



Creative Communities

Culture for Health and Wellbeing in Wirral

2019 Annual Report of the Director of Public Health



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Foreword

Our year as the Liverpool City Region Borough of Culture provides a great opportunity for Wirral residents to engage with cultural activities and experience something new. It is a chance to maximise the health and wellbeing benefits of culture for individuals and communities through creative discovery and the exploring the world around us. I am proud and privileged therefore to share this year's Director of Public Health Annual Report. It provides a strong evidence base for culture as a means to improving health and wellbeing, presents local examples of these benefits and calls for everyone in Wirral to be part of a Borough of Culture legacy that leaves us happier and healthier.

Regardless of the many individual ways in which we experience culture, it helps us to connect better to each other, enjoy and cope with life's everyday challenges. There is strong evidence that arts and culture help to keep us well, recover from illness and support longer, better lives. Our case studies show how such initiatives improve health and wellbeing outcomes and are cost effective. This provides fresh thinking for health and care systems. However the benefits of investment in cultural activities for health and wellbeing are still not widely recognised.

This report has three key recommendations which aim to optimise the amazing work happening across Wirral and identify new opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through cultural activities.

In producing this report, I'm grateful to local people who have shared their experiences and for the energy and commitment of all those who have supported its development; in particular more than 1,000 residents who participated in the Sofa Sessions, interacting with culture and creativity, to talk about health and wellbeing. I hope that this report inspires and energises individuals and encourages increased collaboration between different disciplines and organisations. Wirral's year of culture has been an amazing journey, showing off the creative and natural assets of our beautiful borough. By working together, we can create wonderful memories and a long lasting, positive impact on health and wellbeing.



Julie Webster
Acting Director for Health and Wellbeing

Introduction

Wirral's year as Borough of Culture has provided some unforgettable and spectacular arts and sporting events for locals and visitors to experience. In 2019, culture has brought communities together and provided opportunities for people of all ages to experience arts and creativity in lots of different ways. Happiness and pride are the words that people have used to describe their experience at these events – events that have provided a chance people to share and celebrate together. These feelings are important indicators of our wellbeing, contributing to good health and reducing isolation.

Engaging with cultural activities – regardless of how we do it – is good for everyone. It helps people to recover from illness, both physical and mental, and protects against it; preventing ill health and keeping us well no matter how young or old we are.

“The creative impulse is fundamental to the experience of being human”¹

We must do things differently to ensure that health and care services are resilient now and in the future. This means focusing on keeping people well. Cultural experiences can provide ways to wellbeing where other interventions don't quite reach. They can enrich our lives as individuals, helping us to better understand our place in the world. The case studies in this report are prime examples of how culture and creativity, often in conjunction with clinical methods of support, could be the logical next step in the journey toward a more well Wirral.


The Wirral Culture Strategy, which underpins the Wirral Plan 2015 – 2020, contains four priorities, one of which is focused on promoting the educational, social and wellbeing benefits of arts and culture, while also recognising the social impact within our communities. Whilst the role of cultural activities on health is increasingly understood, globally, we have yet to fully maximise these opportunities in health and care. This

report looks at the current knowledge of ‘what works’ to improve health through arts and cultural activities, the experiences of local people interacting with culture and its impact upon them and finally makes recommendations about how we can all utilise cultural activities to improve health and wellbeing.



“The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls”
Pablo Picasso

1. Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, 2017. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing. Inquiry Report



“The effect in sickness of beautiful objects, of variety of objects, and especially of brilliance of colours is hardly at all appreciated. People say the effect is on the mind. It is no such thing. The effect is on the body, too. Little as we know about the way in which we are offered by form, colour, by light, we do know this, that they have a physical effect. Variety of form and brilliance of colour in the objects presented to patients are actual means of recovery.”

Florence Nightingale, Notes on Nursing, 1859

The Impact of Culture

Globally, there is increasing understanding and recognition of the impact that culture can have on the health and wellbeing of individuals and in turn, their communities.

“More and more people now appreciate that arts and culture can play a valuable part in helping tackle some of the most challenging social and health conditions. Active participation in the visual and performing arts, music and dance can help people facing a lonely old age, depression or mental illness; it can help maintain levels of independence and curiosity and, let’s not forget, it can bring great joy and so improve the quality of life for those engaged”
Lord Richards of Nailsworth, 2016

As part of the development of this report a review of the impact that culture can have on health and wellbeing found that:

“Wonder is the beginning of wisdom”

Socrates

1. Wirral Intelligence Service (2019)
The impact of art and culture on health and wellbeing – a literature review. May 2019.

1. Evidence for the positive impact of arts and cultural activities on health at every stage of life has grown considerably in recent years. The evidence base is now extensive and not only identifies those activities which are beneficial, but often indicates the scale of these health improvements.

