidents of disruption, help disaffected young people re-engage with education, and sponsor social and personal development (Hughes, 2005).

### **Economic**

McCarthy et al. (2005) identify three principal categories of economic benefits – direct benefits (i.e. those that result from the arts as an economic activity and thus are a source of employment, tax revenue and spending); indirect benefits (e.g. attraction of individuals and firms to locations where the arts are available); and a variety of public-good benefits (e.g. the availability of the arts and the contribution of the arts make to a community's quality of life).

### **Features which support beneficial impact of participation in the arts**

Studies have also identified factors which contribute to benefits being derived from participation in the arts. Involvement in the arts is more likely if individuals are introduced to the arts when they are younger (Harland et al., 1995; McCarthy et al., 2004). The frequency of

participation in the arts is another factor. Those who participate frequently consider involvement intrinsically worthwhile, whereas infrequent participants get involved for extrinsic reasons (such as accompanying someone to an arts event). Participants are more likely to gain benefit from arts projects and programmes if they are 'hands on'; and remain involved over a period of time (Hughes, 2005; McCarthy et al., 2004). Also, the quality of the arts experience is important – the more engaging (emotionally, mentally and socially) the more likely individuals will continue being involved in the arts (McCarthy et al., 2004). Hughes (2005) also notes that arts practice tends to be generated by local and specific contexts; flexibility and responsiveness is a key indicator for success of arts interventions.

### **Intrinsic benefits of the arts**

The benefits in the previous section mentioned are defined as 'instrumental benefits'. In recent years, arguments for private and public investment in the arts emphasise the potential of the arts for serving broad and economic goals in Ireland as well as elsewhere (Coughlan, 2005; Matarasso, 1997; McCarthy et al., 2004). Many arts supporters do not support these instrumental arguments as justification for the arts because they know firstly, that some of the claims are unsubstantiated or exaggerated and secondly, that they fail to capture the unique value of the arts. (Eisner, 1998; Hughes, 2005; Matarasso, 1997; McCarthy, 2005). They point out that an argument based entirely on the instrumental affects of the arts runs the risk of being discredited if other activities are more effective at generating the same effects or if policy priorities shift. As Eisner (1998: 56) puts it, the danger with arts educators becoming side-tracked by this argument is that it leaves 'the arts vulnerable to any other field or educational practice that can achieve the same aims faster or better'. In the long run, this undermines the value of teaching the arts and legitimises the marginal position assigned to the arts by those looking for such justifications. Eisner (1998) argues that when arts



educators comply with such expectations, they are implying that the arts are not important in themselves, rather their importance is how they can contribute to learning in other prioritised subjects.

*'It strikes me that we do the arts no service when we try to make their case by touting their contributions to other fields. When such contributions become priorities the arts become hand-maidens to ends that are not distinctively artistic and in the process undermine the values of art's unique contributions to the education of the young.'*

*(Eisner, 1998: 59).*

Some researchers have addressed this question and have tried to identify the 'intrinsic benefits' – the particular contribution of the arts and the unique benefits that can be gained only by participation in artistic practice. Matarasso (1997) argues that arts projects are different because of those whom they engage, people who enjoy and benefit from involvement in cultural activity, as opposed to sports for example, and the quality of engagement. He argues that art as activity, process and object, is fundamental to culture and 'is central to how people experience, understand and shape the world' (1997: 84).

*'The greatest social impacts of participation in the arts – and the ones which other programmes cannot achieve – arise from their ability to help people think critically about and question their experiences and those of others, not in a discussion group but with all the excitement, danger, magic, colour, symbolism, feeling, metaphor and creativity that the arts offer. It is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies, and through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted'*

*(Matarosso, 1997).*

Hughes (2005) argues that the experiences of participating in the arts are rooted in a range of human, social and environmental factors not fully available to or accessible via the traditional therapeutic or educational modes of engagement and communication.

*'The arts offer a non-judgemental and un-authoritarian model of engagement, as well as a non-traditional, non-institutional social and emotional environment.... Engagement in the arts assumes and requires respect and responsibility, cooperation and collaboration'*

*Hughes, 2005: 70).*

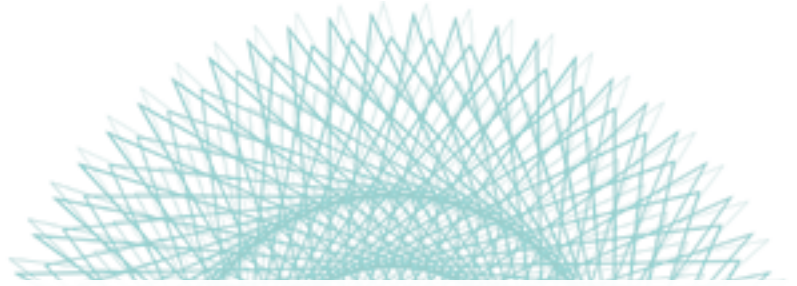
McCarthy et al. (2005) argue that people are drawn to the arts because they can provide them with meaning and with a distinctive type of pleasure and emotional stimulation. People are not drawn to the arts in the hope that experience will make them more intelligent, confident or self-disciplined. Rather, people are drawn to the arts with the hope that it will be a rewarding experience, 'one that offers them pleasure and emotional stimulation and meaning' (2005: 37). Intrinsic benefits are the principal reasons people participate in the arts.

Finally, it has been argued that arts activities can achieve the goals of artistic competence, as well as personal, social and community development. As Matarosso (1997: 86-87) points out artists have always sought the balance of form and function:

*'It is perfectly possible to combine high aesthetic standards with lasting social value ... Usefulness can be beautiful, and beauty useful. Neither use nor ornament, but both.'*

## Models of understanding intrinsic benefits

One of the reasons there has perhaps been less focus in research studies on identifying the intrinsic benefits has been because they are intangible and difficult to define. They are identified mainly through qualitative



research which gives credence to the subject realities of research participants, and is difficult to collate and quantify. Both McCarthy et al. (2005) and Eisner (1998) have developed models of understanding intrinsic benefits of arts activities.

McCarthy et al. (2005) not only focus on participation in the arts, but also on experiencing the arts as audience and consumers. They are concerned with identifying both the private and public value of the arts.

Some intrinsic benefits are primarily of private value to individuals:

- **Captivation:** the initial response of rapt absorption to a work of art can briefly but powerfully move the individual away from habitual, everyday reality and into a state of focused attention. It can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.
- **Pleasure:** the artist provides individuals with an imaginative experience that is often a more intense, revealing and meaningful version of actual experience.

Some intrinsic benefits are primarily of value to the individual and have valuable public spillover effects:

- **Expanded capacity for empathy:** art can draw people into the experiences of others who are vastly different from themselves.
- **Cognitive growth:** art invites you to make sense of what is before you.

Other intrinsic benefits are primarily of value to society as a whole

- **Creation of social bonds:** social bonds are created through the communal experience of art
- **Expression of communal meanings:** works of art can sometimes convey what a whole community wishes to express e.g. art commemorating significant events, art that provides a voice to communities, art that critiques culture.

Eisner (1998) is more focused on the outcomes of arts education in schools. He identifies three levels or tiers to which arts education might be expected to make a contribution, and suggests four goals for arts education. Arts education can make a contribution on three levels:

### **1. Arts based outcomes of arts education:**

These outcomes are directly related to the subject matter (e.g. competence in an art form; appreciation of a piece of music, play, painting, understanding a particular art style; its history, cultural context, personal side of the artist) that the project is designed to teach. Such outcomes reside in perceptions and discourse unique to the arts and includes outcomes pertaining to performance within the art form.

### **2. Arts related outcomes of arts education:**

These outcomes pertain to the perception and comprehension of aesthetic features in the general environment e.g. students are enabled to notice and respond to the aesthetic configurations of phenomena such as cloud formations, the dynamic flow of the city street.

### **3. Ancillary outcomes of arts education:**

These outcomes are the effects of arts education on the student's competence in other areas, such as academic performance, and also personal and social skills. Therefore, the ancillary outcomes are instrumental benefits.

Eisner puts forward four goals for arts education:

### **1. Acquiring a feel for what it means to transform ideas, images and feelings into an art form.**

This is related to the development of students' ability to create art, or art-like creations and is fostered best by hands-on experience of creating art. Eisner argues that experiencing the struggle to create compelling images, whether in sight, sound or movement, provides an opportunity to get in touch with the arts and can help the student recognise

both the qualities of work and the accomplishment of the artist.

## **2. Refining awareness of aesthetic qualities in art and life**

This involves helping students become alive to the aesthetic qualities of art and life in the worlds in which they live. Arts education should help students learn to use an aesthetic frame of reference.

Practically speaking, it means students will know what they can listen for in music and what they can look for in the visual arts and performance arts.

When they are asked about the works or situations they encounter they will be able to say something about them with insight, sensitivity and intelligence. They will know what they like or respond to in an environment and why. Eisner also argues that arts education should influence the connotative aspects of cognition i.e. the desire to frame the word as an object of enjoyed perception.

## **3. Enabling understanding of the connection between content and form that the arts take and the culture and time in which the work was created.**

The goal is that students should be able to situate the arts within culture – they should be able to understand the problems that artists tackle and how they do so are influenced by the settings in which they work, that art and artists participate in a tradition that both liberates and constrains, and that at times artists violate the expectations of norms of that tradition.

## **4. Developing dispositional outcomes for arts education.**

This goal encourages an open and creative mind amongst arts students and aids development of a willingness to imagine possibilities that are not now, but which might become; a desire to explore ambiguity, to be willing to forestall premature closure in pursuing resolutions; and the ability to recognise and accept the multiple perspectives and resolutions

that work in the arts celebrate.

## **SUMMARY**

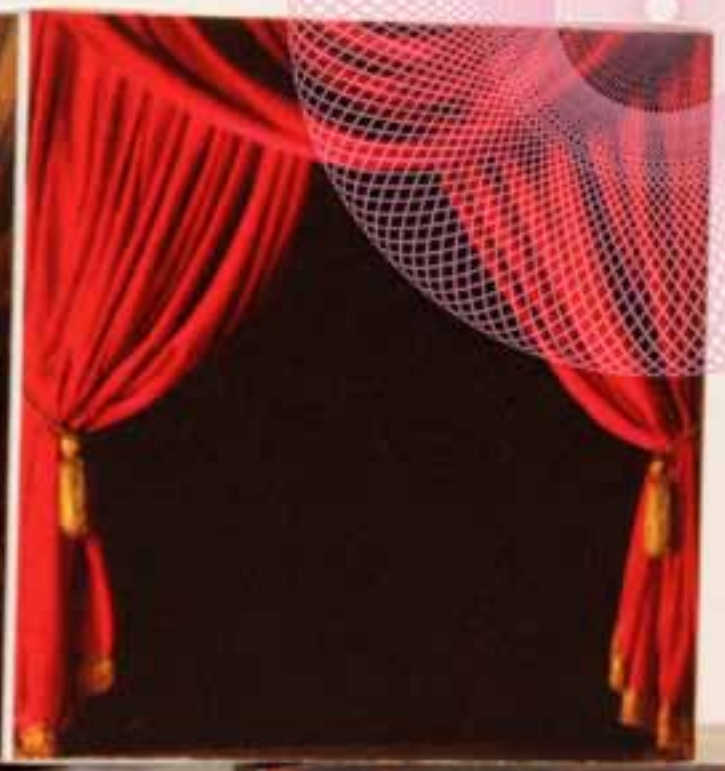
This chapter considered the current situation of youth arts in Ireland by reviewing the concept of youth arts and policy development in Ireland. The youth arts sector has developed considerably over the last decade with an increasing focus on making the arts more accessible to young people, not only because they are conducive to enacting the general development of young people but because young people are entitled to quality arts experiences as citizens in their own rights. The arts sector is increasingly challenging views and assumptions about young people's relationship to the arts, and embracing young people as creators, participants, critics and consumers of the arts.

This chapter also reviewed the research on the benefits of participating in the arts to young people, which include instrumental benefits such as personal and cognitive development, health, rehabilitation, social and community developing, reducing social exclusion, and economic benefits. It was argued that rather than focusing on the instrumental benefits of the arts, which undermine the inherent value of artistic experience, the focus should be on the particular contribution of the arts and the unique benefits that can be gained only by participation in artistic practice. Two models of understanding the intrinsic benefits were outlined which provide a frame of analysis for the findings of this study. The next chapters present the findings of the study.

### 3. PROJECTS



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This chapter introduces each of the projects that were involved in the study.

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## CASE STUDY 1: DUBLIN – THE BASE

The Base aims to provide programmes, services and facilities for children, young people, youth service providers and the community in general. Through innovative and interactive programmes, services and activities, The Base works towards providing a way for people to grow and develop in a safe, enjoyable and fun environment. A new youth centre and childcare facility is currently being constructed for The Base which will be open late at night and at weekends. The Base currently runs arts, music, new media and youth work programmes and services as well as youth health activities including a new Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP).

The idea for the youth centre began in 2001. The vision for this new state-of-the-art facility grew from talking to young people, people working with young

people, community groups and agencies working in Ballyfermot. The original focus of the arts programme, which began in 2003, was on arts and music, and more recently new media, which has also become a vital part of the overall programme.

The Base aims to provide exciting initiatives working in partnership with the community and seeks to bring about positive individual, collective and community change. The focus of the arts programme is to provide young people with an opportunity to experience various art forms and develop artistic and practical skills within a caring and respectful environment.

### *Activities*

The arts programme caters for children and young people from 0 to 25 years of age. There are a number of projects:

- Dare2Dream Kids: drop-in arts workshops for children aged 4 to 12 years old explore a variety of art forms

including visual arts, crafts, creative writing, puppetry, drama, music and dance. In 2007, The Base established a Dare2Dream Kids Arts Festival for children in order to celebrate its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. More than 500 children took part in 24 arts and crafts workshops during the week long celebration. Dare 2Dream Kids Arts Festival is funded by the Arts Council. A similar programme is under development for teens.

- The music division offers music training workshops including music composition, music technology and dj mixing. The latest addition to the music training workshops is SAMPLE (Songwriting, Appreciation Musicianship, Performance, Live Recording and Event Production); a pilot programme funded by the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The music division also organises music events like open-mic sessions, live gigs, the Ballyfamous Talent Show and Battle of the Bands. The new premises will consist of a professional recording studio and rehearsal spaces.
- The new media division offers a number of workshops including digital video production, animation, web design and broadcast. There are also a number of projects including DATA (Design, Audiovisual Technology & Animation), FACTORY (Film & Audio Computerised Training Objectives to Re-engage Youth). The latest addition to the new media training is TAKE-1 digital video production workshops focusing on scripting, storyboarding, camera, audio and lighting operation, editing, grading etc; another pilot programme funded by the VEC. The new premises will consist of a new media and editing suite.
- BMG, GMG, The Crew and Spider Web are some of the groups of young people who participate in the arts programme on a regular basis. The BMG (Base Media Group) was the first one to be established in 2005 when a group of boys from the local secondary school asked the project development officer in The Base to help them with a journalism project. As they expressed an interest in the arts in general, a six week course was developed for them which provided

an introduction to all types of media. The BMG have since participated in a number of courses including photography, creative writing, stand-up comedy, graphic design and digital video production. The highlight was attending the World Summit on Media for Children in South Africa as a vital part of the Irish delegation.

- Finally, the arts programme runs partnership projects with the local third level colleges and has informal links to secondary and primary schools in the area through which it accesses most of its participants as well as engaging with specific target groups through the youth work programme.

Evaluation of projects occurs on a regular basis through consultation with staff, youth participants, partner organisations and funding bodies.

### Structure

The Base is an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It is a statutory organisation focusing on community, semi-commercial and commercial projects. Currently, there are 13 full-time staff members including Chief Executive Officer; Arts, Music and New Media Programme Co-ordinator; Project Development Officer; Administrator; Youth Health Co-ordinator; Youth Work Leader; Teen Parents Support Programme Project Leader and Community Employment Co-ordinator. There are also 15 Community Employment workers.

The Base is funded by Urban Ballyfermot, Dublin City Council, National Development Plan, European Regional Development Fund, Health Service Executive, FAS, Ballyfermot Drug Taskforce and Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund. The Base will in addition be generating revenue through music and new media productions, training programmes and products and facility and equipment hire. All participants would normally pay a nominal fee. The fee structure will be divided into community, semi-commercial and commercial fee scales.

## CASE STUDY 2: GALWAY – NA CROSÁIN

Na Crosáin is the in-house youth theatre company for Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, the National Irish Theatre, which produces plays in Irish as well as hosting various other events. An Taibhdhearc was established in 1928.

Na Crosáin was established in 2003 by An Taibhdhearc. Marc Mac Lochlainn, of Branar Theatre in Education Company was charged with the task of setting up and developing Na Crosáin. Beartla Ó'Flaithearta became artistic director of Na Crosáin in Connemara in 2005. 'Na Crosáin' is named after a band of elite travelling performers in medieval Ireland.

Na Crosáin aims to provide professional skills and theatre methodologies through Irish to young people. It aims to provide the highest standard of theatre education and to provide youth theatre members with the necessary facilities and skills to perform confidently.

