

The Arts and Mental Health: Creativity and Inclusion



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Introduction

This brief report documents some findings from an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research project (RES-000-27-0043) on the outcomes of arts work for participants of community arts projects that are specifically geared towards people with mental health problems. It draws on qualitative research conducted during 2004 and 2005 with 'Art Angel', Dundee and Project Ability's 'Trongate Studios', Glasgow.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff and artists of Art Angel, Dundee and the Trongate Studios, Glasgow for their generous assistance in conducting this research project.

Executive Summary

In summary, participation in Art Angel and the Project Ability's Trongate Studios has a range of largely positive impacts on the people with mental health problems that use these projects. Using evidence from their narrated experiences these can be summarised as follows:

The experience of arts for mental health is reported to have facilitated

- Increased self-understanding
- Prompted self esteem
- Facilitated self-directed therapeutic processes
- Opportunities for self-evaluation
- Feelings of stability
- Positive 'ripple effects' to friends and family
- Improved communications skills
- Involved challenges and difficulties
- Increased senses of resilience

The experience of arts project participation is reported to have facilitated:

- Structure and regular routines
- Social and emotional capital
- Progressive participation in a range of activities
- Incremental skills development
- Training opportunities
- Learning opportunities
- Fears about sustainable funding and associated social support
- Artistic development

The experience of community lives beyond (but related to) arts project is reported to have involved

- Cross-community networking
- Opportunities for travel, research, planning and managing projects
- Exhibiting in mainstream cultural venues
- Building different community identities and status through the arts
- Building different senses of place and belonging in community and cultural networks
- Partial self-identification as artists

The experience of visioning a future within and beyond arts projects is reported to have involved:

- Moving on to other projects and community roles
- Returning to paid work
- Engaging in educational and work training activities
- Taking on new responsibilities and roles within the organisation
- Creating distance from previously isolated social positions

In terms of the reported benefits for the participating artists the two organisations can be seen to be facilitating important changes and benefits that are orientated around both social and artistic development, and this clearly links with multi-agency agendas for social inclusion.

Section 1: Aims and objectives of research

Academic context

This work is part of a larger funded research programme [ESRC RES-000-27-0043] about mental health and social inclusion and concerns how people with mental health problems experience psychological and social stability through participating in different kinds of spaces. The spaces under investigation are categorised as natural, artistic and technological. What this means in practice is that the research programme evaluates examples of innovative community programmes and projects that facilitate the participation of people with mental health problems in (i) gardening activities, (ii) arts work and (iii) the use of the internet for social support.

The research programme is primarily academic in orientation, however, the research conducted as part of this programme *also* has implications for users of service, practitioners and policy makers. As such the results are being made available in easily accessible formats in terms of printed reports, a web-site with further information and data (<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geography/inclusion/>) and a short video film '*Recovering Lives: mental health, gardening and the arts*' (made by LUNA and distributed by the Scottish Executive's National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being in Scotland).

Objectives and research questions

This study set out to investigate the relationship between community arts activities and people with severe and enduring mental health problems in terms of the following overall questions:

- What do project participants feel about the arts in terms of its implications for their mental health?
- What are the key outcomes of arts work for project participants?
- How does working with the arts help to achieve social inclusion and stability for people who access the projects?
- What future changes might benefit the projects and their participants?

The research reported here was not intended as an overall evaluation or full social audit of Art Angel or the Trongate Studios in terms of their organisation, funding and management, but rather, it primarily sought to engage the views of project participants (referred to as artists¹) about what were the key outcomes for them in social and psychological terms.

This research was also directed primarily by more academic questions about human selves and identities in everyday social life and spaces, although only the more user and policy friendly findings are reported here (but see Parr, forthcoming 2006).

Methods

Ethical permission from *The Tayside Committee on Medical Research Ethics* was attained in January 2004. In February 2004, 7 artists were interviewed with Art Angel. These 7 interviews were repeated in February 2005 in order to introduce a sense of comparison over time, and a further 6 interviews were undertaken with other staff and project participants in March 2005. During February and March 2005 20 interviews were carried out with staff and artists from the Trongate Studios. In all 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken as part of the research with the two organisations.

In both projects the artists come from a variety of class backgrounds, although are predominantly working class and of white British origin. As in many community projects orientated around mental health issues, the numbers of women were smaller than that of men (8 out of 35 artist interviews were with women)², and participants were referred to the projects from a range of access points (including GPs, community psychiatric nurses, psychiatrists, hospital wards, outreach project work and friendship networks). In both projects participants had a mix of arts related experience ranging from none at all to degree-level training in fine art. Neither project requires that

¹ It should be noted that not all project participants would self-identify as 'artists'. However, in recognition that some may also not want to be categorised as 'users' or 'clients', this report uses this category to represent the people who contributed to the research. The implications of art project participation for social identity is addressed in the main body of the report.

² Although there is little research on this phenomenon, it is often suggested by practitioners that women's domestic responsibilities do not always disappear even when experiencing serious mental health problems, and so women simply have less available time and resources to attend community projects, particularly ones that are located in city centres, and away from schools and childcare. This contributes to their multiple disadvantage.

participants have experience or training, and both hold outreach workshops and operate phased introductory access to artwork and group workshops. Of the 35 interviews with artists as part of this project 5 had formal training, although most others professed a long-standing interest in visual art (predominantly), writing or performance, which for some began in hospital settings. They are hence a self-selecting group to some degree, and this may have implications for the ways in which the outcomes of art work are experienced.

Ethnographic (participant observation) work has also contributed to the research design, with a collaborative film-making project forming the main basis of this activity in association with LUNA and Art Angel. The semi-structured interviews have been transcribed and analysed for key findings and themes using the NVivo software data management package.

Semi-structured interview schedules were used and these covered a variety of relevant themes such as:

- History of project attendance
- Initial and changing expectations of arts projects
- Outcomes of arts work
- Reflections on therapeutic aspects of arts work
- Reflections on the social and practical skills gained as a result of art work
- Reflections on questions of identity and inclusion
- Future prospects and visions

However, key themes were also *emergent* in interviews and thus responsive to the concerns of the project participants. Interviews were between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours long, and all but two were taped and carried out on-site at the Art Angel project in Dundee and the Trongate Studios in Glasgow.

It is noted that interviewees are *not identifiable* from quotations and false initials have been used to distinguish individual contributions. No interview materials from project staff are included in this report. Permission to reproduce photographs of artists was attained.

Section 2: Context: Art and mental health

Outsider Art and mental health

Briefly, it should be noted that there is a specific history of the relationship between mental health and illness and art and this famously lies in the category of what is known as 'outsider art' or 'art brut' (Rhodes, 2000). In this typology artist outsiders are, by definition, different to their audience and are often thought of as being dysfunctional in respect of the parameters set by the dominant culture. In the case of mental health, outsider art and artists were often located and identified in the context of institutions, and indeed, psychiatric patients are a key group at the heart of early definitions of outsider art. 'Insane art', as it is also known, is primarily a 20th century phenomenon, although artistic expression by patients did exist before that, but was often thought to be valueless beyond its selective use for clinical teaching. The early collectors of insane art were psychiatrists themselves, with some using work to illustrate different forms of pathology (Gilman, 1995), while others, famously the likes of Hans Prinzhorn (1886-1933), amassed a large collection of insane art where the works considered were taken to have some kind of aesthetic value (Haywood Gallery, 1996).

Although there is still contemporary interest in outsider art³, it is often criticised as a representative of stigmatising processes whereby artists are relegated to social and symbolic positions of isolation. Insane outsider art was produced mainly within psychiatric asylums - and in-line with anti-psychiatric critiques that have emerged in the recent past - the location of outsider artists in such marginalised spaces heavily signifies their 'not belonging' to mainstream society and their relative social exclusion.

