



## **Arts for All**

**Response to the enquiry into  
Inclusion in the Arts of Working  
Class Communities**

# Evidence from Arts for All to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure For the Committee Enquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of Working Class Communities

## Preamble

Arts for All welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this enquiry. Arts for All believes the enquiry is crucial and will enhance important government policy such as the Programme for Government and Together Building a United Community.

Arts for All is situated in the heart of a disadvantaged community - Duncairn1 Super Output Area (SOA) - one of the top 20 Super Output Areas. In this SOA, 5.4% of the population is educated to degree level and 80.3% have no or a low level of qualifications. This makes the work Arts for All does necessary, challenging and complex. Arts for All promotes the use of the arts to tackle social exclusion and promote equality.

## 1. Arts for All

1. During 2013, Arts for All worked with 829 participants, 95 artists, over 50 community groups and ten schools. Participants and groups come exclusively from working class communities and/or marginalised groups. The Arts for All board is made up of members of the local community and community groups.

1.2 Arts for All (AfA) promotes, develops and encourages the arts within disadvantaged north Belfast communities. It has four aims to:

- Encourage and stimulate the artistic creativity of people from north Belfast
- Encourage appreciation of and participation in community arts
- Provide advice, training and information on the arts
- Promote and conduct research benefiting the arts

1.3 Aims are realised by providing arts workshops for community/youth groups, schools and partnerships across north Belfast and operating a Cultural Hub in a derelict, disadvantaged area. Arts for All programmes offer opportunities for participation in the arts - for people living in working class communities to create art. Arts for All runs the only community gallery in north Belfast - the *John Luke Gallery* - and the only one honouring the work of a local artist - John Luke - recognising and celebrating his life, his art work and his working class roots. The Cultural Hub houses one artist in residence, the only one in the vicinity and supports three north Belfast artists with space. The artist in residence delivers workshops with local groups, transferring skills to community workers and groups.

1.4 Arts for All delivers a wide range of short, medium and long term programmes including:

- A capacity building community arts training programme designed to build the capacity of local groups and working class north Belfast communities. Artists deliver short, medium and long term arts workshops with community and youth groups and schools
- The port and docks of Belfast: imagined through textiles: this is an intercultural and cross community project using drawing and textiles to explore life in port and dockside communities
- Edward Carson Summer School: this was a summer school consisting of history sessions; study visits including one to Dublin; writing workshops when the script *My*

*Duncairn Diary* was developed; photography workshops; drama workshops and four performances across the city of Belfast in the summer of 2013

1.5 North Belfast continues to be affected by sectarian tensions, as evidenced by the parades dispute in the area. Over the past year, the protestant community has been grappling with issues around history, identity and capacity. Arts for All projects provide a crucial space to explore these challenging issues within a safe environment through arts workshops and projects, study visits and lectures.

1.6 Arts for All programmes expose participants to fresh and/or different ideas, concepts and information. They directly and indirectly confront prejudice, sectarianism, racism, ignorance, mistaken ideas about people from different communities and stereotypes. They inform people about the past, recent and ancient history and models of reconciliation from across the globe.

Performance of *My Duncairn Diary* at Crumlin House Gaol: Photograph: Ephy McConnell



1.7 Almost all Arts for All programmes are free. Arts for All ensures that cost is not a barrier for north Belfast residents seeking opportunities to participate in the arts. In addition, Arts for All organises trips and study visits to cultural venues, ensuring that artistic activity within the organisation does not happen in isolation, but is part of a larger, coherent whole. Please refer to point 3.3 for details of visits to other cultural venues over the past year.

1.8 Arts for All has made a significant contribution to physical regeneration within north Belfast by developing public art projects which improve the physical appearance of the area. One such mural is painted on the side of the building, by recognised street artists Dermot McConaghy and Jonny McKerr, improving a very derelict part of north Belfast (pictured on the cover page of this document).