It aims to achieve a theatre style that is accessible, enjoyable and challenging to its members and its audience. Na Crosáin also aims to further the development of theatre for and with young people.

### *Activities*

There are two branches of Na Crosáin, one based in An Taibhdhearc and the other in Connemara. It serves two age groups – Dordán for 11 – 15 year olds and Ardán for 15 – 20 year olds. There are approximately 35 members at any one time.

Na Crosáin provides weekly drama workshops which incorporate a number of dramatic forms including Le Coq methodology, puppetry and physical theatre. The Galway group meet every Saturday for two hours and the Connemara group meet every Wednesday evening for two hours. The groups often devise their own plays which are then performed in An Taibhdhearc, as well as other venues. Recent productions include 'Seafóid', 'An Binse', 'Jane', and 'Oíche le Chekhov'. In addition to the drama workshops, Na Crosáin also provides intensive summer courses and has started an outreach to the islands and the Gaeltacht. The outreaches have been primarily focused in primary schools.

Evaluation of projects occurs on a constant basis through consultation with staff and youth participants.

### *Structure*

Na Crosáin operates under the stewardship of An Taibhdhearc, which is a professional arts organisation. Na Crosáin has two artistic directors, one for each branch. In addition, guest facilitators are invited to provide additional training. Na Crosáin is funded by An Taibhdhearc which receives its funding from Roinn na Gaeltachta. Participants pay a fee of €75 for 15 weeks.





## CASE STUDY 3: KILKENNY – YOUNG IRISH FILM MAKERS

Young Irish Film Makers (YIFM) is a film training and production company for young people aged 13 to 20. Founded in 1991 by Mike Kelly, YIFM's studio is based in Kilkenny City. YIFM produced a number of short films and children's theatre productions before making their first feature film, *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, for Channel 4 and RTE in 1998. Their theatre production arm, Dreamstuff Youth Theatre, produced its first play in 2000, and the first National Youth Film School took place in 2002.

YIFM trains young people to become filmmakers through the process of making digital feature films. It employs a youth work approach which aims to empower and build the confidence of its members. Films are produced to a very high standard using professional equipment. The members are encouraged to take ownership of the work and view failure as a learning opportunity.

### *Activities*

The core programme of YIFM involves weekly classes on all aspects of film making including acting, writing and technical production. Every Saturday young people can participate in short film workshops and several short films are made each term. There is a core membership of approximately 100 young people which increases during stage productions. Dreamstuff Youth Theatre stages productions each Easter and Christmas in the Watergate Theatre in Kilkenny.

The National Youth Film School invites 20 young people from all over Ireland and abroad to spend five weeks shooting a major feature film for television. Four feature films have been made as part of this programme – *The Children* (2002), *Stealaway* (2003) (both U.S. Film Festival winners), *Lily's Bad Day* (2004), *Eliza Mayflower*

(2005) and *Suckers* (2007). Over 100 young people from all over Ireland (including many from Northern Ireland) have taken part in the National Youth Film School.

YIFM also runs a National Youth Film Outreach which is an innovative youth film making programme for young people in disadvantaged areas that is delivered through youth service, community development and community health organisations. The youth filmmaking programme specifically targets young people in underprivileged areas through partnership with after school programmes to combat the growing digital divide which adds to the marginalisation of disadvantaged young people. They also assist and support young filmmakers to make films, or set up film making groups, in their own areas.

Evaluation occurs on a constant basis through consultation with staff and youth participants.

### *Structure*

YIFM is a voluntary youth arts organisation. There is a staff group of six. Full-time staff include the artistic director, creative director, post-production teacher and administrator. YIFM is not dependent on one source of funding. It receives funding from the Arts Council, The Office of The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the local authority. It is also supported by corporate and private funding from organisations like RTE, Apple and private sponsors. Participants pay €60 a term (10 weeks) which provides access to all the classes and Saturday workshops.

## CASE STUDY 4: SLIGO – BAROQUE YOUTH ORCHESTRA

The Baroque Youth Orchestra, which is based in the Model Arts and Niland Gallery in Sligo, was founded by

Rod Alston in 2006. Rod is Director of the Sligo Early Music Ensemble and Artistic Director of the Baroque Music Festival which is now in its 12th year. The Festival was produced independently until a partnership was established with the Model Arts and Niland Gallery nine years ago.

The Baroque Youth Orchestra is a training orchestra. The goal of the orchestra is to prepare a performance for the Baroque festival each year. The main aim is to give student instrumentalists the opportunity to play in a chamber orchestra in preparation for a performance that is probably more demanding and rewarding than they would otherwise have a chance to play. Through involvement in the orchestra the youth members are introduced to the particular style and qualities of baroque music, providing them with an opportunity to improve their technical skills and develop their musicality, as well as giving them an opportunity to play a concert with a professional guest performer. For the more able students, there is the possibility that they go on to also join Sligo Early Music Ensemble which meets and performs throughout the year.

### **Activities**

Prior to the festival, the orchestra rehearses weekly for two hours for approximately six weeks and then during the festival there is two or three training sessions lasting three hours before the concert. Each year the orchestra plays another concert after the festival to make the most of their rehearsing.

The Model Arts and Niland Gallery provides other programmes for young people:

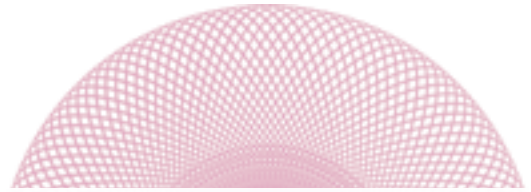
The Young Model programme runs every Saturday for four and a half hours for eight weeks. Each week participants work with a different artist and have the opportunity to explore various art forms and experiment with different technologies. The 'taster' session is free and participants pay a €10 booking fee.

Art Trap is a series of 12 weekly workshops for families and children up to 12 years old. Each week a different artist works with the participants.

### **Structure**

The Baroque Youth Orchestra is supported by the Model Arts and Niland Gallery which is a not-for-profit arts organisation. The tutor of the orchestra is paid but the Artistic Director volunteers his time. The Baroque Youth Orchestra is funded through the Model Arts and Niland Gallery, which receives its funding from the Arts Council, as well as other sponsors including CREATE, Dormant Accounts and Alban Tourism and Development. Youth orchestra members do not pay to participate in the orchestra.





## CASE STUDY 5: WATERFORD – WYD-MOVES

WYD-Moves is the dance division of Waterford Youth Arts (WYA) and is co-ordinated by Libby Seward. WYA is a youth and community arts resource which enables young people to participate in creative activity as a means of self-expression and development in a safe, professional and enjoyable environment.

In 1999, Libby Seward came to Waterford for one week and worked with three groups to produce two dance pieces from each group resulting in the Chance 2 Dance 1999 Festival. The following year she returned and The Chance 2 Dance 2000 Festival was another great success. Since 2000 she has worked as the Dance Development Officer for WYA and her work includes community dance in schools and with adults. Her initial brief was as Dancer in Residence, part funded by the Arts Council, WYA and Waterford City Council.

The dance programme with WYD-Moves focuses on developing and producing creative dance. Young people are very much involved in the creative process and work is produced through devising and improvisation. One of the goals of WYD-Moves is that the young people have a positive and empowering experience.

### Activities

Currently, WYD-Moves has a core group of approximately 60 members, including young people with special needs. It provides weekly dance workshops with five different age groups from pre-schoolers through to adults, as well as community and school outreach workshops. The classes last for between 45 and 90 minutes depending on the group. To cater for young adults a programme called Animated State has been established. It is a platform for dance and is open to all who are willing to use and develop their choreography and dance skills.

Occasionally WYD-Moves produces dance performances, one recent being 'Aqua Luna' in January 2007.

Performances are dependent on funding, but less formal performances are produced on a frequent basis. In addition, WYD-Moves often collaborates with the drama and film divisions of WYA on projects and productions.

Evaluation of the programme happens on a frequent but informal basis within each session when participants have the opportunity to share their opinions. Evaluation is conducted on a more formal basis after a performance when all involved are asked to fill in a feedback form. WYD-Moves is funded through Waterford Youth Arts. It also receives some dedicated funding from the Arts Council.

### Waterford Youth Arts

Established in August 1985 as Waterford Youth Drama, WYA has grown from the voluntary efforts of two individuals and 25 young people to a fully-structured youth arts organisation with a paid staff. Each week over 400 young people take part in its activities. The core activity of WYA is running weekly drama, dance, film and creative writing workshops by professional tutors throughout the year for young people. It is often invited to do workshops with schools. WYA also produces drama, dance and film on a regular basis.

WYA is founded on the principles of youth work and has strong working links with other youth and community groups in Waterford. It promotes access for all young people to the creative arts, in particular young people from disadvantaged areas. WYA aims to:

- enable young people to articulate their needs clearly in a safe group
- enable young people to develop interpersonal skills, such as confidence, social interaction, responsibility sharing, planning, decision making, and problem sharing
- introduce young people to new and innovative elements of the arts
- provide training and education in creative skills

Another aim of WYA is to professionalise the youth and community arts sector by providing employment opportunities for dedicated youth/community arts workers. Artists may use WYA as a resource organisation, a space to base themselves and use of the facilities.

WYA is a voluntary organisation, and legally it is a charity. It has an independent voluntary management committee. Currently there are two full-time workers; artistic director and administrator, two half-time jobs; office manager and dance development worker. All other work is contracted. WYA is not dependent on one source of funding. It is grant aided by The Arts Council, Waterford City Council, Waterford County Council, City of Waterford VEC, Waterford Youth Committee, The Ireland Funds, FÁS and Léargas. Last year Waterford City Council provided them with a building with office and workshop spaces. WYA also has a Corporate Friend and Patron Scheme to encourage companies and individual business people to support its work. In addition, programme participants pay a nominal rate of €40 for a 10 week term.

## CASE STUDY 6: AVONDHU DANCE GROUP

Avondhu Dance Group is one of the projects which is organised through the youth arts section of the Avondhu Development Group Ltd and is facilitated by community dance artist, Jo Nichols. Avondhu Development Group Ltd is a partnership which aims to help people and communities who are experiencing, or likely to experience, disadvantage to take control over their own development. They do this through facilitation, skills development and the creation of an enabling environment.

Jo has been working as a community dance artist in Cork for five years with various groups and projects

for children, adults, elderly and people with learning disabilities. In summer 2005, the County Arts Officer put her in touch with the Arts Officer in Avondhu. They did some taster classes for young people in June 2005 for four weeks. As the taster sessions were well received regular weekly classes began in September. Initially there were two classes for girls; junior girls (8-13 years old) and senior girls (13+ years old).

Jo works from a child-centred approach mainly facilitating the children to create, improvise and devise their dances. Peer learning is also encouraged whereby the children share and teach their own dances to each other. Through the dance project there is also a focus on developing self-confidence team work skills and creativity.

### *Activities*

There are currently two dance groups, one group for girls and one for boys. Each group has a class on Monday evenings for one hour. Girls dance first and then the boys. There is a core group of 20 children.

The dance group works in conjunction with a boys' and girls' visual arts group which is also held in the community hall. When the girls finish dancing, they join the arts group and the boys come to the dance group. Although not all children attend both groups the groups work together and often with a similar theme. For example, the dance group prepared a performance for the St. Patrick's Day Parade, and the visual arts group prepared the costumes.

Although the dance group is not performance focused, they do take up opportunities to perform at different events, such as the parade. They also have a 'sharing' for parents at the end of each term.

Project participants contribute €3 a class and the shortfall is subsidised by Avondhu Development Group Ltd.

## Avondhu Development Group

Established in 1996, Avondhu Development Group has developed into a highly regarded community partnership delivering a wide range of projects including The Rural Transport Initiative, The Equality for Women Initiative and The Enhancing Disabilities Services Initiative. Youth Initiatives include the Youth Arts Development Project, Mallow Sports for Youth Project and the Youth Mental Health Awareness Project. One of the core values of Avondhu is the promotion of self-reliance and sustainable responses to local needs. Avondhu works in a geographical area which includes Mallow, Fermoy and the greater Blarney area.

The Youth Arts Development Project began in July 2005. It aims to improve access for young people to affordable and high quality arts opportunities in the area through consultation with young people. It also aims to develop the youth arts infrastructure in the region so that it may operate independently. One of the roles of the Youth Arts Officer, Lorraine O'Donnell, is to engage local artists and arts facilitators to develop youth arts programmes, organise training for the facilitators and to support them in developing an autonomous and independent practice.

Some of the other activities in the arts programme in 2007 included:

- Arts projects targeted at local secondary schools: In November, Fidget Feet, which is an aerial theatre dance company, did a residency marketed to the three secondary schools in Fermoy. They provided two taster workshops in the morning from Monday to Friday and then one group came every afternoon. In total, they facilitated 97 young people.
- Taster weekends: In December, a series of taster weekends in Fermoy was provided. There were workshops in filmmaking, drama and a circus skills workshop.
- The co-ordination of the Summer Arts Festival in July: The theme of the festival was 'Myth and Leg-

ends from Around the World'. There was an opening parade, performances from various youth arts groups and street theatre and art workshops.

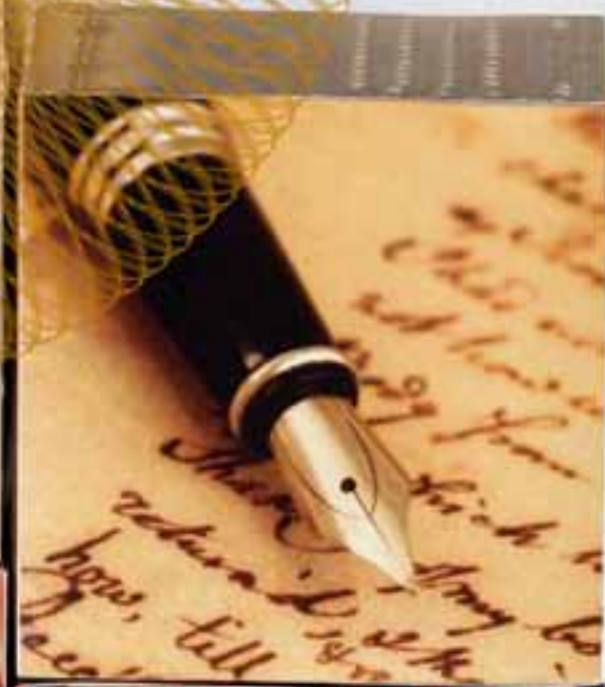
- The Local Young Bands Development Plan: this aims to support the young bands in the area, providing them with a safe platform to play their original music with a Battle of the Bands competition in May.

There are 15 staff members, 10 full-time and five part-time, in Avondhu Development Group. It is a statutory sector organisation and is funded by the LDSIP (Local Development and Social Inclusion project). The arts projects are supported by the Arts Office of Cork County Council.

This chapter provided a brief description of each project involved in this research study. The next chapter will outline the aims and goals of the project facilitators.



## 4. AIMS & GOALS OF PROJECTS





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This chapter outlines the aims and goals of the projects as reported by the 13 project co-ordinators and facilitators interviewed for the study. These include:

1. making the arts accessible to young people
  2. creating a welcoming environment
  3. valuing the young people's contributions
  4. developing the young person
  5. developing artistic potential
  6. working to a high standard
  7. contributing to young people's education
  8. developing a sustainable arts infrastructure
- 

The aims of the projects were clearly influenced by the fact that 11 of the project co-ordinators and facilitators had arts backgrounds.

- Five of these had a background specifically in community or youth arts.
- Seven worked as artists in their particular field before they began working with young people or in the community. Three of these had considerable experience working with young people and three were working with young people primarily as artists but were supported by youth workers or teachers.
- Two were trained in working with young people (teaching and youth work) before beginning to work in the youth arts sector.

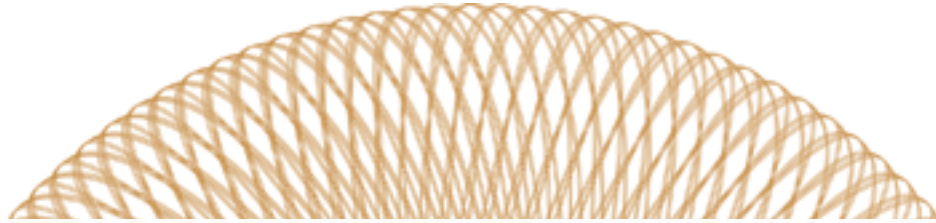
The project co-ordinators and facilitators discussed some the goals their arts programmes are designed to achieve:

### **Making the arts accessible to young people**

One goal of all the projects was to encourage opportunity and access for young people in the arts. Generally speaking, the organisations running the projects did not have difficulty accessing youth participants, in fact, in some places the youth arts organisations are competing for young people. Although word of mouth is an important way to access young people, a number of the projects actively promote their organisation through radio, schools, fliers, newspapers. Project facilitators also talked about how one of the best ways to attract young participants is through putting on performances.