Arts therapy, community arts and social inclusion

Countering this very specific history, there are at least two main contexts to a more positive association between culture, the arts and social inclusion for people with serious and enduring mental health problems. The first of these is the development of art therapy within mental health care. Popular since the middle of the 20th century,

³ For example 'The Scottish Collection of Extraordinary Art' in Pittenweem, Fife, which includes the artwork of present and discharged psychiatric patients.

this is, alongside therapeutic drug use, credited with the demise of the category of 'pure' outsider art/artists; as both therapeutic mediums have supposedly contributed to a 'quietening' of raw insanity and its artistic expression (Rhodes, 2000). While there may be all sorts of therapeutic benefits associated with the practice of art therapy (Hogan 2001), there is a common assumption that the art comes second to the therapy in this and similar rehabilitative practices, it being merely a tool for the rehabilitation of the damaged or pathological self. This argument may have implications for the social inclusion of patient-artists via cultural processes.

The second context that is broadly relevant here relates to the benefits of community and public art whereby marginalised people and places are considered to gain access to empowering forms of representation and expression that help addressing instances of social exclusion (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2004). The participation of people with severe and enduring mental health problems in community arts is likely to occur as a result of specific mental health and arts projects in community settings. While certainly helping to disrupt the historic association between mental health and art in institutional space, the literature suggests that arts for health projects may engender experiences of what has been termed 'bonding' and not necessarily 'bridging' social capital for participants. If so, this outcome clearly then has implications for social integration and inclusion (White, 2003), questioning the success of what has been called an inclusive 'arts advocacy' approach which often underlies such initiatives (Maddern and Bloom, 2004). Despite this latter caveat, though, these two broad contexts above can be argued to have contributed to a disruption of a negative association between mental health, arts and social exclusion, although there is a need to understand in more detail what *precisely* constitutes the association between arts and social inclusion in community settings

These contexts have been recently supplemented by arguments about cultural rights and citizenship, and with respect to mental health problems specifically, sections 25 and 26 of the new Mental Health Care and Treatment Act 2003 (in effect in Scotland in 2005) require local authorities to support the promotion of well-being and social development for people with mental health difficulties through the provision of social, cultural and recreational activities. In Scotland this legal provision is being cited as an impetus for the state to develop and implement an integrative mental health and arts strategy, one specifically looking to create sustainable links between mental health and creativity at both the local and national scale (see for

example, aspects of the Scottish Executive's *National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being*). Embedded within such initiatives are assumptions about an inclusive citizenship that is achievable through arts activities, something that has been argued by the mental health lobby for some time. This assumption rests partly on the notion that participation in the arts entails inclusive social processes, but also that the arts are a resource whereby positive mental health awareness is raised and stigma is reduced (Dunn, 1999, p47).

Evaluation of the arts and well-being

One key challenge for arts and mental health projects is tied to questions of validity and evidence, as debates concerning the merits and limitations of qualitative and quantitative approaches pepper policy commentaries about the effectiveness of this pairing (Jermyn, 2001, White, 2003). Unsurprisingly, self-evaluation by art practitioners and organisations has traditionally been relatively limited, qualitative, and often tied to the specific demands of funders (although there are examples of arts-on-prescription schemes which have been evaluated using standard tools such as the General Health Questionnaire: White, 2003, Huxley, 1997). White (2003) notes that quantitative evidence, including costs comparisons with other health interventions, and longitudinal studies are almost completely lacking in this field, and it is also noted that 'it is more difficult to provide evidence that these projects have an effect on mental health, social exclusion and civic participation' (White, 2003, p11). Given the current resourcing of mental health projects like Art Angel and Trongate Studios, and the burden of administration on arts staff who do not necessarily have any research expertise, it is unrealistic to expect diverse and systematic data collection and interpretation about project participants and individual outcomes. The effects of such demands on local mental health and arts projects is that they struggle for credibility with statutory services which are often uncomfortable with qualitative or creative evidence, and with the notion that well-being, social inclusion and recovery (often key aims of community mental health initiatives) may be tied to creativity and creative identities in complex ways.

Robust qualitative research that examines and represents subjective understandings of the social world is now recognised to have an important role in academic discourse and policy related research (Parr, 1998, 2000, Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Furthermore, it is vital that marginalised and vulnerable groups are given

adequate opportunities to represent their understandings and world-views in relation to their everyday lives. If services are to be truly responsive to their users, then flexible and appropriate methodologies need to be put in place in order to fully facilitate their input into assessment and evaluation. This report uses qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews and ethnographic participation in order to access complicated relationships with two arts projects. Quantitative indicators are considered inappropriate in the context of the research questions asked, and it is important that arts projects such as Art Angel and Trongate Studios be understood primarily in terms of their social functions. Evaluating the social functions of art projects does not simply mean recording data about reduced medication use, increases in numbers of social contacts per day and so on, but requires us to think more carefully about questions of self-identity and self-esteem and individualised perceptions of recovery. Although standard statutory and medical approaches to evaluation may see such concerns as rather nebulous categories that are difficult to assess, these are precisely the areas where community mental health projects can make their most strategic and successful interventions. This report is thus orientated towards assessing some aspects of the complicated social relationship between ill self and the arts in the context of Art Angel in Dundee and the Trongate Studios in Glasgow. This approach is in keeping with Scottish Executive's emphasis on learning from recovery stories (SRN, 2005) and understanding the cultural dimensions to well-being (National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, 2005).



Section 3: Research Evidence and Findings

Introduction and project profiles

The activities of Art Angel and the Trongate Studios involve work across a range of artistic mediums, including visual arts, craft making, writing, film-making and performance (I will term this all ‘art’ or ‘arts’ for the purposes of this report, although there are social and material differences between the artistic mediums used⁴).

To profile the two projects, **Art Angel** in Dundee has been operating since 2003 in Dudhope Arts Centre, a largely abandoned building just North-West of the city centre, and is core-funded by the National Health Service (NHS) and the City Council’s Regeneration Fund, with 60 people registered as using its city-wide service. For six years prior to this, the project was known as Arts Advocacy and located in the Dundee Rep Theatre in the prestigious cultural quarter of the city. Funding difficulties led to the project having to move from this site to its current location and its reinvention as ‘Art Angel’. The project runs weekly arts group in Liff hospital (a former asylum) and several community group arts workshops in visual art, photography and writing. Art Angel in Dundee also hosts LUNA, a next-steps arts organisation run by people with mental health problems and who engage in a range of arts activities that involve film-making, music recording and book publications. That there is a progressive route to different types of participation in the arts is a key benefit of the way in which Art Angel in particular is organised. Art Angel are also currently project-funded by the Scottish Arts Council to employ two artists-in-residence with experience of mental health problems and who work with other project users.



⁴ For example, film-making is often constructed as a collective, very social form of participation in the arts, whereby visual arts work or writing can be (although not necessarily) a more individualised experience.

The Trongate Studios in Glasgow's city centre (the Merchant City) is mainly a visual arts space, although artists here have also been involved with creative writing, filmmaking, photography and craftwork. Two professional artists support the work of the artist-users of the Studios, providing guidance and professional expertise. The Studios are directly connected to **Project Ability**, and are run as one of their core projects. Project Ability is also an arts project for a permanent group of learning disabled artists, although project work with ethnic minorities, children and youth also feature strongly in programmes alongside the Trongate Studios. The Studios are funded by Project Ability and through NHS funding. Seventy studio artists are registered with the project, and share or individually occupy a small studio space in an open plan arrangement. The Studios run introductory group workshops for prospective members, although there has been up to a three year waiting list to access the project in the past. The main activity of the studios is visual arts work, and unlike Art Angel, the studios has its own gallery, as well as sharing a gallery with Project Ability next door, both of which are open to the public.