9. Arts for All creates opportunities for participation in the arts for participants and groups

from all backgrounds including children and young people, older people, people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, women, men and members of the GLBT community. Arts for All exists to deliver and promote the arts in working class areas of north Belfast.

1.11 Arts for All is funded by a cocktail of funders including

- Arts Council of Northern Ireland (core funding)
- Belfast City Council (core funding)
- Lloyds TSB (core funding)
- Department of Foreign Affairs (project funding)

## **2. Barriers to the arts for people living in working class communities**

2.1. Grayson Perry in last year's Reith lecture recognised and articulated class and prejudicial barriers

to participating in the arts. People from working class communities can feel alienated from mainstream arts organisations. Barriers to stop them engaging include cost. This has become more evident in recent years as the price of attending a performance has shot up to £25 in the Lyric and even more in a commercial venue such as the Grand Opera House.

2.2. Research carried out for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2003 found that: 'The

perception of major class issues in arts provision was a recurring theme. There was a strong conviction that many arts events and facilities were aimed at the 'upper classes' and arts such as ballet and opera were described as 'elite'.

2.3 Other barriers identified in this report include:

- ignorance about the existence of programmes and services
- an inability to make contact with providers, or other appropriate personnel
- the information about access arrangements being presented in inappropriate formats
- the location of facilities is unsuited to the needs of individuals or groups
- the costs involved inhibit access.

2.4 It is Arts for All's experience that additional poverty related barriers exist. Levels of disability are higher in working class communities and people living in working class communities experience poorer health and life expectancy than those living in more middle class areas. (Orr, 2008). These impact on the ability to attend events outside the home and/or community. The Dunlop Report in 2000 stated that '...North Belfast has some of the poorest health and social care indices in Northern Ireland, with high incidences of cancer, asthma, bronchitis and other diseases, partly because of the high level of deprivation and relatively poor housing'.

2.5 Arts for All has a deep understanding of the barriers people from working class communities face in accessing the arts and addresses this by providing arts activities in the heart of the community. Every single Arts for All activity aims to address barriers to accessing and participating in the arts.

2.6 Arts for All provides a crucial bridge between residents living in working class communities, in particular working class loyalist communities, community centres and mainstream arts venues.

## **3. Community arts as part of a wider arts sector**

3.1 Community arts has enormous value in a society which is emerging from major social and political upheaval. Community arts engages with communities which have a poor or non-existent arts structure. The impact of community arts has been widely researched. Research carried out by Arts for All in 2008 found that:

- 72% of participants indicated that they felt better or healthier
- 85% of participants reported increased levels of happiness

- 84% of participants reported increased levels of confidence
- 90% of participants indicated interest in taking part in new activities after participating in a community arts project

These outcomes are particularly important within working class communities.

3.2 Community arts is strongest if it is operating alongside a thriving arts sector, through a complementary relationship that benefits and inspires both community arts and the wider arts sector.

3.3 Over the past year, Arts for All organised visits to the following cultural venues which were positive and informative for the 119 participants involved. Most of the participants came from working class loyalist areas:

- Lyric Theatre (two productions - Lord Edward Carson Reflects and Weddins Wakes and Weans)
- War Memorial Gardens (Dublin)
- Phoenix Park Visitor's Centre (Dublin)
- The Mac (two visits - one to the art galleries and one to Meeting at Menin Gate)
- Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
- Launch of the 1913 Lockout Tapestry (Dublin)
- Exhibition of the Ros Tapestry (Dublin)
- NI War Memorial
- St. Anne's Cathedral
- Belfast Community Circus School

3.4 Arts for All believes the key to increasing participation in the arts within working class communities is in seriously investing in community arts organisations and investing in developing links between community arts organisations and the arts sector. As illustrated in section five, funding distribution patterns for exchequer funding of the arts are skewed towards mainstream arts organisations.

3.5 Mainstream arts organisations need to focus on what they do - eg produce theatre and community arts organisations need to focus on what they do - create access and opportunities for participation. The answer is not to force mainstream arts organisations to deliver in working class areas, but to support bridging work between community arts organisations and venues.