However, as young people's lives are constantly changing and moving at a fast pace, project facilitators talked about how they constantly have to rethink ways to engage young people and have to be willing to try new and different things out. As one project facilitator put it





*'you have to be a bit creative about the way you approach things.'*

Some of the strategies employed by the different organisations to encourage young people to engage with their organisation and the arts included events such as Battle of the Bands, talent shows, open-mic events and performances. Such events encourage young people to be audience members as well as performers and may attract those with little previous experience of the arts. One facilitator pointed out how the Battle of the Bands provides an age appropriate, legal and safe platform for music bands to play original music. Such events may also be of interest to older teenagers who may have lost interest in participating in more formal projects. One project facilitator pointed out that as young people get older, they do not like the idea of participating in 'youth arts' as they want to be associated with something more mature. Young people may withdraw from a project because they are beginning to see themselves as serious artists and they feel that the 'youth arts' bracket does not fulfil their expectations. In order to meet this challenge, WYD Moves developed a Platform for Dance aimed at meeting the lifestyles and needs of older teenagers.

Young people may also have negative perceptions of the arts which hinder their involvement. Avondhu Development Group Ltd organised taster classes with Fidget Feet, an aerial dance theatre company, for young people in the local schools. They found that giving young people a chance to see a DVD of the company's work encouraged them to get involved as it reduced some of their anxieties about what is expected and made it exciting. As the co-ordinator put it:

*'There's hesitancy sometimes if they can't visualise it, or if they can't get their head around the concept, they're much more hesitant to sign up for anything'.*

Project facilitators talked about how young people may not join a project because of perceptions they may have

about where it is located e.g. if it is located in a part of town that they normally would not go to. A creative approach adopted by The Base to meet this challenge was the organisation of an outdoor event in the local park. This allowed young people to see different kinds of activities, meet people and get a taste of the projects. This seemed to be less intimidating than having to go to a venue at a particular time. WYA stated that since they now have a building and are based in the community, more young people from the local community are accessing the projects.

There are a number of issues which may act as a barrier to young people's continued participation in a project including other commitments, financial resources and lack of transport. Also school related commitments such as exams may also inhibit continued attendance. One facilitator discussed the importance of spontaneity and creativity in the content of the project so that the young people can easily rejoin the group if they have missed a few weeks. Some projects aim to be as accessible as possible by having minimal fees for participants or providing bursaries. Others have begun to provide outreach programmes to rural or disadvantaged areas for example. It was also pointed out that support from home is important for young people to maintain involvement in projects.

### **Creating a welcoming environment:**

In terms of making the project attractive, it was pointed out that having a 'base' to work from is important, so that the young people always have a place to come back to, like another home. In most cases, the project facilitators felt that it was very important to make the site of the project an accepting, safe and friendly environment, so that it is simply a nice place to hang around. It is important that the environment is non-competitive and supportive, where the young people are free to create and express their ideas.

*'It's important that they feel comfortable, and when they're comfortable then they can breathe and*

*develop, and find out new things about themselves, and to mature and to build up confidence.'*

The environment needs to meet the young people where they are at, as this facilitator describes:

*'The boys, you should see them, in the first five minutes I really don't try and teach them anything. They just love to run and skid and bounce off the walls, and it's just giving them that space to do that and play with it.'*

Being creative requires taking a risk and making oneself vulnerable. Young people will be reluctant to take this risk if they do not feel accepted and sense that their contributions are not valued. It is important for facilitators and co-ordinators to be committed to the young people and understand the value of participation in the arts. The role of the project facilitator is to ensure that the needs of all the youth participants are addressed and that every young person has the opportunity to develop and share their ideas. Project facilitators aim to develop the potential of the young people, 'to make sure everyone gets a slice of the cake' and to make participation a positive experience.

### Valuing the young people's contributions

Project facilitators talked about how their projects have been shaped by the young people's wishes and needs. Valuing young people's contributions encourages ownership of the art pieces and more of a commitment to the creative process. For most of the projects, the main priority was that the young people are the focus of every stage of the programme from the design through to the evaluation after the project is completed. As one facilitator put it:

*'It's about becoming less, it's about the adults becoming less in the organisation because you're not working to your own agendas.'*

Project facilitators talked about the importance of making the young people feel valued and respected. It is important to value all the ideas the young people come up with:

*'We value everything that comes from the group, and nothing is kind of thrown out or nothing is said, you know, come up with something better, we try it and let them see that it's not going to work, so that they actually have the confidence to come up with their ideas, when their ideas are good, that they believe in their ability to create pieces.'*

Most of the projects encouraged the young people to devise their own work:

*'When we're working it's through devising, it's always through imagination and play if you like... and interaction with each other as well that's really important.'*

It is important for every young person to have a role and a part to play in the project:

*'We think that's really important because we believe in the idea that every young person has creativity, everybody can perform, and that's how we work.'*

### Developing the young person

Of the 6 projects, 4 work from a youth work basis and 2 from an arts basis. For projects working from a youth work basis, the focus is on developing the young person:

*'We're about developing young people. We use film to do that, we use theatre to do that. So you know what it's not, we're not trying to make actors, we're not trying to make filmmakers, that's purely incidental... if somehow they don't learn to become adults within the organisation, that somehow it develops them as people, then it would have failed badly.'*

Another project facilitator echoed this:

*'Our brief is not to create future dancers, future actors, future directors, our brief is to develop young people, the introduction of young people to the arts and discovering something about*

*their creativity, and then after that it's up to the young people.'*

However, all of the youth work based projects were committed to fully integrating arts and youth work. One project facilitator pointed out that working from a youth work basis does not mean that the artistic quality is inferior.

*'I think it's just a perception maybe that if it's community based it's not necessarily going to be high quality artistically, but I think that's a perception that I'd really like to change... an emphasis on both the quality but also the community aspect of it, that those things can work together and alongside each other.'*

He argued that there is no conflict between a youth work and arts-based approach:

*'I don't think there's a conflict there really; I think it's a conflict that's a bit constructed. And I think also that we are not doing the young people a favour if we're just thinking about quantity and are not thinking about the artistic quality, that that's kind of a secondary thing, I think we should have both of those things at the forefront.'*

### Developing artistic potential

Developing the artistic potential of the young people is a fundamental objective of the projects. One goal related to artistic development is to facilitate young people to recognise and develop their creativity. The facilitators' role is to harness their enthusiasm and creativity by teaching them basic skills such as improvising, devising, appreciation and different methodologies and approaches.

Encouraging participants to develop a critical eye is also an important part of their artistic development. Facilitators aim to help young people learn to reflect and evaluate their art, so that 'if they are crafting something, they do not just throw any old thing out there':

*'I think it gives them a certain standard or level of thinking whether something is well crafted or well worked or well presented or whether it appeals to them or why it appeals to them or why it doesn't appeal to them, rather than 'Oh that's nice.'*

Art appreciation is related to not only reflecting on what you see and hear, but also being able to question and find a way of understanding what the art piece communicated to you:

*'It's like developing an aesthetic sense... so you're noticing how it makes you feel, you're saying 'that moves me' or 'that makes me feel this', so getting in touch with feelings, and getting in touch with the ability to express feelings. I think those are two really important things for young people.'*

Although some of the projects are more focused on the process than on the performance or the end result, giving young people an opportunity to perform or show their work is important. One facilitator talked about providing performance opportunities on a meagre budget through running a 'hit and run' exercise around the town, for example, performing in bus stops, supermarkets, and at ATM machines.

### Working to a high standard

It is important young people are challenged through participation in projects and that as they become more skilled they have the opportunity to work with more challenging material. One project facilitator talks about how it is important to expect a high standard from the young people:

*'Everything we do we always put the idea out that we want to achieve the best we can artistically. We push ourselves and we push the young people. We're always striving for the best, the best what people can do at that time, with the skills they have you know.'*

An important aspect of empowering young people is to

help them create something they can be proud of and to provide them with opportunities to achieve:

*'You know something to be proud of, something to identify as being, you know, "that's me, I have a stake in it" rather than "oh well I stood on the stage and took four steps because I was told to do it."*

The facilitators reported where possible, young people are given the best equipment to work with, even though the equipment may be expensive and needs to be maintained.

*'But I think it's worth it... when the kids see it, they look at themselves like movie stars when they see themselves on screen... I think they feel like that they're being taken a little bit more seriously, rather than being given a little disposable Kodak camera.'*

High standards are developed by giving young people the opportunity to work with or meet professional artists who are committed to producing high quality work:

*'[The artist] didn't want to just do something which didn't mean anything to her so she really, really wanted to take on the whole idea of them actually making a piece of work, and that piece of work going somewhere, and that piece of work will be exhibited and shown around the world.'*

### Contributing to young people's education

Many of the project facilitators were also involved in providing arts education in formal education, either as once off projects or modules, or arts projects with teachers which link into the curriculum. One project facilitator has been working in one school for a number of years. She said that it is very clear that young people who have had dedicated arts education over a long period of time are able to engage with the arts at an in-depth level.

*'And they are living proof that even when you get to*

*6<sup>th</sup> year, they're still totally open, so if you ask them for improvisation or devising, they're not kind of just at a loss, they're able to draw on their imagination.'*

Some arts workers have a particular educational focus in their projects and aim to support the young people if they want to pursue an arts or media career by helping them build portfolios and so on. Often young people want to be certified for what they do and they seem to be interested and willing even though they know it will involve a lot of work. Facilitators in one project are exploring whether they can develop any courses which will get accreditation e.g. FETAC.

### Developing a sustainable arts infrastructure

A number of the co-ordinators spoke about the importance of developing a sustainable arts infrastructure in the locality in order for young people to access and engage with the arts. Avondhu Development Group Ltd aims to set up a sustainable and enabling arts environment in the community so that eventually the community takes responsibility for arts promotion and participation. This requires the commitment of volunteers from the community.

*'A lot of the work we do is within the community, and to create sustainability we have to get them on board, so that they can take it over. We provide the set up, facilitation and an enabling environment for them to continue it on.'*

In rural areas in particular, the possibilities for young people and the wider community to get involved in the arts are limited to certain art forms, like traditional music or dancing. For example, in Connemara, there is a need for strategic planning and physical infrastructure, such as an arts centre, to make the arts accessible to the community.

In summary, various strategies are employed by the organisations to make the projects accessible to young people. They aim to maintain the continued participation of young people through continually consulting with them and allowing them to shape the projects, and adapting the content of the projects to meet their needs and their changing lifestyles. The projects have two goals; which are to develop the young person and to develop their artistic potential. All of the projects were committed to fully integrating arts and youth work approaches and providing quality arts experiences. Valuing young people's contributions encourages ownership of the art pieces and more of a commitment to the creative process.

Having described the projects and having outlined the aims and goals of the project facilitators, we will now turn our attention to the contributions of the young people who participated in the study.



A collage of decorative elements. On the left, there are two overlapping spiral mesh structures, one in red and one in yellow. On the right, there are two white cards. The top card features a cartoon character with a large red nose and a white mask. The bottom card features a portrait of a person with a white mask and a blue and gold patterned background. A wooden handle is visible at the bottom right, holding the cards.

## 5. SETTING THE SCENE



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This chapter sets the scene for the young people's contributions by outlining how they accessed the projects, their reasons for getting involved and what they think are the barriers to involvement the arts. Some additional information about their general arts practice will also be summarised. This information was primarily attained through the 50 surveys filled in by the young people and supplemented by the views of project facilitators, focus group participants and interviewees. The gender and age of the young person is given after a quote.

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### Background information

Demographic information was sought from the young people who filled in the survey. In terms of the socio-economic background of the young people, 48 out of the 50 young people live with both their parents. No respondent indicated that their parents were unemployed and 35 stated that both parents were employed. A high proportion of parents have attended third level education – 70% mothers and 58% fathers.

### Accessing the projects

Of those who filled in the survey questionnaire, the majority of the young people (44%) found out about the project from their friends. A sizeable number (32%) found the project through family, as one young person explained:

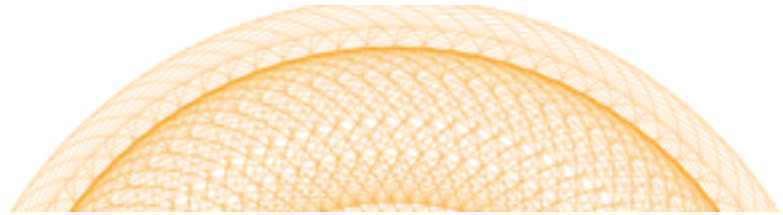
*'My Mum actually encouraged me a lot to come here...because she knew that I really wanted to*

*go towards the arts side of things rather than the other practical.' (F,14)*

A project facilitator made the point that parents may have an interest in a particular art form and think it is important for their children to experience it. With increasing cultural diversity, it is noticeable that people from some cultural backgrounds favour particular arts practice. He gave an example of a recent visual arts project where most of the children came from an Eastern European background, and suggested that their parents may favour visual arts more than Irish parents.

In this study, quite a number of young people (20%) accessed the project through school e.g. most projects had links with schools and some run arts workshops in schools. Primary school aged children in particular are easy to access through schools. Some found out about it through their music or dance teacher. Some also found out about projects through word of mouth, going to see a show, fliers or ads. Some people, particularly the younger ones, were enrolled by their parents.





### Reasons for getting involved:

Young people got involved with the projects for a number of reasons. The most common reason for getting involved cited in the survey was: 'wanting to learn it'. Here are some examples of what they said:

*'I liked drama since I was a little boy, my mum said I was good acting.... so I thought I'd go to drama to learn more about making characters and how to act.'* (M, 13)

*'Well I made films before I came here, and I really enjoyed it, so I figured this is a place I could do it properly if you get me, that and that certain areas of this place is like 70% female.'* (M, 17)

The Avondhu Boys' Dance Group started because they heard the music as they were leaving their art group, which was in the next room, and wanted to try it. It started off with six boys and within a few weeks there were 15-20 boys attending. As one boy said:

*'I went there the first night and I absolutely loved it to bits because it's not about showing off how good you are and all it's about team work and team effort.'* (M, 11)

Some desired to develop their experience or skill in a particular art form:

*'To try something new, 'cause I'd never heard of baroque (music) before that. I was kind of wondering what it would be like.'* (F, 15)

*'It's like my passion to be in acting, it has been for a very long while... so they said YIFM and Dreamstuff, who are owned by the same people, would be very helpful towards aiming towards that goal, or the arts in general.'* (F, 14)

One young person said that she was attracted to the creative aspect of a particular programme, as the other class she was attending was 'strict and uninventive'.

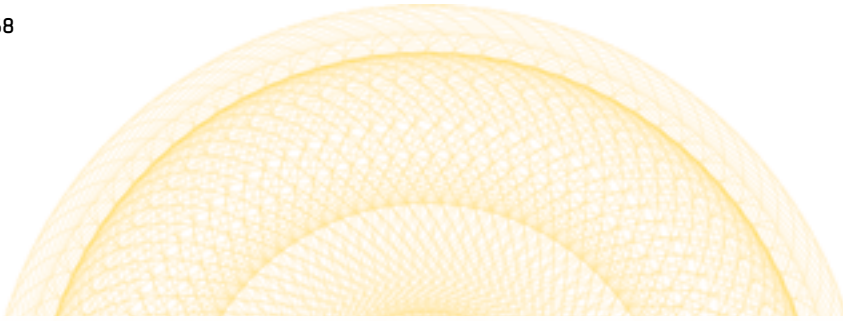
*'I was doing ballet and jazz... and it was kind of rigid or whatever, they just told you what to do and you had to go and do it, you didn't have any say in what you wanted to do.'* (F, 14)

The young people involved in The Base had a particular story about how they got involved. The BMG (Boys' Media Group) was established when a group of boys from a local school asked the project development officer in The Base if she could help them with a journalism project. As they expressed an interest in the arts in general, a six week course was developed for them which provided an introduction to all types of media. So basically the project was developed out of the interest and initiative of the young people. One boy explained:

*'We were thinking about starting up this club you know, media arts and stuff, I was looking through the schedule of what was happening and I thought it was really, really cool, there was media, and then there was radio, and just loads of stuff you wouldn't get a chance to do. I jumped at it straight away so.'* (M,15)

The two other most popular reasons for getting involved in a project, according to the survey responses, were 'friends are in it', and 'meet new people'. Other reasons included:

- To have fun.
- To try something new.
- To get up on stage and dress up.
- To have something to do during the summer or after school – 'It was just something new, because there was nothing happening in my life'. (M, 15)
- To use facilities provided by the organisation – One young person became involved with the programme because he wanted to use the recording studio in The Base. He then found out about the projects and decided to become involved.
- It looks good on a curriculum vitae.



- They knew other people (neighbours, friends and family) who were involved in the arts.
- They aspire to become a professional artist.
- The project facilitators also pointed out that young people may get involved in arts because they do not gravitate to sport. Digital media and film may also attract the 'techies', those who are interested in technology. One facilitator noticed that many of the young people who get involved in the project appear to be quite motivated and are often involved in lots of other activities.