Participation and starting out

There is no one clear route to participating in arts and mental health projects in general and these two organisations are no exception. Project artists are introduced to the project from a range of referral points including CPNs, social workers, GPs, and in-patient care workers. Informal access also occurs with self and social network referral. Interviewees who participated in this research had accessed the projects for time periods that ranged from 6 months to 10 years. It is notable that on entry to the arts and arts projects that participants have few specific expectations beyond a

general will to socialise with others and find a route out of difficult or isolating situations.

'I didn't have any expectations, I was just glad to have somewhere to go. I hadn't any experience of anything like that before' (A, project artist, Dundee)

'I didn't know what I was getting into, I could do nothing' (E, project artist, Glasgow)

'I wanted to meet people and friendship, rather than being on my own all the time' (B, project artist, Dundee)

'I was at a low ebb and needed an interest' (S, project artist, Dundee)

'I don't know, I really don't know what to expect' (Z, project artist, Glasgow)

When asked about expectations from initial project participation, artists do not straightforwardly discuss well-being, recovery or skills development. This is perhaps a reflection of an individual state of mind or health at the time of entry to the project, but also about their lack of understanding about what an arts project may be able to offer them. Lack of detailed knowledge about the benefits of arts activity, and about Art Angel and Trongate Studios specifically, may be a characteristic of both new participants *and* referral agencies. There are noted contrasts between expectations at the beginning of project participation and expectations that evolve through experience at the arts projects and these shall be addressed at the end of the report.

Section 4: Experiencing art-work for mental health

In interviews and in everyday conversation with project artists they discussed their participation in the arts in many ways, but primarily as a non-clinical practice that involved experiences of stability and well-being. There are several dimensions to this experience for the participants of the art project involved in the study and this section represents some of those complexities in order to record the benefits of creativity for health.

4a) Creativity for mental health

Experiences of stability and well-being were represented as emerging from different dimensions of arts experience. In discussing the links between creativity and well-being in particular, many participants evoked a complex fusion of thoughts, emotions, materials, movements and imagination in the production of artwork. This fusion - experienced in the creative process of painting, making, writing, filmmaking and, in some cases, performing - was perceived as a beneficial and sometimes therapeutic interiority. Put more simply, artistic practice facilitated a sense of psychological locatedness, enabling a temporarily all-consuming occupational space that distracted from negative and disruptive thoughts and emotions:

'Art is therapeutic because its absorbing and you can go to this place that is not you and it's not world, but it's safe because its sort of a mediation' (T, project artist, Glasgow)

'It sounds corny, but it's like a kind of magic [you] go into a sort of trance and I think it's a fantastic thing when it happens. It doesn't always happen ... but for me it was a way of getting out of the depression' (K, artist, Glasgow).

'It is therapeutic and this is where the art comes in, the focus in on the art. We express ourselves and it comes out ... you see people come here who are closed in by the illness ... but this is a practical forms of therapy' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'Art contains, so if you are feeling really bad and anxious, then yes, you are making a bad and anxious picture, but you get some of it out y'know?' (T, project artist, Glasgow).

Although not always the case by any means, such comments demonstrate how individual artists encounter 'interior creative space' as a positive and safe location that can be accessed as part of a strategy for recovery. The emotional and psychological dimensions to art-making were also characterised by the importance of practising and sensing boundaries. For people who were particularly ill or experiencing difficulties, their sense of a bounded and coherent self was sometimes tied to the physical art object itself:

'I started on paper mache balls, because it was trying to bind myself to something. So it would be, if I felt I was losing the place, I could do paper mache balls because one ball has a finishing you know? It's a finished object ... a boundary' (R, project artist, Dundee).

'I always go for bright colours, and the brush strokes go in different directions. I could be using red, yellow, white and when you put it on, you are bringing it out of your system, it's about getting your feelings out and not letting them build up, getting the feelings out onto the canvas ... you want life to be more immediate. I look at some of my paintings and there is something in there, like a coal fire' (P, project artist, Glasgow).



In these and other ways, the practice of artwork clearly has a value in terms of assisting project participants with their sense of recovery, emotional and psychological stability. Being able to develop and experience such beneficial outcomes, however, is particularly dependent on the ability to work in safe and supportive social environments (see section 5). In summary, when asked about the experience of art for mental health, project participants would also use descriptor words that expressed a range of positive emotions and associations:

Reported effects of art work for mental health

Calming
Focusing
Distracting
Healing
Therapeutic
Binding/Bounding
Occupying
Joyful
Exciting
Challenging

For many participants in Art Angel and the Trongate Studios, then, the experience of creativity for mental health was difficult to articulate, but in extended discussions usually entailed a sense of well-being associated with perceptions of a recovering self.

4b) The social effects and impacts of creativity

In thinking through how such creative and artistic experience in itself had important *social* implications for the project participants, it is important to recognise how artists understand their arts practice to be tied to their abilities to relate and communicate themselves with others. For example, experiencing artwork as a stabilising practice was perceived as an important 'stepping stone' for reinsertion into wider social relationships and situations outside project spaces. This was linked to the perception that artwork enabled participants to learn about themselves, to experiment with communicating feelings and to work through difficulties that they encountered in other aspects of their everyday lives. A strong sense of art-work as a *relational social practice* and as one that therefore might help participants to achieve or regain a sense of their social abilities in mainstream social spaces beyond Art Angel and the Trongate Studios emerged from artists who previously have had difficulties communicating aspects of themselves, particularly during periods of illness:

'It's about me trying to communicate with me' (F, project artist, Glasgow)

'It's important to communicate with people, and art, I believe art is about communicating with people. Communicating with yourself as well, it's a place where you can be read ... and I think that's why people are often frightened to just put anything down, because suddenly they've walked into a place with no rules ...' (R, project artist, Dundee).

'It [art] was another form of communication, because I couldn't talk very well. Actually I [just] couldn't talk sometimes and I wasn't being understood, so I used painting and writing as other forms of trying to communicate with people ... [and so] for me it was vital' (P, project artist, Dundee)



While participation in artwork can be beneficial in terms of how it helps facilitate social selves (ie, helping artists to enter into a greater diversity of social relations through the development of communication skills), there are other benefits tied to the experience of self-understanding and self-expression, these being important precursors to abilities to communicate and relate. While clearly nebulous and subjective constructs, self-understanding and self-expression are central to identity formation and therefore important in terms of assessing the social impacts of artwork.

In addition to experiencing creativity as and through a therapeutic interior space, artistic practice can also involve self-evaluation in terms of both artistic and personal development:

'I would draw a picture of myself each day. Not from looking in the mirror, but from how I felt ... and I'd learned something from those drawings, learned strongly about how people influence me' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'I don't make [art work] for selling, I like to hold onto it to see how far I've come' (M, project artist, Glasgow)

'It gives you an insight into your own struggle' (K, project artist, Glasgow)

Understanding of both self and illness through artistic work was a dominant theme for many artists in Art Angel and the Trongate Studios, although both staff and project artists noted that working through illness experiences using artwork can gradually be

replaced by a development of other artistic agendas with wider implications for identity and social inclusion (see section 6). However, for many project artists, a key benefits of participation in the arts was having access to a medium through which to work through questions of self and gain self-understanding in non-clinical ways:

'I think I will always use the pictures I paint in the future to understand myself on an on-going basis and to understand relationships, what other people are to me' (U, project artist, Glasgow)

'It's been very helpful, it helps in having a good look at yourself and helping to get rid of the bits you don't like. Because it's such a powerful illness, it's a practical strategy' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'It's great for the soul and great for who I am and to understand who I am you know? I am constantly re-reading what I have written to find out where I was at a particular time and what I can do now to improve my situation' (A, project artist, Dundee)