2. Overall, there appears to be both more - and slightly higher quality - evidence for the positive impacts of participative singing, music, dance and literature (reading and story-telling) on health and wellbeing.

3. Although a large body of literature focuses on mental health (primarily anxiety and depression), positive impacts have also been noted on a range of physical conditions and social factors such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis, blood pressure and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), dementia, falls, hospital admissions and length of stay, GP consultations, medication levels, child development, anti-social behaviour, attainment at school and in preventing and postponing frailty.

4. The challenge inherent in many arts and cultural interventions is that they do not easily lend themselves to showing quantifiable improvements (especially in people approaching the end of life for example). Absence of (quantifiable) evidence, is not however evidence of absence.

5. Future arts and cultural activities organised locally here in Wirral should aim to add to the growing evidence base for this type of intervention by conducting robust evaluation. Evaluation should include quantifiable improvements alongside more qualitative information in order to better inform commissioners.

“When I look back, I am so impressed with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young.” Maya Angelou

Culture in Action

Here we showcase some of the rich and varied work that local people, involved in arts and cultural activities, are doing across Wirral.

The Open Door Centre

The Open Door Centre is a Birkenhead based charity providing creative and therapeutic opportunities to young people accessing mental health support. Through music and technology, training and volunteering, the centre helps young people confront their stress, anxiety and depression, supporting them to develop effective ways to deal with these feelings.

Having a team of volunteer mentors has been an integral part of the service delivery. It has also helped the charity promote the ideas of valued lived experience, compassion, informality and empathy to support people to overcome emotional challenges.

Promoting good mental health is at the heart of what the charity does but it also sees its role to upskill and provide opportunities for local people to gain experience whilst improving their career and academic prospects. It is often difficult for people to gain practical experience in mental health roles and that is something the charity wanted to change. It was apparent that so many fantastic individuals were drawn to the sector for all the right reasons such as personal lived experience and wanting to help others. The charity is pleased it can offer training and practical opportunities to these individuals, but it also means that as an organisation with currently 35 volunteer mentors, they can adequately support a large number of people in a timely and cost-effective way – and with impressive outcomes. Members who work with the charity like the fact that they are supported by a mentor through an 8-week Cognitive Behavioural

Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness-based intervention, called Bazaar. The majority of mentors are young adults (early 20's), dress casually and if you walked into the centre, you would not necessarily know who the mentor or member is. This helps break down the barriers and formalities that drive a lot of the stigma young people feel about mental health care. It is also common for a member to complete support with the charity and further down the line find themselves completing training and becoming mentors themselves.



Volunteer mentors



The centre's 'Bazaar – A Marketplace for the Mind' programme delivers one-to-one cognitive behavioural therapy sessions inside cosy therapy spaces (or, sheds).

With nine in total, the spaces are used by members working alongside a mentor during this 8 week course to improve their mental health.

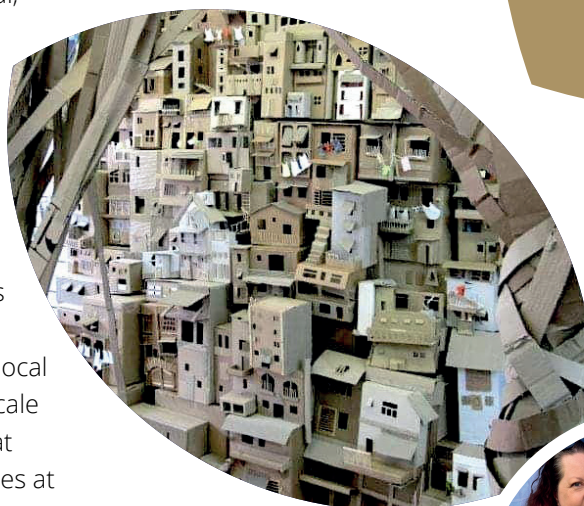
"I am forever grateful for the sessions I took part in at the Open Door Centre. The staff are so attentive and compassionate and really reassured me when I first arrived, which was very difficult for me. From then on I knew I was in safe hands and found the distraction techniques, mindfulness, Thought Bully and thought tracking really useful and these are tools that I intend to use for life."



The Williamson Art Gallery & Museum

The Williamson Art Gallery, based in Oxton, provides space to display masterpieces, ceramics, and sculptures. Housing the largest public collection of Della Robbia pottery in the UK and home to some internationally important paintings, exhibitions at the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum are always free. They also welcome educational, party and group visits. Pamela Sullivan is a freelance artist working at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. Teaching adult art classes in drawing, painting and printmaking, she works with vulnerable young people and families from a range of diverse backgrounds. Outside of the gallery setting she works in the wider Wirral community. Her work involves the re use and up cycling of found materials including plastics, paper and cardboard. With local communities in Wirral she has created large scale cardboard trees and 'city scapes' for projects at the New Ferry Butterfly Park as well as 80ft trees at the Bombed Out Church in Liverpool for the 2012 Biennial Arts Festival.