## Barriers to involvement

Reasons why young people might not get involved in a project were:

- **Lack of interest:** 'Some people aren't just into this kind of stuff, they just don't like it, they just do other things like sports, whatever'. (F, 14)

*'Like, young people are the worst at going out and trying to find something, they just give up if they don't find something straight away. (M, 15)*

- **Lack of time** – a common obstacle is that many young people are already committed to different activities outside of school. Many organisations are competing for young people's involvement.
- **Lack of information and opportunity** – One of the difficulties is that promotion of the organisation, and specifically of different projects, requires resources and time which are not always available. It is largely dependent on funding which in turn requires a lot of work to access. Some project facilitators stated that a lot of their time is dedicated to accessing funding, sponsorship etc.
- **Perceptions** – young people may have certain perceptions about the arts which inhibit them joining a project. For example, young people may be more attracted to fashionable art forms like 'hip-hop' as opposed to creative dance. They may be concerned about their self-image:

*'They don't think it's cool... they'd be like embarrassed'. (M, 15)*

*'I think he thought he was a bit too old for it so he left'. (M, 15)*

*'I think like some people would want to do it, but they wouldn't do it because it'll make them kind of woosy or something, you know'. (M, 15)*

*'Especially boys, they never like dancing, and even if they do, they pretend they don't'. (F, 10)*

- **They may have certain expectations and anxieties about what it involves:**

*'They don't want to go through all the training in the arts'. (M, 15)*

*'They think it's hard work, and they can't put up with it'. (M, 13)*

- **Some young people said it was important that they knew other people before they started:**

*'Because I was so shy, and you just need that bit of a push, that safety net like, you know, but now I wouldn't really care, I'd just walk in'. (F, 18)*

*'Oh yeah, I wouldn't really start anything unless I knew someone was there ... and I at least have a basic insight of what's going on... I just don't like going into anything blind'. (M, 15)*

## Length of time involved in projects

The young people had participated in the project or programme for varying lengths of time.

Of the 50 participants who filled in the survey:

- 22% had been involved in the project for over four years and more were involved in the particular art form for longer
- 40% (the majority) had been involved for one to two years

- 16% had been involved for less than one year but at least two had been involved in other projects. 12% had been involved for two to three years
- 10% for three to four years.

In summary, most of the young people had been involved in the programme for over a year which means that they sustained their involvement.

### Other arts practice


Many of the young people interviewed had a general interest in the arts and had been involved in arts since a young age. Over half of those surveyed (64%) were involved in other arts activities. Many of those specialising in a particular art form, such as music or drama, had not had other experience of arts. Almost 70% said that they would like to do another art form. Most were introduced to new arts experience through school, especially in primary and in transition year. Most expected to stay involved in the arts in the future, even if not to the same degree as now.

### Arts consumption

Participation in projects seems to have a very positive impact on the young people's interest in purchasing arts products. Almost all (94%) of those surveyed had been to see a performance in the last six months and (86%) had been to see at least two performances. The most commonly attended performance was film (72%) followed by the theatre (64%). Around 40% attended music concerts, dance performances and art exhibitions and 24% went to a comedy show. Many of the participants (86%) had purchased or downloaded art products in the past six months. The most commonly purchased or downloaded product was music (78%), followed by films (68%), books (50%), arts magazines (42%) and 12% had purchased a piece of art. Only 14% young people participated in arts-related internet chatrooms or forums.

Having reviewed the arts-related background and practice of the research participants, the next chapter will report on the respondents' views on the value of participation in the arts.





**THE VALUE OF  
6. PARTICIPATION  
IN THE ARTS**



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This chapter will report on the values of participating in the arts as identified by the young people and the project facilitators. The gender and age of the young person is given after a quote. Before this, we will review the young people's understanding of the term 'arts'.

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## UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM 'ARTS'

It was considered important to find out from the participants what they understood by the term 'arts'. This highlighted a number of different understandings:

- Art/painting – Almost all the participants said that the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word 'arts' is fine art, painting and sculpture.
- After art/painting most participants mentioned various other art forms. Participants who participated in projects which integrated many art forms obviously had a very broad understanding of the arts and listed many art forms including drama, dance, music, djing, writing, animation, media and photography.
- In a number of cases, participants did not include music as an art form even though they play musical instruments or sing.

In addition to mentioning different art forms, the young people conceptualised 'the arts' in numerous ways:

Way of thinking	'It's like a certain way of thinking'. (F, 11)  'Thinking outside the norm, outside the box'. (M, 17)
Being creative	'Things that involve you making things up yourself'. (F, 14)
Expression	'When you're getting creative, like, sort of like expressing yourself'. (F, 15)  'Stuff that people make... that mightn't have a purpose, that's probably, I suppose the definition of art, an expressive purpose'. (M, 16)

Interaction	'Anything that gets you involved with other people kind of'. (M, 13)
Performance	'Anything that you really have to perform in front of people'. (M, 13) 'Other people have to see it, kind of way'. (M, 15)
Personal enjoyment	'It's for yourself like'. (F, 15) 'Your own personal space'. (F, 14)
Being 'arty'	'People who do art are automatically considered as quirky and stuff'. (M, 17) 'Arty movies which are low budget and make you think'. (M, 17)

Finally, some young people associate 'the arts' with:

- Arts colleges
- Arts degrees i.e. literature, history, philosophy etc.
- Arts festivals
- The Arts Council
- Bureaucracy: 'I don't know... the thing that pops into my mind is bureaucracy just because of the Arts Council and that whole thing'. (M, 16)
- Aspect of society - 'you'd be thinking of... for me it's just like a section of society, you know sport is a part, but there's loads of stuff that is art... it's a part, it's a thing we'd do.' (M, 16)

It is apparent that the young people entertained numerous different and multifaceted concepts of the term 'arts'. Notably, they did not differentiate between the high arts and alternative arts as young people in Harland *et al.*'s study (1995).

## VALUES IDENTIFIED BY THE GROUPS

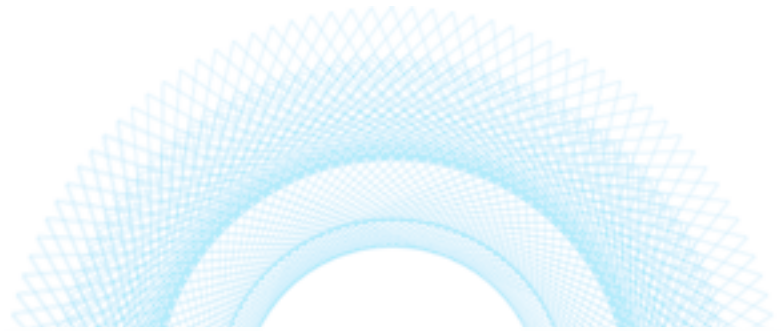
This section collates the perspectives of the young people participating in the focus group interviews. The data collected from the focus groups provides a particular insight into young people's perspectives as it is their initial responses to the questions 'What is the value of participating in the arts?' They were not asked to comment on particular statements as in the interviews or questionnaires.

In total, 32 young people (13 boys and 19 girls) between the ages of 10 and 18 participated in six focus groups. Focus group participants were asked to write down in a word or phrase what they thought was the value of participating in the arts. After writing them down, they were asked to group them according to theme, so if for example participants wrote 'fun', 'it's fun', 'good craic', these were grouped together. Finally, the participants were asked to rank as a group the most important to the least important theme. Their creativity was evident in the poster making exercise as at least one person in each group chose to draw or sketch some of their thoughts as opposed to writing them down.

Below the main values identified by focus group participants in each of the projects are reviewed. The most important values of participating in the arts were

- 'fun'
- 'more self-confidence'
- 'meeting new people'
- 'learning new skills.'

It was noticeable that all the young people participating in the groups were very motivated and enthusiastic about their projects. It was also observed that all the groups found it difficult to rank themes according to importance, as indicated by this extract:



**Q:** You seemed kind of reluctant to put them in an order?

(All agree.)

**YP1:** You don't need an order, just as long as their important they're fine, you don't need most important and least important

**YP2:** They're important or they're not

**YP1:** They're important in different ways, but if you're trying to go as a general it's very hard

**YP2:** Like without any of them it wouldn't be the same, you know, you need all of them to have fun, meet new people, that's what's makes it fun, learning new things all together, but if you take away one of them it's not the same.

By way of introduction to the focus group responses, an extract from one of the groups highlights some of the main values identified by focus group participants. This group were delighted by the fact that they received certificates from the Lord Mayor for participating in the programme and made reference to it regularly.

**Q:** Do you get anything out of participating in the arts?

**YP1:** Yeah definitely

**YP2:** Keeps you out of trouble

**YP3:** Gives you something to do as well like, when you're not in the group you're thinking about it.

**YP4:** It's something productive

**YP5:** It makes you more confident as well... it makes you more like group involved, more social

**YP3:** Yeah, it also gives you career ideas for later ... I'm going to see if I can go to college and study like communications to see if I can do that so, without this I would have never even got that chance

**YP2:** We got awards, remember, a few of us last year we got an award for being the founders.

## The Base

It was evident in the focus group with the Base Media Group that the main value for them was '**learning new skills**' – computer, communication and socialising skills and that participation in the project was good for '**future possibilities**' – it looks good on the cv and provides new career choices. '**Meeting friends**' was also listed as 'most important.' Second in the list for BMG was '**more self-confidence**' and '**ideas for media**'. The notable contrast with the poster made by this group and the others is that 'fun' or 'enjoyment' were not listed in the top values, however it was clear from the way they talked about the project and through observing the interaction amongst the group that they enjoyed it.

## Na Crosáin

The most important values of participating in the arts to the focus group participants from Na Crosáin was '**fun**' and '**it's cultural**'. Second on the list came '**meeting new people**' and 'learning new things/learning to act.' They were the only group who brought up the cultural aspect of participating in arts programmes. This is most likely related to the fact that it is an Irish language youth theatre company and so there is an aim to promote Irish language through the youth theatre as well as developing the Irish language and communication skills of the youth theatre members.

## Young Irish Film Makers

The most important value of participating in the arts to the focus group participants from YIFM was '**fun**'. Second to this was '**more confidence**' and '**meeting new people**'. This group was notably different to the others in that participants identified values unrelated to arts such as 'understand your surroundings better'. They also referred to 'seeing' new things. This may be related to the fact that they focus on film productions which have a visual element, and that at some level their observational skills were being tuned.



## Baroque Youth Orchestra

The most important values of participating in the arts to the focus group participants from the Baroque Youth Orchestra were **'it's fun/pure enjoyment'**, **'more confidence'** and **'improve your playing.'** This group were similar to BMG in that there was a very strong focus on learning skills and learning to perform in their discussion. They talked about learning to perform in different settings, improving technical skills, broadening musical knowledge. Topics such as 'getting it wrong', receiving criticism and doing exams also came up. These themes are perhaps to be expected from a group who were meeting mainly to prepare for a classical music performance. It was also clear from the discussion with this group that they were very focused on their particular art form (music) and that they had high standards of technical and artistic qualities which they were seeking to meet through participating in this project.

## WYD Moves

The most important values of participating in the arts to the focus group participants from WYD Moves was **'creativity'** and **'self-confidence'**, whilst **'making new friends'** and **'fun'** were the next most important. Notably, both dance groups, WYD Moves and Avondhu Dance Group, mention creativity as one of the most important values. As they are younger than the other groups, they may not be as concerned with learning skills as adolescents or as concerned with their relationships with their peers. It may also be due to the particular nature of dance. Also developing creativity was one of the main priorities of their project facilitator, as was developing potential of participants.

## Avondhu Dance Group

The most important values of participating in the arts to the focus group participants from Avondhu Dance Group were **'fun'**, **'be creative'**, **'make new friends'** and **'stress free.'** This was the only group to identify 'stress free'

as an important value. It was evident that this group really enjoyed the dance group and were very excited and enthusiastic talking about it. They discussed getting more of a say and agreed that if they had more of a say it would be chaotic.

In summary, different groups identified different values as important. This seems to be dependent on their age, the arts activities engaged with in the project and the set-up of the project.

Some of the common values of participation include: **fun; making new friends; more confidence; creativity; and learning new skills.**

The following table summarises the values identified by focus group participants categorised by theme. This summary was the basis for the development of themes ensuing from the various 'values' reported by the indepth responses of young people and project facilitators in the study which are now reviewed.



**Summary: values of participation identified by focus group participants categorised by theme**

Pleasure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyment</li> <li>• Fun – ‘it is a laugh’, ‘having a jallopytastic time.’</li> <li>• Mood regulator – ‘worry less’, ‘no stress filled tension’, ‘stress free’; ‘it’s relaxing’, ‘keeps you healthy.’</li> <li>• Entertaining – ‘gets rid of boredom’, ‘something to do.’</li> </ul>
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet new friends; meet new people.</li> <li>• Socialising</li> </ul>
Self-confidence/ esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence – ‘it makes me more confident and I feel I can talk to people easier’, ‘I’m less shy’, ‘more outgoing’, ‘it gets rid of stage fright.’</li> <li>• Discover new hobbies and talents – ‘finding things you’re good at that you didn’t think you had’.</li> </ul>
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved self-expression – ‘helps you to express yourself.’</li> <li>• Sense of achievement – ‘it’s a chance to show what you can do’; ‘you get a real sense of achievement when you complete an art project’.</li> <li>• Young people power – ‘you get to make up dances, and make your own decisions.’</li> </ul>
Artistic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘New ideas’, ‘ideas for media.’</li> <li>• ‘Creative’, ‘express your ideas.’</li> <li>• ‘Getting involved in other art forms’.</li> </ul>
Skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning skills and techniques – ‘computer skills’, ‘learn to act’ ‘learn to perform’, ‘improve your playing’, ‘learn new techniques and improve on other ones.’</li> <li>• Communication and socialising skills – ‘easier for you to interact with people.’</li> <li>• Group and team work skills – ‘learn to participate as a group’, ‘being able to work together’, ‘others help you to improve.’</li> <li>• ‘Understand things you didn’t understand before.’</li> </ul>
New opportunities and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New experiences – ‘getting involved in all manner of memorable events (i.e. Patrick’s Day parade)’; ‘getting opportunities that you wouldn’t get otherwise’, ‘see things you wouldn’t have.’</li> </ul>
Future possibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good for cv and career options – ‘things you do look good on your cv’; ‘good preferences for applying for a job in later life’; ‘it could get me a job in the future.’</li> <li>• Gives new opportunities.</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Understanding your surroundings better.’</li> <li>• ‘It’s cultural.’</li> </ul>



## QUALITY OF LIFE

Comments made by the young people indicated that participation in arts projects has added to their quality of life because it has;

1. brought pleasurable experiences
2. new interests
3. a sense of purpose
4. a sense of belonging
5. meaningful relationships
6. supports mental health

### Pleasure

The main reason study participants got involved in the projects is because they 'wanted to learn it'. It is not surprising then that one of the main values of participating in the arts identified by the young people was that it was pleasurable. Pleasure was related to simply enjoying the art form and also having fun with others, as some young people explain:

*'Everyone just gets together and we have great fun.' (M, 11)*

*'I enjoy it, and also it's just fun to play music... but playing music with other people ... say if it's not working in the first rehearsal and then it begins to work, the fulfilment from that actually, because it is finally working is very cool... and it's great when it comes together the first time, it feels like, you know, like you worked at it, after doing that you can work at more challenging things.' (F, 17)*

Another girl talks about the passion intrinsic to creating something:

*'It's good, cause you know that no one else in this world is doing that, and no one else is going to know it cause you made it, and you can work hard until you perfect it, and then you can dance it and say to somebody I made it up... there's much more*

*passion when you do something that you created.' (F, 14)*

Another was delighted by the experience of performing and entertaining others:

*'Oh, it's brilliant because then you see the look on people's faces when you're actually entertaining them... you feel so proud to have created something that people can watch and be entertained by, it's just, you feel so, enlightened, that you have enlightened people.' (F, 14)*

The project facilitators also recognised how participation in youth arts projects provides young people with pleasurable experiences:

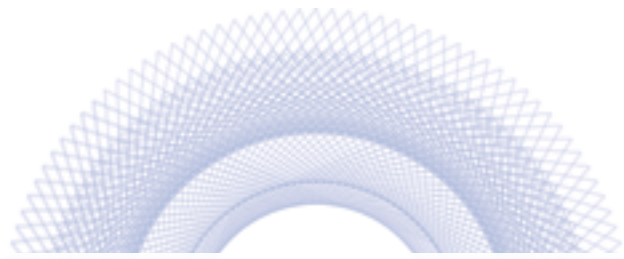
*'The importance of having fun, you know, which is quite often lost or overlooked... you know, even at a young age, there is a level of expectation put on the child around homework, or what they look like, or what their hobbies are or whatever, there's a lot of pressure, I think that whole idea of playing or having fun is [overlooked]... it is incredible fun to run across the room and leap... here's a piece of music, run with it, or here's a shout, go for it, and see what that does for you.'*

One project facilitator explains that because they want to learn it, they are very motivated:

*'There's a great dynamic, there's a great energy because of that, and you know that as a result of that, you're not concerned about laying down rules and regulations... because there is that self-motivation, that self-drive within them, there is a strong willingness to learn... so in terms of personal development, the participants, they push themselves... they become more self-motivated, more motivated within the group and they're not afraid to express themselves.'*

### New interests and sense of purpose

The majority (90%) of the young people agreed that



'they feel happier in themselves' since joining the arts project. For many, participation in the project met many needs. Most of the young people said they were rarely in trouble anyway, but for some it has encouraged them to use their time more productively. For this boy, participating in a project gave him new interests and purpose. He says that he realised:

*'there's no point in getting into trouble, that you can always be doing something better' and that 'it saves me being bored, I haven't been bored in ages':*

*'...and like it's something interesting, it's not just like sport, or just hanging around a corner chatting with all your mates, it shows me like things you can do... before here opened, I remember just like hanging around corners with my mates and stuff, like I still do that it's just that now it's kind of, when I'm not hanging around with them I can come up here, they help me out with everything, and even like I got into more stuff.' (M, 15)*

A young participant stated that it occupies her, keeps her busy and keeps her happy:

*'I think it really expresses what I do. It's what I do for a living. It's a hobby and it's more or less my life.' (F, 11)*

Involvement in the projects is much bigger than just participating in an arts project. One boy referred to his project as 'the club'. For many of the young people, it is something that occupies their minds, even outside of the project. It is much bigger than just an evening activity, it is much more consuming. One boy talked about how he thinks about the project during the week:

*'Yeah especially if you've got something big coming up like a film or play, you're really kind of thinking about it, if you've been told something in advance you're really looking forward to it, like some days in school, I'm lying back in my chair, I can't wait till drama class.' (M, 13)*

It has been such an important experience for another boy that he would prioritise attending the project over and above working:

*'Yeah, cause even, I was hoping to get a job, and like, the one thing I said I'd even ask for Fridays off just to go to this.' (M, 15)*

Another boy talked about how it's given him a sense of purpose:

*'Like I just feel this really gives me a sense of purpose that if I can get this done, I can help, I can help people, I can help my friends, I can help make the locality or whatever a better place with the work I do.' (M, 15)*

This sense of purpose is very important to young people's sense of self-worth, according to one facilitator:

*'To be part of some story, something that's going on... they find themselves in a great story here, and so therefore they have a purpose, and the purpose is set up to carry them through sometimes, cause so many kids we see don't have any purpose in life... you are respected, you are valued, you are someone, and that's terribly important'*

## Sense of belonging

Most (88%) agreed with the statement 'I feel I belong', as one young boy stated:

*'I'm the missing piece of the jigsaw... if I'm not in it the picture's ruined.' (M, 11)*

Many talked spontaneously about how they felt welcomed and accepted.

*'I was kind of wary of coming in and seeing new people, but they're actually just so accepting here, you could just come in straight away and feel like you're a part of it already.' (F, 14)*

She continues to say how it feels great to be part of a group:

*'It actually makes you feel like you're a part of something like, you're a part of a group, you belong in this group, it's not really that there're outsiders and insiders... like so many people can come in and go out again.'*

One young person described how creating something as part of a group makes him feel like he belongs and is important:

*'Like everyone has an important part in the dance, so you know that you must do this certain thing, to help the dance get on its way to get to the next stage. You realise that you're valued, you must do this, or this can't happen.'* (M, 12)

Another girl talks about she feels she is always welcome at the project space and how it's a place to come anytime:

*'You can just... it's not where you just have to come up just for classes; you can come up any time of the day, and hang around. It's a place where you can relax and come up to and we're not on the streets in town.'* (F, 16)

Project facilitators identified that arts projects can provide a place for young people with similar interests to meet, to become part of a group and fit in, especially those who may feel isolated. As one young person wrote in the survey:

*'I like feeling accepted as I'm not great at sports. Acting made me feel like I don't have to pick up a ball to fit in somewhere and I've made new friends.'* (M, 15)

This experience of belonging somewhere contributes to a general sense of being able to fit in outside the project, as these young people explain:

*'I feel like I belong here, I do, and I have a laugh with everyone, but I mean it also helps you fit in I*

*think, gives you something to talk about that you can fit in other places as well.'* (M, 17)

*'Yeah it's a good conversation starter... it's really good to get talking to people you don't know.'* (F, 14)

## Development of meaningful relationships

Meeting new people and developing friendships and relationships, both with peers and project facilitators was important for most of the young people. Almost all (98%) agreed that they had made new friends, and those that did not agree said it was because they already knew everyone before they got involved in the project. Meeting new people can be difficult at first:

*'At first you'd be very nervous kind of, and you'd be like "who are these people?" but then you'd get to know them, and then it's real relaxed.'* (M, 15)

Youth arts projects provide young people with the opportunity 'to interact without even knowing it.' It is a safe way to have new social encounters:

*'I think I'm more confident in myself and then, more social, I think, more socially outgoing, I think that's a big pro for any teenager I think... I go to a boys' school, I live in the middle of nowhere, so I mean talking to anyone who wasn't a boy, no matter how taboo that is, it is a good experience.'* (M, 17)

Meeting like-minded people is very affirming:

*'It's just so good to share common interests with people who share the same passions as you... you just go in and you automatically feel like you have something to talk about, you never ever run out of something to talk about and you just hold so many of the same interests, and it's just, it's brilliant.'* (F, 14)

For some it is enriching to develop a wider social network:

*'If you have another set of friends outside school,*

*it makes you think, everything isn't about school... you have a different social scene to where you live or go to school.' (F, 17)*

Specific to arts projects, the intensity of interaction with others in order to put on a performance or complete a task helps develop meaningful relationships:

*'When you're working on the film crew, you need to get on with everyone, when you're on a film crew there are going to be rows cause you need to get things done and you have a schedule to keep to. And if your friends, like you need to know, like you need to get on with everyone, and no one can take it personally, so you have to learn to work together.' (F, 15)*

Many referred to the fact that their current friendships with school friends developed through participating in arts projects out of school time. It allows them to 'get more close to each other'. One boy referred to how participating in the project with his school friends gave them 'a sense of togetherness' and 'a sense of trust'. He said doing a break dancing course especially made it easier for the group to bond:



*'It was just great fun for us to do all. It was sort of a sense of bonding doing it altogether, and we got the group closer to each other, and sort of like gave a sense of team work and appreciation to everyone.' (M, 15)*

Some talked about how they feel supported by their peers and project facilitators, who they feel they can trust:

*'You just come in and you have a laugh and that's a good thing too, you have fun and you try your best and you're always being helped, constantly being helped by the project facilitators and the older people who've been here longer as well, they're just giving you tips constantly, and you have to be thankful for that because there just giving so much of their time.' (F, 14)*

Some also talked about how they feel they are cared for and missed if they do not come:

*'First of all, I thought it was just the group and if you don't go, that's it, but like now I know that if I don't go, they give me a ring and ask me if everything's okay and all, basically we're like a family pretty much... I know that everyone would help me if I'm in trouble and that, they wouldn't think twice about it.' (M, 15)*

## Supports mental health

Many of the young people commented on how participation in an arts project has contributed to better mental health:

*'Before like, I was real kind of, it's kinda hard to explain, I was a bit sad and all that stuff, but now here like, I know I have friends here and even the [project facilitators], they'd help me in any way they can...' (M, 15)*

For some it provided a place for them to forget about their problems. Others talked about how they continued

with the project during the exam preparation period as it relieved them from some of the stress:

*'I just found it really great relief, just to get rid of the tension. I'd do grinds in the morning and then I'd come in and just forget about everything, like I thought it was great.'* (F, 18)

Some participants referred to how it has taken the focus off school:

*'I have my own little outside-of-school that I'm so much happier for because once school is over I just can't wait to get here and do what I like.'* (F, 14)

This was also pointed out by one of the project facilitators, who described it as a 'sort of freedom' from the pressures of school life and a 'different take on life'.

In the model for understanding the intrinsic benefits of the arts put forward by McCarthy *et al.* (2005), they state that captivation and pleasure are two of the benefits which are primarily of private value to individuals. It is clear that the young people in this study experience a sense of captivation, passion and pleasure from participating in the arts. It is also clear that they developed social bonds through participation in the projects and the co-creation of art, which McCarthy *et al.* (2005) describe as an intrinsic value which is primarily of value to society as a whole.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Previous research has shown that participation in the arts contributes to personal development. Young people reported that participation has developed their self-confidence, given them a sense of empowerment, responsibility and achievement, given them new ways of coping with failure, and also new opportunities and aspirations.

### Self-confidence

Many of the young people spoke spontaneously about how their self-confidence has improved through participating in the projects. In addition, a high proportion (92%) agreed with the statement 'I have more self-confidence'. Project facilitators talked about how there are so many different aspects to creating art that most young people can find something that they are good at.

*'The great thing about film and theatre is that there's something for everyone, if you're an extrovert, you can be an actor, you know, in everyone's face. If you're an introvert, you can get stuck behind a camera, or behind the lighting, or the computer stuff...there's something for absolutely everyone, be it academic or not, artistic, creative, there is a hole for everyone to slot into.'*

Self-confidence improved for numerous reasons. Some talked about how it has helped them tackle shyness:

*'Before like I went into this I was real kind of shy, and like I wouldn't talk to anyone unless they talked to me first, and now cause of this... I've more self confidence and I've made more friends, like I'd be able to walk up and talk to anybody now, I wouldn't be nervous...'* (M, 15)

Self-confidence is also built up through supporting and teaching others, for example, assisting the project facilitators or teaching friends. As one boy put it, if he's explaining the technical aspects to friends, 'he has to really dumb it down for them'. Another said it's good to have a feeling of being knowledgeable: 'I know about it and you don't, ha!'

Developing self-confidence means that most of the young people (90%) are more willing to try new things, as one girl put it:

*'I'd probably be like, you know, "Sure why not?" - it doesn't matter if I make a fool of myself.'* (F, 14)

Doing stand-up comedy as part of a project helped this young person:

*'Yeah, I'm not self conscious anymore, I know I'll get out there and like, if I'm not, like I don't care now if I embarrass myself, if someone laughs at me, I wouldn't care anymore, I know if I can laugh at myself that's one of the biggest things.'* (M, 15)

This self-confidence has also helped some young people get on better in school:

*'I started [in the project] around Christmas time in first year in secondary school. I was very shy, I was afraid to go near anybody in case they threw me in a bush or something like that, but I think all my self-confidence definitely did build up, and by the time, after a couple of months, I was talking to the older people in the school... I realised that I'd wasted about 5 months just trying to kind a stay out of everyone's way, try not to draw attention to myself.'* (M, 15)

As they go through the process of creating a piece, young people discover that their ideas are important, and that they are able to complete tasks and fulfil goals. They learn to stand up for themselves and their ideas within the group. Some talked about how being in a supportive environment helped build confidence:

*'I just came out of my shell completely. Not just confidence on stage but confidence in general, about joining new things, and just about presenting yourself... it's such a secure environment to get up in front of people because it's like a helping thing, like no one's going to criticise you, you have that feeling of safety.'* (F, 18)

Learning to perform builds confidence and young performers learn to express and project themselves on stage. This boy definitely agreed that he has more confidence:

*'Because you know like that what you're doing is like good for you, physically and even mentally*

*because you're getting used to the fact that there's people in front of you... it makes you more confident that you can go out there and do that.'* (M, 12)

One young participant stated that it has helped her become less concerned about other people's opinions of her work:

*'[Previously] like I thought maybe people don't like what I'm doing... but now I just don't care, if they don't like it it's not my fault basically.'* (F, 10)

## Sense of empowerment

Both the young people and the project facilitators reported that participation in arts projects is empowering. Self-confidence is closely related to this sense of empowerment, as is clear from this boy's comment:

*'Since I've started this, I've found that like, being a part of a group and having my say, really gives me self confidence knowing that people are listening to me, knowing that my opinions are being met, and that they're put into effect just gives me more self-confidence... my confidence has shot through the roof, just the feeling that you are a part of something, and that you can do something, and that you can make a difference, really just gives you self-confidence and helps you speak out.'* (M, 15)

Young people can find their voice, as a project facilitator explained:

*'...and they also get to express themselves in a way they can't in school or in life or in family... the outcome, to be empowered, to be somebody who's able to create, and to become an adult that's worth knowing and worth being.'*

One girl talked about how you learn to think for yourself:

*'I think it teaches people to, like use their own heads and not just like go with the crowd, decide*





*their own opinions for things, and confident enough to give their own opinions and think their ideas are going to be valued.' (F, 15)*

Fundamental to a sense of empowerment is comfortable self-expression. Most of the young people (86%) stated that participating in the arts project has helped them express themselves better. Participants have to learn how to express the 'great ideas bursting to get out.' This is easier in an accepting environment:

*'It's really easy to put your idea out, because they're so open. It's unbelievable really. Even in school if you want to ask a question, the teacher would say, "you can't cause we don't have enough time."' (M, 12)*

One boy says it is easier to say what he thinks:

*'Since I've started doing this... I find that I don't really care what anyone else thinks, if I have something to say, I say it, it has to be said... most of the time, I'd be the sort of person that sits in the corner... and just agrees with everything.' (M, 15)*

As art is about communicating, creating literally allows young people to express themselves and their ideas through their creations. For Na Crosáin who work and perform through the Irish language, they have to communicate their work in such a way that audience can understand them. They have developed a certain style and are developing a vocabulary of physical theatre which is a nice way of making their plays accessible to non-Irish speakers. The project facilitator explained:

*'When we do pieces, I make sure that they are as physically expressive as they are verbally, you show exactly what you're saying as much as you can, we use music or movement or some sort of gesture to help with understanding of the piece. And we don't use a lot of words... we keep the language to the minimum.'*

Some boys had established a radio show which literally

let them have their say:

*'Our club has our own radio show, so every week like, if we have something really important to say, you can go on it and talk about it and relay it to everyone.' (M,15)*

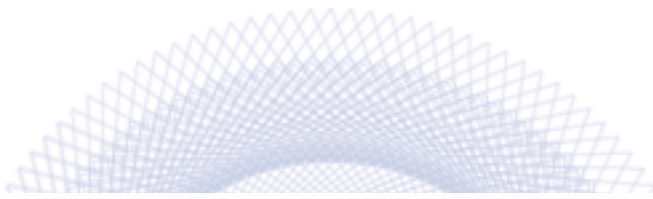
Empowerment is related to feeling one's contribution is valued, literally 'getting a say'. Apart from the young people who didn't think it was a relevant issue, all the young people agreed that they were 'given a say' in the projects, and only nine said that they would like more of a say. A common opinion held by many young people who were interviewed and participated in focus groups was that having too much of a say could be detrimental to the overall experience and productivity. They argued that it is important for the facilitator to have a final say and realised the need for boundaries. This indicates the young people's sense of the importance of discipline and responsibility.

### Sense of responsibility

Participation in arts projects gives young people a sense of responsibility if they are allowed to own the process and product of creating. They get a chance to be the decision makers and 'live an adult kind of existence as opposed to being told how to do things'. An atmosphere of freedom to explore, learn and create can be easily created through arts projects. One project facilitator talked about how they take responsibility for their learning:

*'I think there's quite a large element of knowing that they have to discover something for themselves, there's not going to be somebody telling them, they have to find it by playing, to find out what works, what doesn't work, to learn how to learn in a way.'*

Another described the process of how a group coming up with project ideas became empowered and took responsibility for their work:



*'One of the lads said, "oh this is taking forever, four sessions that's four weeks you know, we still haven't done anything..." By the end of the last session, they're going 90, they don't want to stop, everybody's getting up and involved, and pretty soon I just sat down, and I just let them go on at it, and like one of them got up and took the role of director, and everybody else was glad to let him do it.'*

Young people talked about enjoying a sense of responsibility. One boy talks about how everyone is willing to work when the time comes:

*'...when it comes to producing something, and on performance night of a theatre production, or getting ready to shoot a film, everyone knows its time to stop fooling around, put your nose down and do it.' (M, 17)*

Allowing young people to have ownership of their work lends to the integrity for their creations which is communicated to audiences, as pointed out by a project facilitator:

*'They are impressive the shows the young people put on and I think one of the reasons they're impressive is because they're very...heartfelt, it's very child-focused... I'm going to use the word professional, because it is, the level of commitment... the way the child is presenting themselves is honest.'*

## Learning to deal with failure

Essential to the creation of art is the process of failure. Young people really enjoy taking responsibility for their creation whether it works well or not as a project facilitator explained:

*'The responsibility of a project being good or bad, that's something they really dwell on. You nearly get as much enjoyment out of a bad project as you do a good. Now you can see the disappointment,*

*but you know they're understanding more and more, and the whole "you have to get it good the next time" feeling'.*

Learning to cope with 'failure' is an important experience for young people. They learn that failure is a valuable part of the art making process and that there are many ways to do things as one boy said 'you're not afraid you're going to mess up' (M, 13). They learn ways of dealing with mistakes and how making mistakes can be a source of inspiration:

*'If you make a mistake, it could be the best mistake you've ever made ...Not seeing it as a trial or a chore, seeing it as an experiment, you know.'*

The arts provide a unique opportunity to learn new ways of thinking about failure:

*'And that's the thing about art, because it's creative expression, you can never really be too wrong. People might not enjoy it but at least you've made something and created something and next time you can make it even better.'*

## Sense of achievement and fulfilment

Seeing a process through is a rewarding experience, especially as putting on a play or making a film is a very intense experience, and requires a lot of energy and commitment on a social and creative level. This is particularly important in the current 'fast-food' age where everything is instant and moves quickly. A sense of achievement is intrinsic to the creation of a quality art piece, as one boy put it:

*'Before this, I wouldn't have thought of anything like this... and you know you can do it to the way you want it, not just like anything will do... even when you watch it, you can feel proud cause you know you've done it, you stuck with it all the way.' (M, 15)*

This girl talked about how it felt like 'a huge achievement, to create something ourselves.'