Key to self-understanding for the artists is the notion that the self can be expressed freely and without risk of interpretation in clinical frameworks. Questions of self and identity for people with serious and enduring mental health problems are profound both in terms of perceived and actual recovery, but also in terms of social status and the ability to relate to others. In discussing self-expression as connected to well-being and health, the arts clearly provided a means through which this might be achieved for project participants:

'As articulate as I am, when I am ill, or afraid or angry I cannot find words to express myself and I feel frightened [but] ... the creative process, you can see it on the walls here, it helps tell of things that people feel, people with mental health difficulties' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'It can be difficult to find sanctuary, and sometimes I sit and write out what I feel, sometimes I'll draw' (M, project artist, Glasgow)

'I try to represent it, I had to express it. I had to channel my expressive energy and Art Angel gave me the platform to do that' (A, project artist, Dundee)

Artwork thus combines the building of communication skills, self-understanding and self-expression, all of which were identified by project artists as being important properties in the development of their personal and social identities. The combination

of the above also contributed to feelings of self-confidence, a positive emotional state directly related to the perceived ability to relate, express and understand oneself outside clinical discourses:

'I feel my confidence has been raised up and increased, as the mental health thing knocks your confidence you know' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'It's changed psychologically, I feel more confident. You are deciding what you want to do, you are in control, deciding. This is a place where you can progress' (B, project artist, Glasgow)

'You begin slowly to get a confidence back, just because you're doing something, ... the way you can feel like you are achieving things and progressing' (A, project artist, Dundee)



The benefits of increased abilities to communicate and express oneself, combined with increased self-confidence led some artists to discuss the beneficial impacts on family life and friendship networks:

'It's had a positive effect on my immediate circle you know, the stone in the water effect. It ripples out, the effects on family' (L, project artist, Dundee)

'My sister thinks it's good and has seen the change in me' (T, project artist, Dundee)

'My father was not very keen on what I was doing, but then he came here and he was very very impressed and he understood the situation' (E, project artist, Glasgow)

'My wife and my son would say I am calmer' (S, project artist, Dundee)



In summary, the practice of artwork in and of itself in Art Angel and the Trongate Studios has reportedly facilitated important relational skills in its project artists and these can be identified as follows:

Reported positive social effects and impacts of creativity

New, recovered or developed communications skills
Developing self-understanding and insight
Improved self-expression
Feelings of self-confidence
Stable behaviour
Social 'ripple' effect on close friends and family
Improved family and social relations

4c) The difficulties of creative artwork

While project participants were mostly concerned to emphasise the benefits of their participation in the arts through their experience at the arts projects, several discussed the significant challenges and difficulties of engaging in creative work. It is important to acknowledge these difficulties with artwork itself, as these show how project participants recognise, cope with and develop strategies for dealing with challenging situations. The evidence above demonstrates that creative work is a very emotional process involving profound senses of self. Arts work can involve working through difficult emotional and psychological processes that prompt negative or conflictual effects:

'The creative process has been too painful because you're going through the process and you are feeling what you are going through and when you become unwell, you have heightened awareness and that can be painful' (A, project artist, Dundee)

'I have manic depression and if I'm not careful creative work can fuel my illness ... when I get high I want to do everything at the same time, paint a picture, I want to write, I want to get involved in a play ... I've got idea triggering off in my head and I perhaps need to take a day off as you start to neglect other things, or other things becomes less important too you, like house work and so on ..' (C, project artist, Glasgow)

'If someone is in a manic phase then their discussions about art can be very very tricky' (L, project artist, Glasgow)

'There are huge risks ... because I was expressing myself I suppose, taking risks, taking chances' (P, project artist, Dundee)

Working through these effects can be a profound experience in which self-understanding is achieved but in challenging circumstances. Being careful not to over-expose oneself to the powerful excitement of creativity is an issue for some artists, as discussed above. For other artists, the very material processes of art-making also presented challenges when they were feeling ill or having difficulty with the side-effects of medication. Making decisions, using art tools and concentrating were identified as key difficulties in these circumstances:

'I find it quite a battle to be able to keep my mind clear enough, to be able to concentrate' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'When I first started, it was huge to just choose the colour of paint that I was going to use, I felt really naked in that, I was very fragile' (T, project artist, Dundee)

The strain of exhibiting work can also be challenging for some artists, with the build-up of tension surrounding individual work resulting in feelings of being over-whelmed or deflated when raised expectations are not met. For others, the time-scales involved in producing art-work can involve stress and are not straight-forwardly mentally healthy:

'To have a whole exhibition of your work I think would be overwhelming and I've spoken to people that have had exhibitions here and they have been disappointed by it somehow and I think that is a terrible sad thing' (K, project artist, Glasgow)

'If you said to me you'd like me to do a painting and I said I'd do it for you in a week, well that week I would be really stressed out and I could do without that stress' (T, project artist, Glasgow)

Artists were able to identify strategies that they had acquired for over-coming such difficulties including gaining the help of project staff or other artists in order to jointly persevere with particular endeavours. For others coping with such difficulties over-time had taught them to build in psychological safeguards so that the creative process itself did not cause de-stabilising effects:

'I've got to watch I don't fail, set myself up ... if I don't finish a poem off, or a piece of work, that I don't beat myself up and go into a depression which would happen before' (N, project artist, Dundee)

Developing resilience or at least coping mechanisms that can be put in place to deal with the effects of difficult creative work is one way in which artists measure their own sense of progression

'This has been one of the major planks in my continuing attempt to adapt to life' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'There's no question that LUNA in particular takes things a step further and it's for people who have the confidence to, to stand up and perform their work, and want to be published and there's certain aspects of that which are not therapeutic' (P, project artist, Dundee)

In discussing the range of emotions and psychological states that were evoked when engaging in artistic activity, artists played up the important role of negative emotions, confronting difficulties and meeting challenges through their work. Rather than offer such subjective experiences as evidence as to why the arts *do not* contribute to mental health, the artists realistically convey how coping with such effects are beneficial in building long terms of sustainable versions of recovery and resilience.

Reported difficulties and associated effects of creative arts work

Evocation of negative emotions

Exposure to conflictual psychological processes

Increased perceptions of risk

Challenging physical practices

Building strategies of sustainable resilience

Learning coping mechanisms over-time

Section 5: Experiencing the social dimensions to art project participation

5a) The social benefits of project attendance

The daily or weekly attendance at and in art project spaces provides structure, routine and opportunities for expanding social networks for project participants. While many forms of what might be called 'day care' offers such opportunities (Parr, 2000; Philo, Parr and Burns, 2005), there are *particular* features associated with the building of social capital in art project spaces that go beyond the usual dimensions to mental health community-making. In Art Angel and the Trongate Studios, there were opportunities for specific kinds of art-talk, peer-advice giving, friendships, acts of reciprocity, facilitation of workshops and participating in cultural events like exhibitions within and beyond art project space: all of these were dimensions that artists identified as ones that facilitated both self-esteem and a range of positive emotions and that contributed to the social benefits of project participation. Not all participants found the social aspects to the project easy, especially at first entry point to the project and some only felt able to participate more fully in group sessions, and to get involved with other projects outside group sessions once a level of confidence and trust had been established with both their peers and project staff.