Being part of these projects, whether through simply creating a drawing or painting, has proven vitally important for the health and wellbeing of those communities involved. The Williamson provides a local hub where people from different backgrounds including those who feel isolated or excluded, can come together to participate in and enjoy the arts. Pamela's work as an artist in this space helps to deliver wellbeing outcomes ranging from alleviating anxiety to developing confidence and resilience.



*Pamela Sullivan
and the Cityscape
exhibition*



*Bidston Observatory
Time and Tide exhibition*



Cardboard Trees exhibition



Wirral Eco Schools Plastics Project

“Attending the art class at the Williamson Art Gallery was a life saver for me and helped me through a very difficult time. I had no self confidence to start with so went with a friend. The benefits have been two fold, my confidence has grown and my self esteem has returned all of this as well as acquiring new skills and having a safe place to experiment with painting and drawing. The course has got me through cancer and the long draining illness that finally took my mum last year. The art class allowed me to escape into my imagination, having two hours just for me was a life saver.”

Combining the promotion of health with celebrating arts, culture and heritage is at the heart of many of Age UK Wirral's projects. The Great Wirral Conversations have brought together people from different generations in events that have explored topics as diverse as motherhood, (through bringing together 'experienced' ladies with new mothers), and life in the forces, (by linking Wirral's veterans with local secondary school history students).

Health promotion projects such as Joining Forces, a Ministry of Defence funded initiative supporting local older veterans, and the Men's Project at Maritime Park, supporting health promotion and tackling the social isolation of former seafarers, have used Wirral's rich military and maritime heritage, and the range of stunning resources that the Borough has to offer. Utilising some of Wirral's finest assets, including Lady Lever and Williamson Art Galleries, as a catalyst for bringing people together Age UK Wirral have fostered new friendships, diverse connections and created shared memories.

Celebration of arts, culture and heritage is also core to the organisation's cognitive stimulation therapy work with people living with dementia. Members of Devonshire Days have been involved in a collaborative arts project that culminated in their work being displayed at a local art gallery, which was a massive boost to the confidence of all involved. Reminder Finders, the organisation's group for people in the earlier stages of dementia, uses physical and online resources to stimulate reminiscence sessions by recalling changes in art, sport, music and local history over the generations.

Extending access to art and sport in its many forms is a powerful medium for tackling isolation and loneliness locally. The organisation's Health & Activity Department facilitates more than 60 different classes and activities a week, ranging from walking and cycling groups taking advantage of Wirral's rich outdoor spaces through to building-based classes including anything from Yoga, Zumba, creative writing through to playing the ukulele! A recent project saw one of the groups redecorate and restore the organisation's very own Superlambanana, which now has pride of place in the courtyard at Age UK Wirral's Care Home for people with dementia.

"Celebration of arts, culture and heritage is core to the organisation's cognitive stimulation therapy work."





Age UK Wirral's very own Superlambanana



Age UK photography exhibition



*The Great Wirral Conversations:
Bringing together intergenerational
groups*

Borough of Culture Animated Square

In March 2019, Birkenhead Town Hall came alive for Animated Square, the first spectacular event of Wirral's year as Borough of Culture. The Grade II listed building was transformed into the canvas for a large-scale projected light show.

Focus in the build-up to the light show was on some inspiring musical performances by four Wirral-based choir groups. The groups included school children from the local area, as well as adults of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

Curated on a non-audition basis, groups were accessible to anyone who had an interest in being part of the event. One of the groups, RiverSign, was a signing choir made up of adults across Merseyside who sign songs whilst performing and cater to audience members who are deaf, or hard of hearing.

RiverSign being part of the event promoted inclusivity in music, irrespective of barriers to performing such as disabilities, deafness, being hard of hearing and learning difficulties. Rehearsal and performance spaces reflected this, offering adequate provision for those with mobility restrictions to enable them to take part with ease.

The legacy from the choir performances lies in the memories and career pathways of local children, as well as increased engagement and collaboration across local choirs, with RiverSign in particular reflecting their enjoyment of being part of a 'live' performance. They were able to work with other community groups during rehearsals and are looking to develop these relationships further to help raise their profile in the local area.



The Wilfred Owen Choir and The Luminelles were made up of 44 students between the ages of 11-18. The performance was an empowering and educational opportunity to take part in a heritage-focused cultural event which told the story and celebrated the history of where they live.



“A member of our choir said someone approached her after the performance in tears to say the whole performance was so emotional. It doesn’t get better than that.”

Pete Martin,
Director RiverSign Choir

Above: Illuminated in 3D onto the building itself, the display was inspired by the history of Birkenhead, attracting thousands for the second consecutive year.

Below: Members of Riversign performing at Animated Square.