*'Cause we're more involved with the producing, and the writing and the production of the play itself, you're able to build your own character, it kind of feels like that if you had a part, the play goes really successful... it kind of felt good to know that you were part of helping make that play, a really good play like that.' (F, 18)*

A positive response to performances or pieces created by young people also gives a great sense of achievement as explained by this boy:

*'It's great, when you're on stage and you get a standing ovation, cause eh, one night, during our last production, we got a standing ovation and that's really something, everyone up... the theatre was packed, and everyone just cheered, you can't help smiling and being content with yourself, amazing really.' (M, 17)*



A sense of fulfilment is also intrinsic to the creation of an art piece:

*'I feel more confident, and I feel satisfied, I've done my best and I can't do any better now.' (M, 11)*

*'I think you get a buzz when you make a film, and it's gone through the editing, and you see the final thing and it's worked and, you know, and the feeling is great, to say I directed that, or I worked on that.' (F, 18)*

## New opportunities and aspirations

For some, participation in an arts project has led to new opportunities, for example, appearing on television or performing with professional artists. Involvement in an arts project may inspire young people to pursue a career in the arts. The experience of working with an artist who has made a career out of art is encouraging for some young people, especially when they realise the skills they are learning are relevant and useful. One project facilitator was told by one of the young people: 'You're keeping my seat warm for me'. Arts projects are particularly beneficial for young people who feel limited by the traditional education system and have dropped out of school. One girl talked about how becoming involved in the arts project inspired her to become a professional artist. Although she always enjoyed art, she just did it at home for herself. After doing the project, her talent was recognised and she was commissioned to do murals in the locality and has since started a 3<sup>rd</sup> level course in animation.

## EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This section outlines the values of participation in the arts which contribute to the personal development of young people. These are what Eisner (1998) termed 'ancillary outcomes of arts education'.

## Emotional expression

Participation in the arts can contribute to emotional development. Emotional expression is inherent to the process of creating art, as explained by a project facilitator:

*'It's very expressive, it brings out the potential for expressing feelings or emotions or, maybe something that's hard to put into words will come through just a group activity, they're there to support each other.'*

Many (83%) participants agreed that it helps them connect with their feeling and express their feelings. As this boy states, the arts provide an outlet for feelings and emotions:

*'I think anyone involved in the arts is well able to express themselves artistically if they want, like I mean, if you play music, that music is a way to escape from the world and express yourself, if you do theatre, that's a way... so I think I would be well able to say how I'm feeling... I have an outlet and a way of expressing myself.' (M, 17)*



Another talked about how the nature of art creation facilitates emotional expression:

*'All songs mostly are about some kind of emotion someone wants to express, and dance, it's like acting, you have to pretend, and you can change a tone of a dance, you can definitely express yourself through it.' (F, 14)*

Another talked about how she can express her feelings through dancing:

*'With dancing it's amazing, you're able to go at your own pace, it's what you feel inside, it's what you're alright to go with, it's sort of doing what you want to do.' (F, 11)*

One girl says it's helped her to understand her feelings:

*'I suppose you learn to differentiate between how you're feeling, and just be more willing to talk about it.' (F, 18)*

Another girl says the best part is the process which can be cathartic:

*'The best part of it is actually drawing it, cause just say if you're listening to an angry piece of music... you can just take your anger out on it... The process is good.' (F, 18)*

One girl talks about how she can vent her feelings through music:

*'Because if you're really, really angry, or upset, I'll go play my fiddle, and it helps a lot.' (F, 17)*

One boy talked about the challenge of expressing how you feel through music. He explained that you need a degree of technical ability before you can express yourself.

*'I don't know whether you'd ever be able to get as far as to being able to express yourself fully, I'd say a lot of artists feel like that.' (M, 16)*

## Learning to work in a group

Most of the young people (90%) agreed with the statement 'I've learned to work as a team.' Participants talked about learning to co-operate:

*'Yeah I mean there's so much team work in putting on a production, you just have to co-operate, even as actors you have to be a team or the whole thing will fall apart.' (F, 16)*

They learned about the benefits of working in a team and how it allows the group to share responsibility:

*'Yeah, before I'd want to do everything myself, but now I know that, when everyone helps out, you'd get it done twice as quick and it's easier when you're working as a team, cause even like, then like, if you do something wrong, everyone shares the blame, not just you.' (M, 15)*

One boy talked about how it is easier to come up with ideas in a team:

*'Well more ideas, it'll be easier to choose, cause you might have a dance that takes only one minute, but if you put it together, you have a whole song.' (M, 10)*

A facilitator talked about how the participants learn from each other through 'peer learning':

*'Some of the ones who are more able and more into the choreography, they had great ideas and the others loved what they were doing, so they taught one another.'*

Learning to be part of a group also develops through the development of artistic skills as pointed out by a project facilitator:

*'[Playing in an orchestra] encourages them ...to listen, which is a very important musical skill, but it's also, not unrelated to the social skill of fitting into a group, and operating as part of a group, and having a role in a group, and having to be aware of*

*other people's role and what they're doing.'*

## Social development

Engaging with the arts can improve young people's social awareness. This may have to do with engaging with different social themes (such as war, bullying, teenage pregnancy), which encourages them to think deeply and critically about the issues. For example, one group devised a play about a teenage girl who thinks she's pregnant, and many of their friends attended the performances. The young people invited Cura, an organisation which supports those who are faced with a crisis pregnancy, to come to the play and be available to talk to the audience afterwards. One girl explained:

*'Well a lot of the time, we come up with plays that interest us, and a lot of the time it's to do with racism or bullying... so yeah it would make you think about those kind of things differently, and it makes you want to put on a performance that makes people think as well as entertain them you know.' (F, 17)*

Another girl gave a detailed description of a dance piece set in the jungle which had a moral message:

*'It was fun cause like you get to think of the things in the jungle and the rainforest. And I think if we were going to do it publicly it was like our performance was going to be... like tribes of the jungle are important... and they need to stay like instead of being killed off.' (F, 10)*

Engagement with the arts can help develop a sense of empathy and understanding where others are coming from:

*'It makes you appreciate the stuff that makes composers think of a certain thing when they're composing a piece of music.' (M, 16)*

A project facilitator discussed how artists have to put themselves in other people's shoes:

*'When we work on characters we actually have to think like that character would think, they have to put themselves into other positions, maybe they have to develop more altruism, they have to be able to project their feelings into a character or vice versa.'*

One group of boys talked about the 'mockumentary' they made, which explored the stereotypes associated with red haired people and makes fun of these stereotypes. As some of the boys have red hair, the topic was close to the hearts of some of the members. The group had an opportunity to explore personal boundaries in a safe and supportive context. It allowed them to explore the thin line between 'just slagging' and being offensive and hurtful. On another level, through interviewing members of the public for the mockumentary, they learned how to negotiate and interact appropriately with people in different contexts and age groups, and also to consider ethical issues related to their topic such as accessing consent to be filmed from members of the public.'



## ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

One of the aims of youth arts projects is to develop the artistic and creative side of the young people. Research participants reported that involvement in the projects has developed their creativity, helped them understand the processes of creating art, developed their ability to reflect on and discuss art and finally, some reported that they see the world artistically.

### Developing creativity

When asked if they felt they were more creative since becoming involved in the project, over 90% agreed. Similarly, 85% stated that they created their own art outside of the project. One young girl talked about creating her own dances:

*'It's kind of good cause you get to do your own dance if you want and you can make one up over the weekend and the next Monday you can show it to everyone, and if they like it you can teach it to them.'* (F, 11)

One of the younger girls talked about how she liked the way she can make up her own pieces in groups or with a partner:

*'Like you make up stuff by yourself, and it's just really fun, it's relaxed too... like you don't have to do anything, you just do what you want really.'* (F, 11)

A young boy in another group talked about how he has learned to develop his own ideas:

*'We all make it up really, [the facilitator] gives us a few ideas and then we twist and twine them around and put them into our own kind of moves.'* (M, 11)

One girl described how she's visited 'new places inside of herself' which have brought out the creative side of her. Other young people talked about how they have



harnessed their creativity:

*'I think I was always creative as a child, but I think Young Filmmakers has more or less honed it, in a single direction, rather than just kind of a mad rambling imagination going everywhere.' (M, 17)*

*'I've come up with film ideas myself, and I've actually shot them, which I wouldn't have come up with before. You come up with different ideas and you work on them and they build up and everything and just, you feel more creative anyway.' (F, 16)*

A project facilitator talked about how even young people interested in the technical side of film learn to be creative:

*'Even the technical side is creative... we get a lot of really geeky, nerdy kids... but they have to appreciate that there's composition here, to make the shot look beautiful, to make every shot tell a story...'*

According to the project facilitators, the young people do not seem to take advantage of the creative freedom; rather they seem to thrive on it. The point was made in a number of focus groups that creativity and self-confidence are inter-related and that it is not possible to develop the one without the other.

## Understanding the process of creating art

Over 90% of the participants agreed that they understand art better since becoming involved with the project. One young person explains:

*'...when you start to do the technical side, when you're watching a film, automatically now I'm zoomed into it, it's totally different to watching a film a few years ago.' (F, 16)*

Young people were able to describe art pieces that moved them and appreciate the skills needed to create them, as was clear when this boy talked about a painting of a red square:

*'When you look closer, it's a blend of hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of shades of red, like the amount of precision needed to blend all those colours together to get something that looks like that, I can't figure out who'd do it...'* (M, 17)

*'First I used to think it was crap but now I appreciate how difficult it would be actually to make it as well, someone taking time to actually do that, and even just that they have a passion for it as well.' (F, 14)*

A project facilitator explained how they learn that creating art, a film or a theatre production for example, requires commitment and can often mean a lot of hard work:

*'When you have someone, who has this view that it's all glamorous, beautiful, golden, and then you get on set, and you realise this sucks...you need to understand how gritty, dirty filmmaking is, especially on the non-acting side of it. That's a great appreciation to learn, and if you still love it, then you know if you'll want to do it.'*

As some young people confirmed:

*'I always thought filmmaking, was you just stand in front of the camera, I didn't know there was so much effort you put into a film with all the scripts and that.' (M, 15)*

## Ability to reflect on and discuss art

Many young people (86%) agreed that they could talk about the arts now, which highlights their ability to appreciate and be critical about art. One girl said that they often talk about films, and may even have a heated debate.

*'I think I could have a meaningful discussion about art and filmmaking and what it means to people, and what I think...'* (F, 14)

A common feature of the interviews is that the young

people were reluctant to criticise art due to their growing understanding of the artistic process as can be seen by comments made by this girl:

*'Well I've always had opinions about things, but I don't know, I always think that you shouldn't really be critical of another art thing, cause if you don't know anything about it, like, cause I could say at another dance, like he's doing it wrong, you don't know if he's doing it wrong, and like, it doesn't really matter as long as you enjoy watching it and they enjoy doing it and...' (F, 14)*

Another girl argues that she has learned to be more discerning about films she sees:

*'Like if I saw a film before and I watched it and thought it was brilliant and then I watched it after a few months doing film makers, I'd say that's not good at all, that's terrible, what was I thinking, because it would have terrible camera, terrible everything, but you would think that it was good at the time because you didn't really know much about the arts.' (F, 14)*

One of the younger participants talked about how he is developing his aesthetic sense. He explained that he has 'the eye':

*'Like I can pick out what doesn't look good and what looks good and you can improve on something.' (M, 11)*

One girl talked about how actually doing a critics course helped her learn how to break a piece down, to consider the minutest details. She says:

*'There's just so much to look at, like you know, I'll never look at a performance in the same way again.' (F, 18)*

Another boy said he understands more about how to down a piece of music, even though he does not play a musical instrument:

*'I know it better, when it comes to music, most of the time I just listened to the words, but now I find myself listening to in between the words, to the music itself, to the beat, to the rhythm, I find myself listening out for the instruments themselves, it could be a drum, a guitar, a trumpet or an oboe...' (M, 15)*

Through involvement in creating art, young people learn how to become critical audience members. One project facilitator said that participants in the programme are able to talk about performances they've seen with "a level of maturity, you know, they've really observed, they've really sort of bothered to take a little bit of time to think about it."

## Seeing the world artistically

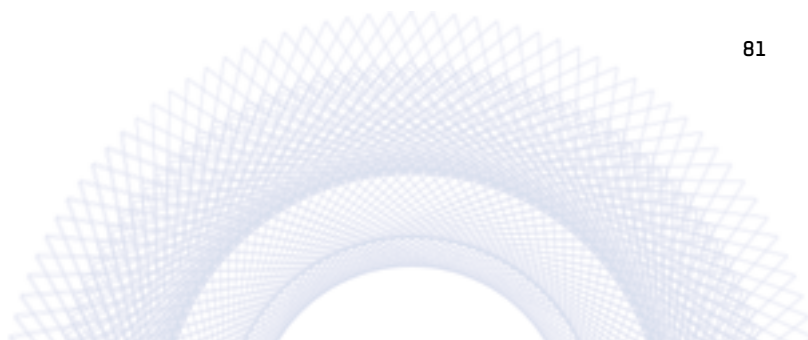
Another insight into the developing creativity of the young people is that they see the world more artistically, as one young person said 'there's a bit of your brain that's tuned into that the whole time' (F, 18). Another boy explains what he means:

*'I think I see the world more kind of artistically, kind of, I know if I was walking down the street I'd go, "how can I light that up or whatever?", or you're watching a film, I'd go "what would I do in this situation, or how would I portray that character?"' (M, 17)*

Another girl talks about how she has learned to find inspiration in mundane things:

*'I kind of like pick out little things that I wouldn't really notice before ...like you'd see inspiration in the things that you'd never find inspiration in before, I mean you'd never think that you'd find inspiration in a grey drab wall, but sometimes it just comes out so easily, how you could write something about a grey drab wall, and you could just go on and on about one thing and you would never be able to do that before.' (F, 14)*





Another girl feels that as well as giving her new sources of inspiration, it has helped her think in different ways:

*'I think that doing things like this, from watching other people and things being taught to you, it helps you think about things in different ways, and you get more ideas from just looking at things around you, I would never have thought of how something like putting on a shoe could be made into a whole dance... but now you can just think of one simple task and make it into a dance.' (F, 14)*

This section has reviewed some of the arts-based outcomes of arts education as framed by Eisner (1998). Such outcomes are directly related to the discourse unique to the arts including outcomes concerning performance. 'Seeing the world differently' is what Eisner describes as an arts-related outcome which relates to the perception and comprehension of aesthetic features in the general environment.

## COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Previous research has also attempted to show that arts participation supports cognitive development. In this section, some of the values related to cognitive development are reported which include

- New way of thinking
- Positive learning experiences
- New skills
- Impact on school work

### New way of thinking

The process of creating art can contribute to cognitive development of young people in a number of ways. Project facilitators and young people reported that it can improve memory, literary and linguistic development, and problem solving skills. Many of the young people talked about how doing arts has given

them a new perspective and has broadened their minds:

*'If you do arts, it kind of trains your frame of mind to look at things differently.' (M, 13)*

Arts participants are pushed to ask questions which only they can answer. Being able to think outside the box is helpful in the long-term perspective, as this project facilitator points out:

*'Even if you weren't to pursue a career in arts, it would help you in any job you are getting involved in, because I think it makes you think outside of the box, be open, flexible, and tolerant.'*

### Positive learning experiences

For some, participation in a project has given them a new interest in learning:

*'The last thing I want is just to leave the media world altogether after getting a good taste of it as well, yeah I just want more and more...'* (M, 15)

It has also broadened their concept of learning:

*'Learning things isn't really confined to what we do, like you could be waiting for your parents to pick you up and you get into a conversation with someone and you know, pick up something that you wouldn't have got somewhere else.'* (F, 16)

Most of the learning in the projects is informal, as one boy explained, 'it just sinks in without you knowing it, and then you realise you can do it'.

*'You know you know how to do it now, but you can't remember actually doing it... 'cause when we learned it, it was like a bit of a drag like, but after a week or something, everything's grand.'* (M, 15)

Some talked about how they understand more about how they learn best, for example, one boy talked about how he's realised that 'there's no chance in hell I can learn anything just sitting at a desk'.