'I could see that it was a social project. I think it was that aspect that I found the most difficult, I just wanted to do the art, I didn't really want to be social initially. I found the social aspect overpowering at the beginning, but it's good to be challenged ... and I feel comfortable with that now' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'When I first joined I just sat there for 4 to 5 weeks before I did anything, it can be intimidating' (S, project artist, Glasgow)

'I believe I've been helped by other people's stories and their art. I believe that's helped me come back to a balance. So you know, mine could help others too' (B, project artist, Glasgow)

'Being around other people who understand is hugely important. I can't see that many people want to work by themselves, that want to work in isolation ... most of the people I know thrive on working with other people and want to be involved in that' (P, project artist, Dundee)

The combination of group sessions and opportunities for more individualised or small group working is a key benefit of both Art Angel and the Trongate Studio's

organisation, enabling project artists to develop their confidence for different types of participation over time.



In Art Angel, all project artists who were interviewed as part of this research held a strong sense of collective artistic endeavour, in ways that might differ from other projects which encourage more individual ways of working. This sense of collectivity, even amongst artists at very different stages of recovery and well-being, clearly helped to facilitate the building of social bonds and friendship network amongst participants. Individuals who may have been previously socially isolated because of illness experiences thus have found that Art Angel has engendered a sense of belonging, purpose and mutual care through regular attendance. For those individuals for whom attendance has been more sporadic, there was still a sense in which the project would be a welcome social space to which to return after time away. Project artists used a range of terms to describe the quality of the support and friendship networks that they had built in Art Angel. Key terms here included love, friendship, fellowship, belonging, care and caring, befriending, mattering, cohesion, wholeness, commonality and family. These positive metaphors were used by project participants in order to demonstrate the range of ways in which social capital is experienced emotionally.

In terms of the Trongate Studios, small studio spaces inculcate more individualised senses of artistic development, although several artists did identify a sense of community with other artists:

'It definitely has a community and sometimes I'm surprised at how it can help to share things you know' (F, project artist, Glasgow)

'The studios suit people who like to work on their own, there's no one saying you must do this, people work on their own and do their own things unless they need help and ask for it' (T, project artist, Glasgow)

'Most people feed off each other ... it's not a competition thing' (N, project artist, Glasgow)

Although the artists at the Trongate Studios do have opportunities to work in groups and on collective projects, there are also other ways in which a sense of mutuality might be articulated, and through the expression of art-work itself:

'Coming here and doing the work, the art work makes you feel as though you've become more stable, because you've been doing it, participating in the project' (R, artist, Glasgow)

'Okay, the link is a feeling of well-being, there's also a feeling of reward that you get after an end of, end of a successful day, when you're having a pint in the pub it's like, it feels okay, especially if there's a few of you and it's chilled out you know, there's, which is the social side to Trongate Studios' (A, artist, Glasgow)

'I'm like an apprentice with them, learning to do things. And ... the space up from me there is a guy attends and that guy's got a masters degree in Art from the Royal College of Art, the Royal College of Art in London.' (M, artist, Glasgow)

'You can see just looking at people's work, you can mostly tell when they've gone down a way, just by looking ... you just know, I recognise it, it could be with form or colour, it depends [but] I would often say 'what's worrying you?', 'what's been through your mind?' and then it's visa versa, people will say to me and I've opened up to them' (B, artist, Glasgow)

This mutuality can be expressed as peer-support for artistic development, peer-learning, the reading others' emotions and state-of-mind through art-work and increased social networking opportunities.

Reported social benefits of art project participation

Building daily routine and structure
Increased opportunities for building social capital and friendship
Progressive participation through different activities
Sense of purpose
Individual artistic development
Peer support-giving and related self-esteem
Specific social skills related to artwork

5b) Opportunities for the development of artistic and social skills

Participation in arts projects like Art Angel and Trongate Studios has enabled instances of learning with possibilities for the development of previously ascribed 'static' (or stigmatised) identities. In explaining this, some artists compared their experience at arts projects with experiences of artwork in hospital settings. In the case of the former, a sense of choice in the development of artwork, materials and skills helped in the assertion of positive forms of post-hospital or post-clinical self-identification:

'In Liff you would get a palette in front of you, specific colours in front of you, pick up a brush ... you don't get to choose your own colours and here you can do what you want, work with your own colours or whatever ... it's a kind of individual thing in here ... and there's no psychiatrist saying this means that feeling and that kind of crap ... in Liff we would get a set of materials and be told what to do with it, and in here we get a set of choices'
(B, project artist, Dundee)

'You can get to experiment more here, [and because of that] there's a sense of frustration, but there's also well-being and satisfaction, so it's a kind of opposite ...' (E, project artist, Glasgow).

'Occupational therapy sessions can only last about an hour, and you're under a microscope' (A, project artist, Glasgow)

A crucial point raised above is that artwork is not open to clinical interpretation in community arts project spaces, and so a fundamental difference between these social spaces and older/other institutional sites is emphasised. However, despite advancing a strong sense of the importance of moving on from hospital-based arts experience, working alongside other people with mental health problems who are being creative and working positively for recovery is of value to many:

'We have a special quality together, we all have different illnesses, but the commonality is that we have the illness. We don't celebrate the illness ... and the art itself is an important tool for diverting people talking about their illness' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'Sometimes I've come in when I'm really not well but I've forced myself into the studios and loads of people have said exactly that, they force themselves to come in and once you're there you do feel better' (O, project artist, Glasgow)

'Sometimes it's grim, really bad and it's despairing and then other times things are possible and this thing called art, you know, it is a constructive way of coping, and just coming here is about being amongst people who understand and that made a difference you know' (Z, project artist, Glasgow)

For many artists, arts projects involve a safe space for artistic development in a non-pressurised environment that combines different ways in which to experience art work; either in the form of classes, individual work or collective projects. Artists discussed the development of their artistic and personal identities by charting a progression from a tentative entry to arts projects when engagement with people, art-talk, materials and creative ideas seemed daunting or impossible, to current positions where individual artists may have built up portfolios, be developing new directions, or even advocating for others:

'When I first joined the project, I was just used to go along to the writing group, but then I became more involved in the running of projects and different projects as well. I know how to go from someone sitting, having an idea, because plenty of people do, they think wouldn't that be a great idea for a film, or I'd really like to publish a book, or I'd like to have my music recorded. I know how to go from there to having a film on the screen or having a book that you can hold in your hand and show to someone. I know how to do that ... and that's the main thing that I've learnt...' (P, project artist, Dundee)

'You are always growing and developing, since I've been here I've painted 5 canvases, aye, and that may change five years down the line, I'll look back and think differently about them' (D, project artist, Glasgow)



'The Studios are a bit self-motivational, you reach your own goals and make your own errors' (A, project artist, Glasgow)

Training is available in both projects in relation to specific arts skills relating to visual, photographic, written, performance and film-making mediums and artists valued having a range of opportunities to develop their artistic portfolios. Of particular value is a sense of progressive and incremental training (non or self-assessed) in the context of continuous staff support:

'It takes time to build your confidence, so you have to be consistent. There is a lot of consistency here. Particularly from L and J (staff) who run the art group. They've got a great deal of consistency and encouragement. They create a very peaceful and supportive environment to do art in' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'I've gained skills that have allowed the artistic and creative side to me to be revealed and developed. It's an art of living if you like and it's challenging because we don't have that level of consistency that comes with stable mental health you know? So it's important not to use formal qualifications in our work, but allow for the wave pattern' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'You're always learning' (T, project artist, Dundee)

Several project artists have gained the opportunity to develop their skills in peer-facilitation, taking the lead on workshops, running groups inside and outside the arts projects and organising versions of art advocacy. Such experiences are valued in

terms of a progressive building of confidence and ability, although almost all artists find such responsibilities challenging and difficult. Art project staff in both Dundee and Glasgow have been available to support peer-facilitation and this is evidence of good practice in terms of progressive approaches to skills building:

'I've taken (ran) an art class through Art Angel and it was a really good experience, but tiring and slow. I found it hard to be with people, to facilitate. I'd ask R (staff) to co-facilitate with me so I would be alright if I was over-stretched' (R, project artist, Dundee)