The Sofa Sessions

To inform this report we also spent time listening to the stories and experiences of local residents. Throughout August 2019 an immersive community arts project, known as 'The Sofa Sessions', travelled across the borough inviting residents to rest, relax and discuss how their life has been influenced by culture whilst also taking part in various creative activities.

Inspired by the Borough of Culture's Radio Local events in Liscard, which delivered innovative engagement with the local community through culture, more than 1000 people interacted with the travelling arts piece, supported by Involve North West and local artists, leaving their mark on it at events across Wirral including:

- Ilchester Family Fun Day in North Birkenhead
- Wirral Evolutions' Health & Wellbeing Art Project in Eastham
- Bee Wirral's Annual Family Fun Day in Birkenhead
- Beechwood Festival Day (Beechwood Estate)
- Mencap's One Wirral Festival in Birkenhead Park
- Carrbridge Centre, Woodchurch
- Summer Park Event, The Walled Garden in Central Park, Wallasey
- Building Bridges Family Fun Day, Birkenhead
- Summer Activities session at West Kirby Library
- Drop-in art event at The Barn, Pye Road in Heswall
- Family Drop-In at Williamson Art Gallery, Oxton



*The Wellbeing Tree tapestry;
The Sofa designed by Pam Sullivan;
Members from Wirral Evolutions' day
centre in Eastham taking part in
the Sofa Sessions*

Each 'Sofa Session' was attended by Community Connectors from Involve North West who were available to assist any residents looking for support; providing information about local services available to them in Wirral.

The work, which also included a large-scale tapestry known as 'The Wellbeing Tree', produced by local residents through 'The Sofa Sessions' will be displayed in various places across Wirral including the Williamson Art Gallery and Birkenhead Central Library.

Artist Pam Sullivan with The Wellbeing Tree tapestry



"When I'm drawing I don't think about the negative things in life."



Sessions offered people the chance to rest, relax and discuss how their lives had been influenced by culture

"Reading and sewing makes me happy."



Youngsters getting creative at the Sofa Sessions

1

Seek out opportunities in our lives and communities for arts and culture – to help to keep us well and live longer, better lives.

- Building on existing networks, bring together stakeholders from the arts and health and care sectors to support the delivery of health and wellbeing through arts and culture. For partners this should focus on disseminating good practice, co-ordinating funding opportunities and informing policy and commissioning.
- Improve awareness of the benefits that arts and culture can bring to health and wellbeing through the workforce, with current patients and with other local people.
- Promote a Wirral wide focus on 'wellness', working with people before they become sick or develop illness in the first place by developing a positive relationship with arts and culture.
- Encourage residents to reimagine new kinds of connected communities in order to develop their own strengths and abilities so they can live independent and fulfilling lives.



The Sofa Sessions (above) took inspiration from Radio Local, a one-off live hyperlocal radio station that was built around Wirral's people and places as part of Borough of Culture.

2

Ensure that the legacy of Wirral's Borough of Culture year contributes to the development of a healthy and health-creating borough.



- The review of the Wirral Culture Strategy provides an opportunity to recognise the success achieved over the last five years whilst looking at new ways to improve outcomes. The recommendations contained within this report should inform the development of the refreshed Wirral Culture Strategy.
- Explore the development of a local cultural legacy programme to mobilise action in local communities and advocate for health through arts and culture.
- Incorporate arts and culture into the Healthy Wirral Plan, seeking opportunities to leverage change.
- Building on methodologies which have been developed to evaluate the Borough of Culture, foster a common approach to research into the potential of culture to tackle some of the deep-rooted and complex challenges in Wirral.
- Following the successful Borough of Culture volunteering programme, support volunteers who want to progress to further volunteering or employment. This will ensure that their enthusiasm, skills and expertise can be used to encourage volunteering activity and build capacity in the borough's voluntary, community and faith sector.



The Witching Hour performances, live in Birkenhead Park with arts company Periplus. Birkenhead Town Hall's Animated Square illuminations.

3

Secure a commitment from health partners to work with arts and cultural organisations to ensure that culture for health and wellbeing becomes integral to organisational, and commissioning strategies.

*Community Connectors from
Involve Northwest*



- Healthy Wirral partners should seize any opportunity to spread messages that encourage public engagement in the creative arts as a route to achieving health and wellbeing goals.
- Health and care partners review the evidence as to the efficacy of the arts and culture in benefiting health and integrate this into local plans, pathway redesign and asset development where appropriate.
- Commissioners should give consideration as to how the Public Services (Social Value) Act can secure cultural benefits, e.g. public art or community cultural investment funds.
- Cultural participation forms a vital part of social prescribing. Wirral Health and Care Commissioners should ensure that arts and culture is part of the developing social prescribing offer.
- Establish a network of partners to support the delivery of the recommendations included within this report.

Give us your feedback

Let me know what you think of this report.

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