#### **4. Vision for the arts within Northern Ireland**

4.1 Arts for All's vision is of a vibrant, productive, well resourced arts sector with affordable arts activities for all citizens and community and mainstream arts sectors working closely beside each other to enhance and complement each others' provision.

#### **5. Recommendations for action**

5.1 Community arts needs to receive recognition for the work it does at a range of levels: social; economic; regeneration; peace building and capacity building. Community arts is particularly effective at working with socially and economically disadvantaged or marginalised groups. It has been used successfully as a tool of engagement for a wide range of communities facing many different issues.

5.2 There are two key issues regarding exchequer funding of the arts (as opposed to lottery funding)

- The per capita spend in Northern Ireland is lower than anywhere else in Ireland or the United Kingdom
- Historic funding patterns mean that a large proportion of a small pot is going to a small number of organisations, all based in Belfast, none based in working class communities and all attracting a demographic which is primarily from social classes A and B.

5.3 This situation needs to be addressed. Some years ago, the Invest in Inspiration campaign made inroads into the per capita spend as part of the government's Comprehensive Spend Review (CSR). This was successful in terms of increasing the proposed spend on the arts within the draft CSR. It did not, however, address distribution issues.

5.4 Distribution of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's core funding programme needs to be looked at. From my calculations, it would appear that £14,375,372 was awarded under the 2013-2014 Annual Funding Programme. Within this programme, the following awards were made:

- The Lyric Theatre: £1,018,500
- The MAC: £1,000,000
- Northern Ireland Opera: £521,569
- The Grand Opera House Trust: £594,610
- Ulster Orchestra Society Ltd: £2,031,966

This totals £5,166,645 - well over a third of the total budget, leaving under two thirds for the 107 other organisations on this programme.

5.5 As outlined above, Arts for All recognises that the arts require a healthy multi-format environment, supporting all types of arts provision. Arts for All supports the work of all the above organisations. However, a better funding balance is desperately needed if the amount of people from working class communities participating in and becoming audiences in the arts is to be significantly increased.

5.6 All groups are required to carry out the same monitoring and fundraising. A very small community arts organisation like Arts for All (two members of staff) has to complete, generally speaking, the same forms as a much larger organisation and to carry out the same monitoring. Small organisations would have access to larger amounts of funding if it was easier to apply and account for. The Arts for All co-ordinator currently spends at least two days every week on funding and monitoring rather than on programme delivery. This is an ineffective use of her time. Funding and monitoring need to be proportionate to the size of the organisation.

5.7 Arts for All recommends major and significant research into the impact of community arts. Arts for All carried out research into impact in 2008 which is becoming dated. Comedia carried out major research in 1998 - Vital Signs - Mapping Community Arts in Belfast which had important findings. Both the Arts for All research - Art works! Creative Community Development: Exploring the Role of Community Arts in Community Development and the Comedia research had similar findings around impact on participants and communities. It needs to be updated, revised and developed.

5.8 Arts for All recommends that inter-departmental arts policies and strategies are developed. Community arts, as evidenced in this paper, delivers benefits to all departments. It is hard for community arts groups to access funding from different departments, as policies are not in place in departments such as the Department for Social Development or the Department for Regional Development. Important benefits could be gained for these departments from delivering community arts activities.

5.9 The arts within working class communities need to be visible and high profile. This happens in places like west Belfast where the award winning Cultúrlann is based in one of the most deprived Super Output Areas, helping to regenerate a very disadvantaged community. Locally based arts provision is essential to promoting the arts in working class communities.

## 6. Conclusion

6.1. Serious investment in organisations based in working class areas will help to place artistic

and creative activity at the heart of working class communities. It will offer a framework of arts provision - offering artistic opportunities at community level as well as crucial opportunities for progression to mainstream arts venues. This would enhance the lives of people living in working class communities and improve access to the arts in those communities.

Belfast Lord Mayor Máirtín Ó Muilleoir launches Arts for All and ArtsFkta textile panel at Belfast City Hall