'Its not just turning up when you feel like it and going along to an art group. If you are involved in making a film or recording a CD, then you have got to be there and be prepared to do things which aren't always fun. It's not for everyone, but the people who are, are folk who want to take things further, who want to really push themselves and see what they can do' (P, project artist, Dundee)

'Helping out in the Studios benefits my mental health. It raises my self-esteem if one of the co-ordinators asks me to help out on a project' (M, project artist, Glasgow)

One of the key ways in which arts projects were identified as helping to facilitate both personal and artistic development amongst project participants was with respect to moving on from representing illness experiences. A self-assessed measure of artistic development was the attainment of new interests and artistic agendas, a progressive strategy also valued and supported by project staff:

'To begin with most people are looking for a wee bit of catharis, a wee bit of therapy of whatever ... but as time goes by and people actually become aware of their developing abilities and find skills they didn't know they had, then there is a real hunger in them to get their work out there' (O, project artist, Dundee)

'It's a vehicle (art) at certain times to write about our problems and it flavours our writing, or painting, it flavours everything, but ... there is an ordinary enjoyment of art that comes in, slowly, but surely, you know, and particularly once you get to trust what is happening ... [that] is being done by us' (N, project artist, Dundee)



Although artists do discuss both intentional and unintentional working through of self in art work (as outlined in Section 4), for many artists a politics of mental health⁵ as advocated through the arts is not a core concern, although various individual projects and exhibitions may have been orientated towards this in the past. Both project staff and artists argue that, while both a therapeutic use of arts and an artistic politics of mental health can be necessary and effective, it is important to move beyond representations of illness and treatment in order to fulfil artistic development and maximise opportunities for social inclusion beyond project spaces (see Section 6).

Reported dimensions of skills development at arts projects

Choices in materials, projects and mediums maximise skills opportunities for participants

Skills development in non-clinical contexts are most valued

Progressive, continuous and incremental skills development are evidenced and valued

Developing new artistic agendas assists self-confidence

Co- and peer facilitation builds on social and artistic skills

5c) Difficulties with project participation

While the majority of narratives about participation in Art Angel and Trongate Studios are positive, there are some more negative aspects that need to be highlighted. Artists were acutely aware of the precarious funding situation of the Art Angel project, represented physically and symbolically in the recent move from the Rep Theatre to

⁵ In this case a politics of mental health references diverse challenges to bio-medical and psychiatric orthodoxies.

Dudhope Arts Centre. The continuing structural instability, and lack of sustainable core project funding, impacts negatively on artists who are worried about their ability to be able to access the project in the future. Some artists also find that they need to occasionally buy their own specialist artistic materials if funds are not available, which is clearly an important issue for those on limited incomes or benefits. The need at various point to cut down on workshop sessions and staff time has impacted negatively on the health and well-being of particular participants who rely heavily on Art Angel in terms of their structure and routine:

'It's the breaks between groups when I go down' (B, project artist, Dundee)

'It's basically saved my life this project, if that's not too strong a point, it gives you a focus on the week. When you're not here, you're thinking what can you do, what can you do on your own. It's important that this project doesn't fold' (T, project artist, Dundee)

Art Angel staff clearly also have an important role to play in providing support for project artists. In time of illness or personal difficulty, particular artists can come to rely heavily on their ability to access staff in terms of talking through their problems. A common concern was thus the amount of time and personal pressure that project staff were under in order to cope with these demands. Several artists suggested that the availability of occasional counselling services as part of the project would help in this regard, and lessen the pressure on project staff.

In terms of the Trongate Studios different tensions were apparent. In relatively large-scale creative spaces like the art studios where groups of people with mental health problems meet on a regular basis, the power of creative endeavour can sometimes be experienced negatively as emotional difficulties or conflictual situations have collective impacts:

'When you have all these different conditions existing in one community, sometimes if someone kicks off ... it has waves through the whole studio, than can have a dark, kind of dark atmosphere and if you are talking to people who are sensitive ... you have to be very careful' (U, project artist, Glasgow)

Particular tensions existed around the competitive selection process for inclusion of artists' work in large-scale events like the annual Glasgow Art Fair. The Glasgow Art Fair is seen as a crucial marker for peer and project esteem in terms of

artistic work, and hence tensions arise about who work is selected for exhibition and why. There is a larger point to be made here about the place of the work of artists with mental health problems in mainstream artistic exhibition spaces, and this will be addressed below in section 6.

Both Art Angel and Trongate Studios are also under pressure to demonstrate effective evaluation processes and a certain amount of 'through-put' of clients who access the project. These demands - ones prompted by external funders - also contribute to the ways in which artists experience art project space, and care must be taken about how such pressures influence artists.

Section 6: Building community lives and identities

An important part of the research project that informs this report is an understanding of how participation in arts projects can help to cement, rebuild or facilitate particular aspects of community lives for people with serious mental health problems. There are many complexities to the community lives and identities for such people, and engagement with arts activities can only address some of these. However, in light of recent arguments about cultural rights and citizenship (Stevenson, 2001), the ways in which the arts might help facilitate positive senses of self and community identification should be examined.

6a) Cross-community networking

Participation in Art Angel in particular has facilitated social opportunities for peer and cross-community networking. Regular trips to other projects in other places (such as the Western Isles Mental Health Association in the Hebrides) involve communicating and interacting with other artists, mental health organisations and communities. Spending time away from home, usual routines and support networks involve challenges and difficulties, but enable project artists to practice engaging in semi-independent living, working and recreation activities. Filming projects can also often involve travel and engagement with a range of community and mental health organisations. In respect to filming (usually undertaken by LUNA) significant responsibility is taken by project artists for explaining artistic intentions, facilitating, research, planning, filming and following-up with the different people and organisations involved. Many project artists find travel and different types of community and organisational engagement challenging, but also clearly gain from such activity, even discussing the ways in which they find difficulties empowering or learning experiences:

'I was pretty intimidated going to Glasgow and meeting these people I didn't know, but I've done it now and I'll know what to look for next time. ... My definition of empowering would be doing things the way I want to do them, and the way I feel comfortable, but I also know that if I'm going to work with other people that's not going to happen all the time, and that there are things we disagree with, but that's what happens when you work with other people ... it will always involve as much effort as enjoyment' (P, project artist, Dundee)

Participation in the Trongate Studios has also facilitated contact with a range of other arts and community groups. Joint exhibitions have been mounted between the Studios and an Edinburgh-based arts group 'Stepping Stones', for example, resulting in several major collaborative exhibitions. Particular Studio artists have also liaised with a range of other artists, organisations and funders in relation to visual arts exhibitions, film and writing projects.

6b) The social significance and outcomes of exhibitions

Beyond facilitating new cross-community and peer experiences with other community organisations, Art Angel and the Trongate Studios have opened up opportunities for project artists to exhibit their work in mainstream community and cultural spaces. This is a major way in which perceptions of artistic identities are built and extended. During the period of research several exhibitions were mounted and films shown in different venues. Project artists emphasised how such material outcomes for their work involved a range of largely positive emotions including pride, self-esteem, sense of achievement and excitement, as well as providing opportunities for collaborative celebration and enjoyment. It should also be recognised that for some artists these events are difficult and pressurising social occasions and involve feelings of risk both in respect to the coping with the event itself as well as judgements about the content of the arts work displayed. The audience for such events is also important for many and for Art Angel these can be small and draw upon related family, friends and organisational networks (although larger exhibitions can attract a wider public). The Trongate Studios can attract a large audience with help from corporate funding sources that facilitate widespread advertisements. In the case of the Trongate, other artists located in the cultural quarter of the city can easily access exhibitions, helping

to further facilitate connections between the community and mainstream artistic networks.