## New skills

Almost all the young people (98%) agreed that they had learned new skills from participating in the projects. Project facilitators talked about how arts programmes provide a good learning environment:

*'To put on any kind of show, there's a thousand different skills and jobs needed, and because we don't have any resources to pay people to do the jobs, so therefore we have to use what we have and therefore people have lots of opportunities to learn, and it's a good starting off point for people to go wherever they want to go.'*

Young people who had been involved in putting on a production talked about how they learned to advertise and market the production, as well as the general skills needed to put on a production. Participation in arts projects provides young people with the opportunity to discover their hidden talents.

*'We know that it brings out new skills in young people and they discover things about themselves around leadership, they discover things around, you know, their abilities to do all sorts of things, not just in the arts.'*

This girl reported that an added bonus of being a member of Na Crosáin is that her Irish has improved:

*'It improves your Irish so much, spoken Irish, there's only so much you speak in the classroom, do you know what I mean... it's not the same as just being in a natural environment where it doesn't actually matter, you're able to say things wrong and no one cares, and it's expressing yourself through Irish, my Irish has improved so much.' (F,18)*

Participants in youth arts projects develop specific technical skills, especially as so many arts projects incorporate new media, young people develop digital literacy and competency with computers and digital

technology, which will be practically helpful in the future. This learning is quite thorough and almost goes unnoticed because the focus is on creation as opposed to development of technological knowledge.

## Impact on school work

Less than half (44%) of the young people agreed that participation in arts projects has helped their school work. Some said it did not help their schoolwork because if anything they may even get distracted:

*'You'd often find that you'd come up here after school and you'd often get detoured.' (F, 16)*

However, a number of young people said that as it has improved their lives overall, it has helped them become more motivated:

*'I do think it helps me with my school work in a way. I can't exactly explain how but something about it. On Mondays it makes me happy so I'm better at my work. For the rest of the week I'm looking forward to Mondays as well.' (F, 11)*

*'It's something that makes you happy, so if something makes you happy you have more energy to do other stuff.' (F, 17)*

*'Probably more motivated, but just happier in general I think.' (F, 17)*

Many stated that participation in the arts can help doing arts subjects in school like music, art history, art and for the dancers PE. One girl talked about how performing has helped her with debating, and it is likely that it has helped her express her opinions and participate more in class. One boy talked about how it has helped him write essays, making up plots and characters. Another boy described how he has become more interested in media, news coverage and journalism:

*'Being involved in the arts did help me cause it did really jump up my, arouse my perspective on*

*what the world is like, and being, and having that sort of perspective really helped me delve into my school work... if I know what's going on, then if I can understand that, I know that I can see how the world is changing.' (M, 15)*

One project facilitator who was in contact with a local school stated that the feedback from the school about the students who were involved in the arts project was tremendous, and that the young people had come on socially, and were participating much more in school. Another facilitator commented on how the young people learn discipline through participation in the projects. She described how some of the kids are very demanding but slowly they fall into the discipline which has repercussions on their daily life at home and school. One teacher said he can tell which boys are involved in the project because 'it just calms them'.

The values reported in this section refer to the cognitive development which is supported by participation in the arts. McCarthy *et al.* (2005) report cognitive growth as an intrinsic benefit which is primarily of value to the individual but has a valuable public spill over. Eisner (1998) identifies cognitive growth as an ancillary (or instrumental) outcome of arts participation as it is an outcome which may be achieved in many ways.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In this final section, how participation in the arts relates to community development as identified by research participants will be reviewed, including:

- Development of community spirit
- Challenges of community impact

### 1. Development of community spirit

Arts projects can contribute to the development of community spirit. The BMG/Crew boys all talked about doing interviews in the community for their

mockumentary, vox pops and things like that. They seemed to enjoy this very much and it gave them a sense of ownership of their community.

*'The activities we do help the community and help us to appreciate what is important in a community.' (M, 15)*

Arts projects encourage the development of collaborations between the organisations and schools, and other arts organisations etc. They may give parents an opportunity to meet each other and get involved in various aspects of the project. One project facilitator talked about the 'backstage team of mothers' who helped out in various ways. Also performances act as occasions for communities to come together.

Arts projects can facilitate the development of relationships between diverse groups of young people and challenge negative perceptions. Projects which integrate young people with disabilities provide a good learning experience for all the students. As one project facilitator stated:

*'I would say it is a good leveller, it's a good place where that isn't an issue, there is no issue when people are dancing together.'*





Some talked about how their perceptions of others were challenged through the projects:

*'When you're doing films, you don't care about if you're well off or what clothes you have, it's all about ideas you have, everyone just comes in equal.' (M, 15)*

Putting on performances are a good way of allowing the young people to show what they can do as well as providing a site for community entertainment. The material presented in a show can be enlightening. On two occasions WYA (Waterford Youth Arts) produced plays directed by foreign directors (Romania, Nigeria), which perhaps challenged negative cultural stereotypes.

*'At the time there were very few black people in the [town], and I'd say a lot of parents were scratching their heads at the idea that a guy from Nigeria was directing the show, and he went down a bomb, people loved him...'*

Another project facilitator talked about how their performances, talent shows etc. are often sold out.

*'There's a lot of pride and community spirit in this area':*

*'There's fantastic support from the local community when young people are performing.'*

## 2. Challenges of community impact

There are also certain challenges in relation to impacting on the community. One project facilitator also talked about how parents may have false perceptions of the organisation, especially as the young people spend so much time with the organisation.

*'When you have kids who are taking ownership of things, when you have 16 year olds who are directing films, feature films, I suppose on the outside it can come off very cocky, and where they're not really...'*

In relation to Na Crosáin, the audience reaction is often

'that was good and it was in Irish'.

*'The problem when you're working in Irish is that people find it hard to get over the fact that it's in Irish, that straight away becomes the barrier... they sometimes don't interact with the show and critique the piece at all.'*

For some projects, their location inhibits the impact they can have on the community. In some areas e.g. the Gaeltacht, there is a need for the physical infrastructure to promote the arts, like an arts centre catering for all the arts. This has led to some programmes developing outreaches. One young person used to fly over from the Aran Islands every week to come to the classes on Saturday, 'which is a huge commitment from his point of you, so we decided to go out and do as much as we can.'

These values are what McCarthy *et al.* (2005) describe as intrinsic benefits which are primarily of value to society as a whole which include the creation of social bonds, as can be seen in the young people's development of social awareness, and the expression of communal meaning, which is evident in their creation of art pieces which are relevant to their lives and interests. Young people also develop an expanded capacity for empathy through arts participation and their art pieces are entertaining and provide a focus for community spirit.

## SUMMARY

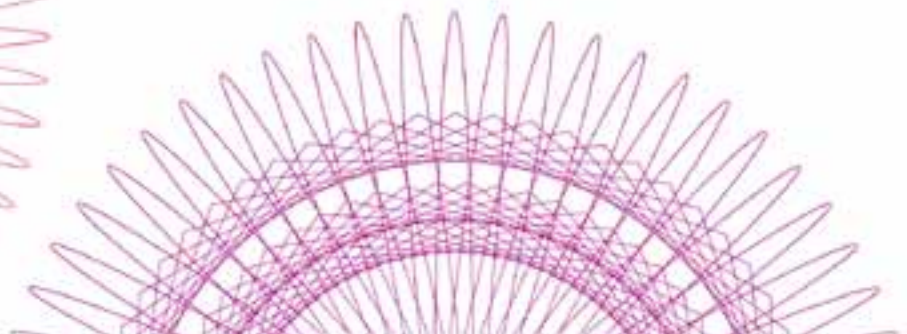
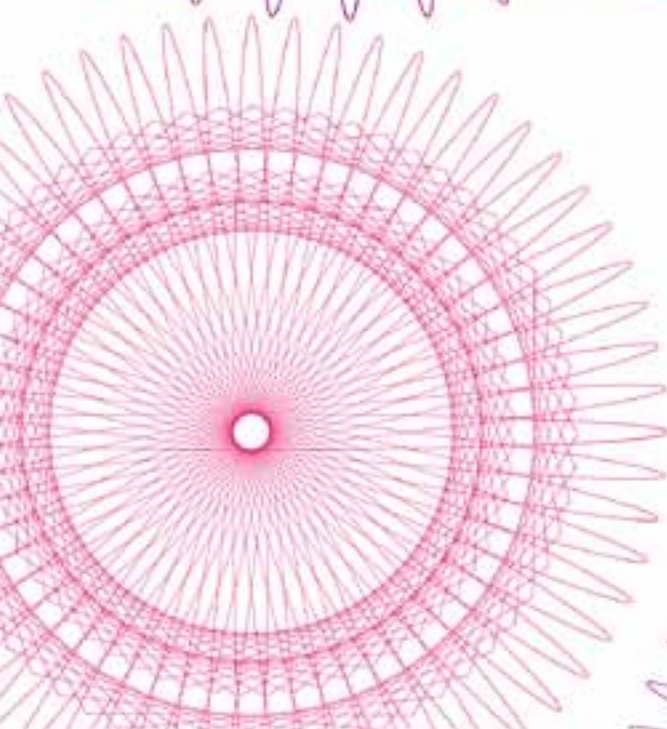
This section has reviewed the values of participating in the arts as identified by the young people and project facilitators who took part in the research study. The values were grouped into themes – quality of life, personal, artistic, cognitive and community development. It is clear from the quotes however that many of these values are interrelated and do not occur independently. This was pointed out by the young people who were reluctant to rank one value above the next.

There are many factors working together to make

participation in arts projects valuable. Positive and pleasurable artistic experiences promote positive self-esteem and positive social relationships. Some factors are intrinsic to participation in the arts projects such as the development of creative potential, the pleasure of art creation alone and with others, gaining an understanding of artistic process and the opportunities to pursue ideas and see them through to production. The young people in this study were very enthusiastic, excited and passionate when talking about their involvement in the projects which seemed to meet many of their needs. The projects are relevant in their eyes and facilitate meaningful experiences.



# 7. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS





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The aim of this study was to assess the value of participation in the arts to young people, and to demonstrate how participation in arts practice impacts on the individual and at a societal level. The study involved conducting indepth research with 62 young people (24 boys and 38 girls) between the ages of 10 and 18, involved in six youth arts projects or programmes nationwide. Surveys were filled in by 50 young people, 18 were individually interviewed and 32 participated in focus groups.

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The projects were selected on a number of criteria including diverse art forms and geographical location. Also, a sample was aimed for that reflected the views of young people from different social backgrounds. Case studies were developed on each of the six projects involved in the study. Two of the projects were based in statutory organisations focusing on community development (The Base and Avondhu Development Group Ltd); two were based in voluntary youth arts organisations (Young Irish Film Makers and Waterford Youth Arts); and two were based in professional arts organisations (Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe and the Model Arts and Niland Gallery).

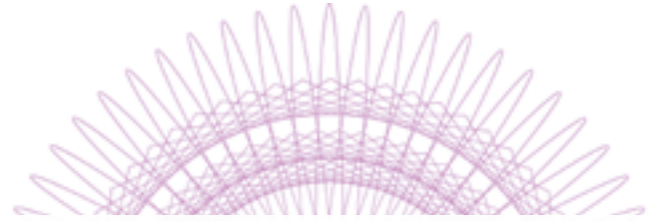
The youth arts sector has developed considerably over the last decade with an increasing focus on making the arts more accessible to young people, not only because they are conducive to enacting the general development of young people but because young people are entitled to quality arts experiences as citizens in their own rights. Young people also contribute in a unique way to the development and enrichment of the arts as

creators of art, critical audiences and participants in arts experiences. The arts sector is increasingly challenging views and assumptions about young people's relationship to the arts, and embracing young people as creators, participants, critics and consumers of the arts. This study aimed to contribute to a better understanding of young people's relationship to the arts. We will now summarise the findings and make some recommendations.

### Aims and goals of the projects

- Project co-ordinators and facilitators outlined a number of goals for the arts projects and programmes. The projects had two goals which were to simultaneously develop the young people and to develop their artistic potential. All of the projects were committed to fully integrating arts and youth work approaches and providing quality arts experiences through using good quality equipment and well trained arts facilitators.
- Various strategies were employed by the





organisations to make the projects accessible to young people and to maintain their continued participation through continually consulting with them and allowing them to shape the projects, and adapting the content of the projects to meet their needs and their changing lifestyles.

- Some projects had an educational focus and there was an aim to support the young people if they wanted to pursue an arts or media career by helping them build portfolios or getting accredited for their project work.
- Some co-ordinators spoke about the importance of developing a sustainable arts infrastructure in the locality in order for young people to access and engage with the arts.

### Background information about participants' arts participation

The majority of the young people (44%) found out about the project from their friends, a sizeable number (32%) found out through family and 20% accessed the project through school. Most of the young people in this study were between the ages of 13 and 15. Many had been involved in the arts for a number of years, which supports the view that involvement in the arts is more likely to be maintained if individuals are introduced to the arts when they are younger. Most had been involved in the programme for over a year which means that they maintained their involvement.

Young people got involved with the projects for a number of reasons. The most common reasons for getting involved cited in the survey was: 'wanting to learn it'; 'friends are in it', and 'meet new people'. Reasons why young people might not get involved in a project included a lack of interest and time; lack of information and opportunity; negative perceptions of the arts; and certain expectations and anxieties about what is involved.

It is apparent that the young people entertained numerous, multifaceted concepts of the term 'arts'. Notably, they did not differentiate between the high arts

and alternative arts. Many of the young people interviewed had a general interest in the arts and had been involved in arts since a young age and over half of those surveyed (64%) were involved in other arts activities.

Participation in projects seems to have a very positive impact on the young people's interest in purchasing arts products. Almost all (94%) of those surveyed had been to see a performance in the last six months. The most commonly attended performance was film followed by the theatre. Many of the participants (86%) had purchased or downloaded art products in the past six months.

### Value of participating in the arts

There are many factors working together to make participation in arts projects valuable. Positive and pleasurable artistic experiences promote positive self-esteem and



positive social relationships. Some factors are intrinsic to participation in the arts projects such as the development of creative potential, the pleasure of art creation alone and with others, gaining an understanding of artistic process and the opportunities to pursue ideas and see them through to production. The young people in this study were very enthusiastic, excited and passionate when talking about their involvement in the projects which seemed to meet many of their needs. The projects are relevant in their eyes and facilitate meaningful experiences.

This study did not highlight any distinctions between the experiences of those living in different geographical locations or socio-economic backgrounds. It appears that youth arts are of intrinsic value to all young people, and not only those living in disadvantaged areas. Neither did the study highlight any particular differences between the experiences of boys and girls. However, it was striking that the development of positive and meaningful relationships was just as evident for boys as for girls.

Some of the obvious benefits from different art forms were highlighted such as physical health for dance artists, observation skills for those involved with visual arts, and performance skills for those involved in staging performances. However, young people in the study highlighted common values from participating in all art forms. These were:

### **Quality of life**

- Comments made by the young people indicated that participation in arts projects has added to their quality of life. The main reason they got involved in the arts projects was because they wanted to learn how to create and experience the arts. Active engagement as participants, creators, appreciators and critics was important for them.
- In the model for understanding the intrinsic benefits of the arts put forward by McCarthy *et al* (2005), captivation and pleasure are two of the benefits which are primarily of private value to individuals. It

is clear that the young people in this study were fully engaged with the projects. They experienced a sense of captivation, passion, enthusiasm and pleasure from participating in the arts. It provided them with a new way of experiencing the world and was relevant to their current life circumstances.

- The majority (90%) of the young people agreed with the statement 'I feel happier in myself since joining this project'. Pleasure was related to simply enjoying the art form and the intrinsic pleasure of creating something, having fun with others and the experience of performing and entertaining others.
- Quality of life was enhanced by new interests and a sense of purpose. Most (88%) agreed with the statement 'I feel I belong'. For many the arts project was a consuming activity and an important part of life. Participants felt welcomed, accepted and part of the group.
- Involvement in projects allowed them to meet new people, develop friendships and relationships. Almost all (98%) agreed that they had made new friends. The projects provided a safe way for them to have new social encounters and to enrich their social network. Some talked about how working together in a project created 'a sense of togetherness' and 'a sense of trust'.
- Quality of life was also enhanced for young people as they were able to understand and make sense of the world and frame the world as an object of enjoyed perception, which is what Eisner (1998) identifies as a goal for arts education.

### **Personal development**

- Previous research has shown that participation in the arts contributes to personal development. Most of the young people (92%) agreed with the statement 'I have more self-confidence since joining this project'. Participation in the project has helped them tackle shyness and try new things. They learned to stand up for themselves and their ideas within the group.

- Many talked about how they developed a sense of empowerment through participation as they realise their contributions are valued. Many (86%) stated that participating in the arts project has helped them to express themselves better and find their voice. As art is about communicating, creating art literally allowed the young people to express themselves and their ideas through their creations.
- Participants talked about developing a sense of responsibility through participation in the projects, especially as they are allowed to own the creative process and product. They learned new ways of dealing with mistakes and that failure was a valuable part of the art making process. Young people also spoke about getting a sense of achievement and fulfilment through creating an art piece and seeing the process through.