In terms of community identities, some artists felt that exhibitions had an important role to play in validating their daily activities to others and legitimatising developing artistic identities to friends and family:

'It gives them an insight into what I do and I'm quite proud of that. To let them see that there is more to (me) It gives the people we love something tangible other than our behaviour, it gives a validity to things' (N, project artist, Dundee)

'When I started to write my friends and family were quite concerned for me you know, that I was drifting into being unwell again ... but once I started getting things published and that it was ok, you know CDs, exhibitions, books, then they started to see things differently' (A, project artist, Dundee)

'My son is very proud of me' (T, project artist, Glasgow)

'It validates me, it validates the fact that I can create and control and be spontaneous and play and tolerate being human ... I think that's why it makes me feel better, it makes me well, rather than being completely controlled by destructive feelings and thoughts' (O, project artist, Glasgow)

It is clear from the above quotations how arts activities can be crucial in terms of developing new versions of self and community identities within existing social networks. For people whose identities may well have been threatened or been experienced as negatively static in relation to illness labels, then such outcomes are profound.



In terms of facilitating a wider sense of place and belonging within the community, exhibition events can be particularly important for groups who have previously felt marginalised due to stigmatising social relations. In discussing past experiences of major exhibition work, some project artists emphasised how the arts bring with them the possibility for centring marginalised voices, experiences and locations. When discussing the past 'Life at Liff' exhibition in the Dundee McManus Galleries, for example, there was a sense of a legitimate and radical re-occupation of mainstream cultural city spaces:

'One of the most incredible events was the Liff exhibition which was held in the premier public exhibition space in Dundee, and from being in this place regarded with suspicion seven miles out of Dundee, we took it right into the middle of the city and said 'we are here, this is us'. We are not hiding in the country anymore in a big Victorian building, we are right in the middle of town now. That was an incredible experience, it was one of the largest collections of work by local people in Dundee, an absolutely major collection and I felt hugely part of the city and its history' (P, project artist, Dundee)

'It's taken us out of Liff and put us slap band in the middle of town and people can see us, we are on the screen and on billboards ... we need to be heard' (O, project artist, Dundee)

Such comments emphasise the political potential of arts work and the role of arts advocacy for this group. However, for some artists it was important to emphasise their experience of the arts as a therapeutic and social process rather than being concerned about working for public acceptance, or demonstrating artistic competence.

6c) Connecting with cultural and artistic communities

Given the particular history of 'outsider art', it is important to assess how community mental health and arts projects offer ways of being 'inside' mainstream cultural and artistic communities. In terms of forging a distinctive presence in the cultural geographies of Dundee, for example, Art Angel has clearly had mixed fortunes, relating partly to its moving from the prestigious location of the Rep Theatre (as Arts Advocacy) to the more marginal city centre location in Dudhope Arts Centre. This has had both practical and symbolic implications for the project artists and their sense of place within local artistic networks. Some artists feel that Art Angel has lost its distinctive profile and they recall the both the sense of excitement and associated social status in physically accessing the Rep Theatre in the cultural quarter of the city. For others, the cultural quarter of the city presented challenges and previous physical access to project staff was difficult and intimidating. The new venue brings, then, a sense of belonging and ownership as well as a new collective artistic working space.

Project artists have mixed feelings about liaising with established and professional arts venues and artists. Some take significant responsibility for networking with organisations like the DCA for the exhibition and showing of work, although this is acknowledged to be challenging. The sheer range of work in a variety of formats has required that project artists liaise with community publishers, editors and so on in ways that expand their experience and expertise. Art Angel facilitators and occasional staff (such as film editors) are themselves professional artists and so engagement with the project itself ensures contact and networking opportunities in this respect. Over the research period for this study, there was little evidence that established writers, visual artists and film-makers, beyond those paid by the project, were in contact with the group, although such workshops and meetings have been organised in the past. For some artists there is also a sense of frustration that a lack of adequate financial support from city, social and medical services has limited the opportunities to build further networks with professional artistic communities. Partly as a result of these factors, the development of artistic identities are mediated, and for some artistic judgement in professional and public arts venues and exhibitions beyond the project also carry risk:

'I use art all the time, but I'm still not convinced I'm an artist' (P, project artist, Dundee)

'There's a lot of protection here, but to go beyond that, and the recognition of mental health problems, hurts ... to go into public, a public art place ...' (R, project artist, Dundee)

In the case of the Trongate Studios, their well-funded location in the artist heartland of Glasgow, the Merchant City, aids a sense in which people with mental health problems have a role in wider processes of cultural place-making. Indeed Glasgow's self-conscious image as a cultural city with a concern for both the promotion of cultural industries and social justice combines with the City Council's inclusive arts objectives which argue that 'arts organisations are a major resource for tackling some of Glasgow's most intractable problems in terms of health' (Glasgow City Council, 2001, p12). In line with this, the planned redevelopment of the artistic quarter of the city includes the Trongate Studios moving to a new building in a multi-million pound relocation package in Kings Street, where the project will be located alongside 'mainstream' artists in order to promote further inclusive integration and contribute to the marketing of the arts environment in central Glasgow. Some staff and artists see challenges about genuine integration between project and other artists, although it is acknowledged that 'the city is being tremendous in the way it's helping to develop a dialogue' (Staff, March, 2005).

However, for many artists and staff, inclusion in large-scale and visible cultural development is not the only way of belonging to artistic networks in the cultural city. This is partly achieved through a more mundane embodied occupation of the city's artistic community spaces; feeling welcome and confident to sit in cafes and bars with other artists and workers, being invited to attend other gallery openings, and having access to mainstream exhibition space for the work of project participants:

'I like this area, it's all about me fitting into this area' (J, project artist, Glasgow)

'I would call myself an artist now, aye ... You're in that community, an artist's community, you know, in that area. I still get that feeling of being, what's the word? like connected to the artist community' (M, artist, Glasgow)

'The feeling of coming to the Merchant City ... has given me the feeling of being part of the community I'm involved with' (R, artist, Glasgow)

For some, this identification is based on new legitimised artistic identities that have been developed as part of their artwork, as well as cultivating an audience amongst the surrounding mainstream artistic community. For others, this feeling of community is based more symbolically on notions of artists *also* being outsiders to more mainstream communities. Artistic communities can be places where unusual working schedules, extreme emotional behaviours and experiences might be tolerated or even celebrated, for example, as part of an alternative 'way of being' in the city. Artists with serious and enduring mental health problems might be positively embraced in such communities of practice, although tensions with professional artists might also exist about subsidised studio spaces and materials, and regarding the allocation of 'undeserved' places in high profile cultural environments, buildings and projects, a concern raised by staff and artists from Trongate Studios when discussing the redevelopment plans highlighted above. Despite feelings of possible belongings, then, incursions into the cultural city can be difficult, involving senses of risk and stigma, and as a result some remain ambivalent about their identities as artists, despite extensive portfolios, experience of exhibitions and even advocacy for others:

'I think we are probably treated with a lot of suspicion ... and there's a feeling in the studios when people talk about that, that they're the under-dog ... we're damaged, and sometimes it feels quite excluded' (P, artist, Glasgow)

Some artists at the Trongate Studios also raised concerns about being involved with artistic communities in terms of their mental health, as exciting and provocative social networks can sometimes fuel experiences of illness.

Overall, both projects offered significant possibilities for connecting with cultural and artistic communities, although the outcome of such connections contained both negative and positive associations.

Reported outcomes of project participation for community lives and identities

Arts projects involve opportunities for cross-community interaction and travel

Arts exhibitions and products facilitate self-esteem, enhanced community status and skills development

Arts exhibitions can involve senses of risk and challenge

Arts exhibitions can facilitate a sense of place

Interactions with artistic and cultural communities involve positive and negative associations and possibilities

Arts projects could be further embedded in the local cultural and artistic context

Section 7: The future, moving on and recovery

Community mental health services and community arts project are often under pressure to demonstrate ‘through-put’ of clients. This demand relies, however, on a very particular understanding of the meaning of ‘moving on’ and this research documents multiple dimensions to this term.

In terms of Art Angel, certain project artists do have a very literal sense of ‘moving on’ in that they have (now) left the project⁶ or have engaged in new and different community activities (such as co-facilitating community writing groups, taking up paid and unpaid positions in the wider voluntary sector) as a direct or indirect result of their participation in Art Angel and the building of self-confidence, skills and self-esteem:

‘I’m firming up mental, I can feel the changes, I’m on a ‘moving forward’ course now, going towards work. ... I’ve been able to come out of the isolation’ (R, project artist, Dundee)

‘There’s lots of spin-offs from the arts as it helps to rebuild your capacities’ (N, project artist, Dundee)

I’m now a reporter with Little Wing, and I’ve joined another writer’s group called ‘Hilltown’s Horizons’. I’ve moved on, I’ve not needed the project so much because I’ve moved on, but I still get involved with LUNA and I think it’s important that the group is still there for me’ (A, project artist, Dundee)

‘I facilitate a photography group at the Whitfield community centre’ (B, project artist, Dundee)

There is clear evidence that participation in both arts projects generally facilitates ‘moving on’ in terms of community engagement (and forms of cultural citizenship) as for project artists interviewed some have become engaged in:

- Facilitating projects and workshops within Art Angel and Trongate Studios
- Facilitating community (non-mental health related) arts workshops
- Participation in training-for-work courses
- Taken on new positions and responsibilities in other voluntary sector groups

⁶ 2 Art Angel interviewees had left the project since first interview, but were still in contact and contributed to key events.

- Participation in college courses
- Activities with media and other arts organisations
- Returning to paid work

However, for some artists there was a sense in which more resources and attention might be allocated to help project artists develop independent artistic identities:

'You do feel the pressure, I think an improvement could be getting more professional artists in and maybe help in moving people on, but it's a very contradictory area you know, this is our space and where we work' (S, project artist, Glasgow)

It should also be noted that 'moving on' can have other meanings. For example, project participants predominantly understand the benefits they have gained from Art Angel and the Trongate Studios as strategies for recovery and well-being that are to be implemented over a long time period. The cultivation of self understanding, self-esteem and well-being through the arts takes a significant amount of time as individuals work through different social and psychological issues (as in Section 4), and 'moving on' from illness and isolated social positions should be valued as much as more literal indicators of progression (such as transferral to other projects or job opportunities). For the project artists who were interviewed for this research project, there are mixed understanding of the meaning of 'moving on', and while for some, not much appeared to have (materially) changed over the period of attendance, for example, they did have a sense in which their life and skills experience was developing in positive ways through their association with the projects. This usually involved ways in which experienced project artists can assist newer participants to develop their work and also engage in arts advocacy. Within the remit of Art Angel and Trongate Studios such movement involves important progression in terms of self-esteem, status and skills experience.

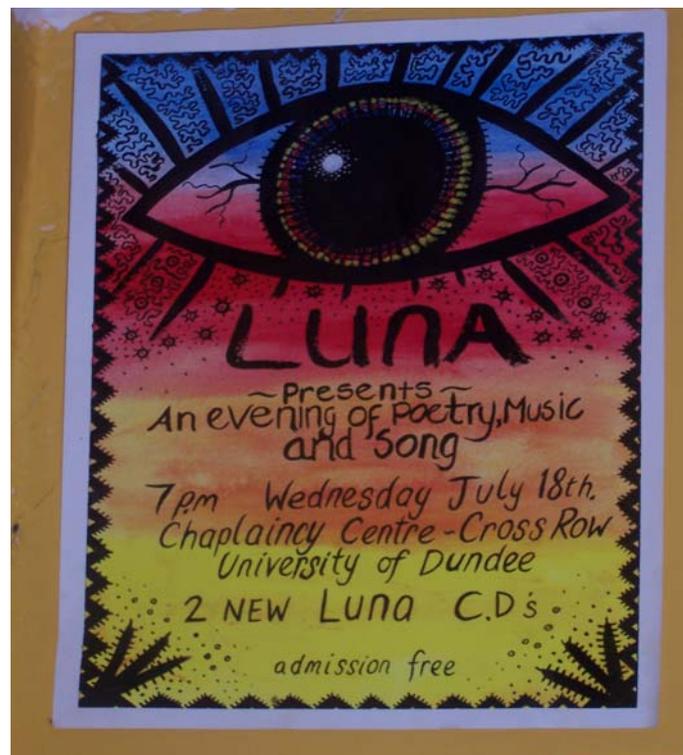
'I can move on and still be here, I just change the job description if you like' (B, project artist, Dundee)

I get a buzz out of helping other people, watching them come on. It's time for me to give something back' (T, project artist, Dundee)

'It makes me feel as though I am giving something back, giving something back to the community' (C, project artist, Glasgow)

Despite evidence that there are different kinds of 'moving on' within Art Angel and the Trongate Studios for participants, it should also be acknowledged that for some people, who are profoundly affected by their mental health problems, conventional understandings of appropriate progression are unrealistic and that more flexible measures of progress need to be developed and recognised by external agencies.

Finally, in terms of contemplating a future it was notable that project artists had a range of things to say about their personal and professional development in association with their attendance at arts projects. For some artists, they viewed their future in terms of an unpredictable patterning of wellness and illness in which the art project referenced would nonetheless provide a stabilising point of focus. For others, however, they had distinctive artistic ambitions for developing new skills, putting on particular exhibitions and getting involved in new projects. In striking contrast to remembered (non or vague) expectations at the point of project entry, artists now (at the point of interview) have a range of ambitions which is testament to the ways in which the organisations have helped to build capacity in their social and artistic development.



Section 8: Summary and conclusion

In summary participation in arts and mental health projects (Art Angel and Trongate Studios) has had a range of largely positive impacts on the people with mental health problems that use the project. Using evidence from their narrated experiences these can be summarised as follows:

The experience of arts for mental health is reported to have facilitated

- Increased self-understanding
- Prompted self esteem
- Facilitated self-directed therapeutic processes
- Opportunities for self-evaluation
- Feelings of stability
- Positive 'ripple effects' to friends and family
- Improved communications skills
- Involved challenges and difficulties
- Increased senses of resilience

The experience of arts project participation is reported to have facilitated:

- Structure and regular routines
- Social and emotional capital
- Progressive participation in a range of activities
- Incremental skills development
- Training opportunities
- Learning opportunities
- Fears about sustainable funding and associated social support
- Artistic development

The experience of community lives beyond (but related to) the arts and mental health projects is reported to have involved

- Cross-community networking
- Opportunities for travel, research, planning and managing projects
- Exhibiting in mainstream cultural venues
- Building different community identities and status
- Building different senses of place and belonging in community and cultural networks
- (Partial) self-identification as artists

The experience of visioning a future within and beyond arts projects is reported to have involved:

- Moving on to other projects and community roles
- Returning to paid work
- Engaging in educational and work training activities
- Taking on new responsibilities and roles within the organisation
- Creating distance from previously isolated social positions
- Creating new artistic agendas

There are profound challenges for mental health and arts projects in terms of their management, sustainable income and planning for the future, but in terms of the reported benefits of project artists, then the organisations researched as part of this report can be seen to be facilitating important changes and benefits that are orientated around both social and artistic development, and clearly link with multi-agency participatory agendas for social inclusion.

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