### Emotional and social development

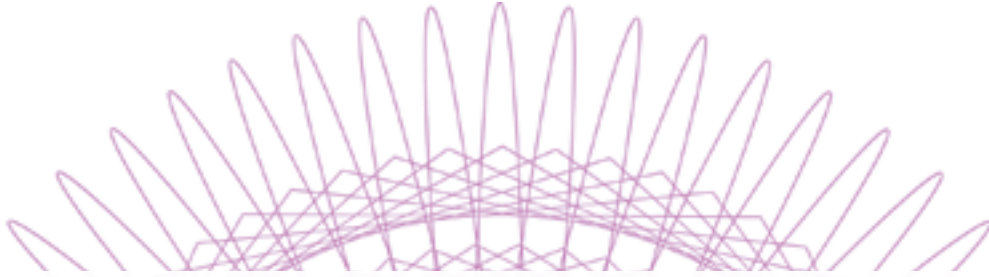
- The idea that arts participation contributes to emotional development and expression is nothing new. Young people in this study confirmed this as they described their experience of emotional expression through the arts. Many participants (83%) agreed that it helps them connect with their feelings and express them.
- Most of the young people (90%) agreed with the statement 'I've learned to work as a team.' Group and team skills learned included learning to co-operate, share responsibility and come up with ideas as a group.
- Research participants also identified that participation in the arts contributed to improved social awareness, especially as they often work with themes of interest to their age group such as bullying or teenage pregnancy. This encourages them to think deeply and critically about the issues. Working with these themes can also help them develop a sense of empathy towards others and an understanding of where others are coming from.
- These values are what McCarthy *et al* (2005) describe

as intrinsic benefits which are primarily of value to society as a whole. These include the creation of social bonds, as can be seen in the young people's development of social awareness, meaningful relationships, and co-operative skills. Young people also develop an expanded capacity for empathy through arts participation. The expression of communal meaning, which is evident in their creation of art pieces which are relevant to their lives and interests, is also of value to society.

### Artistic development

- One of the aims of youth arts projects is to develop the artistic and creative side of young people, which Eisner (1998) termed as 'arts based outcomes'. Such outcomes are directly related to the discourse unique to the arts including learning about the art form, styles, history, artists and particularly learning about





the process of creating art and seeing it through from beginning to end.

- Research participants reported that involvement in the projects has developed their creativity. The majority felt that they are more creative now and that they understand the processes of creating art better now. Through involvement in creating art, young people developed their ability to reflect on and discuss art. Many young people (86%) agreed that they could talk about the arts now, which highlights their ability to appreciate and be critical about art. Finally, some reported that they see the world artistically. They had an interest in challenging experiences and had an expectation of a high standard of artistic outcomes.

### **Cognitive development**

- Previous research has also attempted to show that arts participation supports cognitive development. McCarthy *et al* (2005) report cognitive growth as an intrinsic benefit which is primarily of value to the individual but has a valuable public spill over.
- Learning to create art provides an alternative, untraditional learning experience which facilitates the cognitive development of young people. In this study, some of the values related to cognitive development included the discovery of new ways of thinking and learning from a number of positive learning experiences. Young people talked about how participation in the arts has given them a new perspective and has broadened their minds.
- Almost all the young people (98%) agreed that they had learned new skills from participating in the projects. They learned specific technical skills related to computer and digital technology, as well as skills related to all aspects of putting on a production.
- Although one of the aims of the study was to explore the relationship between arts experiences in and out of school, young people had very little to say on this matter and seemed to separate the two experiences. Less than half (44%) of the young people agreed that

participation in arts projects has helped their school work. Despite this, a number of young people said that it has improved their lives overall, which has helped them become more motivated in school. It has also helped them in specific subjects.

- It was also evident that young people had developed an ability to process and think critically about their experiences of art creation. They had learned to think outside of the box, see mistakes as opportunities, and find resolutions to problems. Some of the young people also stated that they had learned to 'see the world differently'. These values are what Eisner (1998) describes as 'arts-related outcomes'.

### **Community development**

- Research participants identified that participation in the arts contributed to the development of community spirit. Arts projects can facilitate the development of relationships between diverse groups of young people and challenge negative perceptions and stereotypes. Young people's art pieces contribute to community development as they literally entertain the public and provide a focus for community spirit.

## **Recommendations**

### **Developing the link between formal and informal arts education**

Project facilitators stated that there is a lot of potential in developing the link between formal arts education and out-of-school youth arts projects and many of the organisations were either developing or co-ordinating projects with schools.

- Consideration should be given to how this link can be developed and best implemented.
- Funding and resources should be made available specifically for the development of this link.

### ***Continued development of arts education within formal education***

The young people in this study clearly benefit from participation in youth arts projects. For many, the projects provided the only comprehensive learning opportunity in the arts as they had limited access to arts education in school. This opportunity led to some young people to gain numerous skills.

- Consideration should be given to how the skills young people involved in youth arts projects develop can be formally recognised and accredited and contribute to the entrance requirements for further education.

### ***Enhancing the role of cultural institutions in meeting the needs of young people***

Two of the projects in this study were based in professional arts organisations, and are examples of how mainstream cultural institutions can meet their responsibilities of providing access to the arts for young people. Both organisations provide a space for the young people on their premises, and have developed ongoing programmes which cater to the needs of young people.

- Consideration should be given to how cultural institutions make a space for young people and cater specifically for their needs.

### ***Developing a sustainable arts infrastructure***

Some co-ordinators spoke about the importance of developing a sustainable arts infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, in order for young people to access and engage with the arts.

- Consideration should be given to where there is a need for a sustainable arts infrastructure and how such an infrastructure can be developed.

### ***Developing youth arts in the youth work sector***

In this study many values of participation in youth arts were outlined. These values were primarily identified by

young people participating in the research. They were very enthusiastic, excited and passionate when talking about their involvement in the projects which seemed to meet many of their needs. The projects are relevant in their eyes and facilitate meaningful experiences.

- All organisations in the youth work sector should consider how they can introduce arts into their programmes. Resources should be made available to meet this challenge in line with the goals of the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003 – 2007.
- Youth organisations should consider developing programmes which aim to specifically cater for certain age groups such as pre-schoolers, primary school children, and young people in their late teens.
- Youth organisations already incorporating arts in their programme should continually evaluate how they can improve the delivery of the arts projects by striving for the creation of quality art work, providing skilled arts facilitators and by using good equipment.
- In order to maintain a high standard of arts facilitation, funded training opportunities should be available for facilitators, including those working independently.
- One of the main findings of the study was that participation in arts projects contributes considerably to the general well being and quality of life of many young people. The specific role that youth arts participation can contribute to the health of young people and health promotion amongst young people should be further investigated.
- Youth arts facilitate young people to learn how to communicate in different ways, and experience other world views. Youth arts provide much potential for young people to enhance their social skills and develop social and cultural capital. The role that youth arts can play in the development of social inclusion and interculturalism should be further investigated.

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## YOUNG PEOPLE, CREATIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

# A report on the value of participation in the arts for young people

### **Photography Credits**

The Irish Association of Youth Orchestras

Kerry Diocesan Youth Service

The National Association for Youth Drama

Pan Intercultural Arts

The Vault, Carlow Youth Service

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix I.

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## ADULT WORKERS: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### About the organisation you work with

1. What does the organisation do?
2. How is it funded?
3. How is this project funded?
4. What sector does it belong to?
5. What programmes/projects does it provide?
6. Do you link in with any formal education projects (schools)?

### About the project or programme

7. What is the specific aim of the project?

8. What are the outcomes you expect for participants?
  - General
  - Arts based – e.g. appreciation of art form, competence in creating art form, competence in performance or dissemination of art form?
9. What age group is it geared towards?
10. Why have you decided to use arts?
11. Why have you decided to focus on this art form in particular?
12. What activities do you do?

### Accessing young people

13. How did you attract young people to this programme?
14. What helped or hinders young people getting involved?

15. What is the social background of the young people in the project? (class, rural, etc).
16. Who works/leads on the project?

### Participation in the arts

17. What is the value of arts participation to the young people you work with?
18. Does it improve their appreciation of the arts and ability to create arts?
19. Does it benefit them:
  - Personally (self-confidence, self-esteem)
  - Health (psychological, physical well-being)
  - Cognitively (problem solving, improving ability to think things through, improvement in school work)
  - Socially (more friends, better behaved, better at communication, open mind)
  - Creatively (new ideas, improved skills, new interests)
20. Do you think the young people you work with feel they benefit from participating in this project?

### Community impact

21. What other opportunities do young people in the locality get to experience the arts?
22. Do you think participation in youth arts impacts on the community?
23. Do youth arts contribute to combating social exclusion?

### Young persons interview schedule

- Explain about the research and the interview.
- Review consent process.

## GO THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRE WITH YOUNG PERSON EXPANDING ON CERTAIN SECTIONS, AS FOLLOWS:

### Involvement in arts activities

1. Are you interested in the arts in general? If so, when did you get interested in the arts? How did you get interested?
2. How do you participate in the arts?
3. Are your friends also interested? Are your family interested?
4. Are you involved in any other arts activities?
5. Do you do any arts in school?
6. Are there any other arts activities you would like to do if you had the opportunity?

### Specific focus on participation in this project

7. How did you find out about the project?
8. Why did you decide to get involved?
9. Do you like being involved in this project?
10. Did you know the other young people before you got involved?
11. Do you think you have enough say in how it is run?
12. Have you met up with young people in other projects?
13. Will you stay involved with this group?
14. If this is finishing, will you get involved in other projects?

15. Do you think you'll stay involved in the arts in the future?

### Value of participation in the arts

16. Has participating in this project changed you in any way? (Go through list on questionnaire)

### Focus on arts based outcomes

17. What was it like to create this piece?
18. Have you got a feel for what it's like to be an artist?
19. Have you got in touch with the arts through this project?
20. Would you like to create another piece?
21. Would you try it on your own?

### Community impact

22. Are there other opportunities for young people where you live to experience the arts?
23. If so, do you think it's impacted the community in any way? If not, do you think there should be?

## FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

### Introduction

- Introduce study and explain what will happen
- Review consent process
- Questions etc.
- Names and ice breaking exercise

### General

1. Do you know other people who are involved in the arts?

2. Why do you think people your age participate in the arts?

3. Why don't they participate in the arts?

4. Do you think it's a good thing for people your age to participate in the arts?

### Value of participating in the arts

5. Brainstorming exercise: What is the value of participating in the arts for young people? (Ask each participant to write down/ draw their ideas on pieces of paper)
6. Ranking exercise: What are the most/least important benefits of participating in the arts for young people? (Ask young people to rank their ideas from most to least important)

### Focus on arts based outcomes

7. What was it like to create this piece?
8. Have you got a feel for what it's like to be an artist?
9. Have you got in touch with the arts through this project?
10. Would you like to continue in this project, or another one like it?
11. Would you like to create another piece?
12. Would you try it on your own?

### Community impact

13. Has this project (or projects like it) had any impact on the local community?
14. What other opportunities are there in this area for young people to participate in the arts?

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## Appendix II.

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### WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE ARTS?

**The National Youth Arts Programme wants to find out what young people get out of doing arts activities.**

This questionnaire is giving you a chance to say what you think about doing arts activities. Do you think it's a good or bad thing? Do you think participating in the arts has changed you in anyway? On the next few pages, there are 22 questions for you to answer.

This is not a test. There are no right and wrong answers, so try to answer the questions as best you can. Your answers will not be shown to anyone else.

First of all we need some information about you.

What's your name? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a  Boy  Girl

What's your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

What age are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your interests? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been involved in this project? \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS PROJECT?

### 1. What arts activities do you do as part of this project?

Tick (  ) as many boxes as you need.

Art       Dance       Drama       Music       Writing       Digital Media       Other

If you answered other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. How did you find out about this project?

Friends       Family       School       Church       Newsletter       Flier       Other

If you answered other, please explain \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. What were the main reasons you got involved with this project?

Rank in order from 1 to 8.

Wanted to learn it \_\_\_\_\_

Nothing else to do \_\_\_\_\_

Friends are in it \_\_\_\_\_

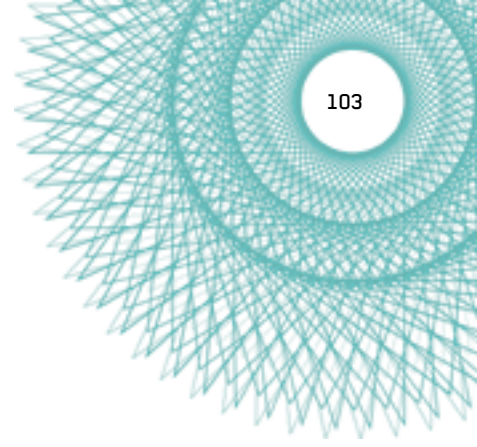
Did it before \_\_\_\_\_

Meet new people \_\_\_\_\_

Parents made me \_\_\_\_\_

I like the leader \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_



If you ranked other from 1 – 7, please give details.

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4. Do you like being involved in this group?

Yes

No

Please explain why or why not?

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5. Are you given a say in how the activities are run?

Yes

No

6. Would you like more of a say in how the activities are run?

Yes

No

7. Are you involved in leading activities?

Yes

No

8. Would you like to have more chances to lead activities?

Yes

No

9. Will you continue with this group?

Yes

No

10. Has taking part made you want to try something else?

Yes

No

11. What would you like to change about the group and why?

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## OTHER ARTS ACTIVITIES

12. Do you do any other arts activities outside of this project?  Yes  No

If yes, please explain

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13. Are there other arts activities that you would like to do if you got the chance  Yes  No

If yes, which ones?

---

14. Have you gone to see an arts performance in the last 6 months?  Yes  No

If yes, tick the boxes that apply

- |  |   |   |                                      |
|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music gig/concert | <input type="checkbox"/> Theatre, musical or a play | <input type="checkbox"/> Film in cinema | <input type="checkbox"/> Comedy show |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dance performance | <input type="checkbox"/> Art gallery or exhibition  | <input type="checkbox"/> Circus         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other       |

If you answered other, please explain

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15. Have you bought/downloaded arts in the last 6 months?  Yes  No

If yes, tick the boxes that apply

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music CD/DVD         | <input type="checkbox"/> Film DVD/video | <input type="checkbox"/> Books for pleasure | <input type="checkbox"/> Art e.g. pictures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music/Film magazines | <input type="checkbox"/> Other          |   |  |

If you answered other, please explain

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16. Do you join in on any arts-related online forums/chatrooms?

Yes

No

If you answered other, please give a brief description

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## HAS DOING ARTS CHANGED YOU IN ANY WAY?

17. Do you think being involved in the arts has changed you in any way?

Below is a list of statements, read each one and decide whether you agree or not.

If you **definitely agree**, put a circle around a

If you **agree a bit**, put a circle around b

If you **agree about half the time**, put a circle around c

If you **don't agree**, put a circle around d

If you **strongly disagree**, put a circle around e

---

1. I have more self-confidence	a	b	c	d	e
2. I understand art better now	a	b	c	d	e
3. I've learned to work as a team	a	b	c	d	e
4. I find school work easier	a	b	c	d	e
5. I feel healthier	a	b	c	d	e
6. I'm more willing to try new things	a	b	c	d	e
7. I don't think I'm any more creative now	a	b	c	d	e
8. I've visited new places	a	b	c	d	e
9. I find school work more difficult now	a	b	c	d	e
10. I see the world differently now	a	b	c	d	e

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. I don't get into as much trouble                | a | b | c | d | e |
| 12. I can talk about the arts now                   | a | b | c | d | e |
| 13. I'm interested in new things                    | a | b | c | d | e |
| 14. I feel I belong somewhere                       | a | b | c | d | e |
| 15. I don't feel good in myself                     | a | b | c | d | e |
| 16. I've learned new skills                         | a | b | c | d | e |
| 17. I've made new friends                           | a | b | c | d | e |
| 18. I can create my own art                         | a | b | c | d | e |
| 19. I have lost self confidence                     | a | b | c | d | e |
| 20. I feel happier in myself                        | a | b | c | d | e |
| 21. I can express myself better                     | a | b | c | d | e |
| 22. I feel like I don't belong                      | a | b | c | d | e |
| 23. I have lots of ideas now                        | a | b | c | d | e |
| 24. I am comfortable performing now                 | a | b | c | d | e |
| 25. I feel like people respect me more              | a | b | c | d | e |
| 26. I can express my feelings through this art form | a | b | c | d | e |



## FINALLY, SOME DETAILS ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!

18. Were you born in Ireland?  Yes  No

If not, please say where you were born?

---

19. Do you have a disability?  Yes  No

If so, can you please give details?

---

20. Who do you live with? Tick all that apply.

Mum  Dad  Brothers  Sisters  Carer  Other

If you answered other, please give details?

---

21. What do your parents/carers work at?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

22. How far did your parents go in education?

**Mum**  Primary  Secondary  University

**Dad**  Primary  Secondary  University

**THAT'S ALL.  
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!**



A series of horizontal dotted lines spanning the width of the page, intended for handwritten notes or comments.







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