



BUILDINGS FOUNDATIONS FOR CHANGE THROUGH THE ARTS - SUMMARY REPORT

*An inquiry into the impact of participation in Prison Arts Foundation's programmes
by Dr Shelley Tracey*

(Cover image)

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ANON
HMP Maghaberry*

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Prison Arts Foundation's programmes*

by

Dr Shelley Tracey

*“Prisons are about no; the workshops are yes. Prisons are limits, blocks, barriers.
Workshops are openings, doors, dances, breakings through.
Prisons are about poverty and poor opportunity, boarded houses and rotting schools,
a system that leaves so many children out.
Workshops are a piece of the reply, they are about the strength of our stories,
about our voices, our songs, our laughter, our resistance, about our families,
our neighbourhoods, our communities, ourselves, about what might and may be.”*

*From: What's Wrong With The Picture? Reviewing Prison Arts In America
(L.R. Hammit, 2011)*

November 2017

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FOREWORD

The Prison Arts Foundation has been successfully transforming lives and patterns of behaviour in and beyond the prison environment for more than 20 years. Their teams of experienced professional artists, working with offenders and ex-offenders, offer a life-line to programme participants. Through their participation in the arts, individuals have developed creative and communications skills, self-esteem and renewed sense of purpose, all of which are key to personal and social development, to unlocking potential and to reshaping futures. These constructive, creative, interventions benefit society as a whole.

Carlo Gebler, a Writer-in-Residence with the Prison Arts Foundation with 25 years' experience working in Northern Ireland's prisons, has observed that, "*When a person comes into a prison they invariably meet the one person they didn't expect to meet; themselves ... [and this] ... has the effect of turning the psyche in on itself*". With the appropriate support structures in place, this moment of profound introspection, coupled with a prisoner's need to do something, if only to pass the time, can form a turning point in a prisoner's life. As the case studies in the current report demonstrate, the arts are particularly good at harnessing this potential. The arts provide the tools, the opportunity, the motivation and the encouragement for prisoners to explore and to express a new, positive sense of personal identity. Participation in the arts improves communications and interpersonal skills and, for many, becomes a route back into education.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland welcomes Dr Tracey's report. The evidence contained within, drawn from prisoners' first-hand accounts, provides a valuable addition to the available research material and compelling support for the efficacy of the programmes delivered by the Prison Arts Foundation. The case studies shed new light on the experience of individuals brought into contact with the arts whilst in custody. They show in tangible terms how the arts have a civilizing and humanizing influence on the prison environment and how prisoners' participation in arts activities contributes to a fundamental change in attitude to offending behaviour, to improved coping skills and to a higher level of social responsibility; even bringing benefits to individual health and wellbeing. This research brings into sharper focus the significant impact of the arts on such factors, which are acknowledged as key contributors to successful rehabilitation.

Roisin McDonough
Chief Executive Arts Council of Northern Ireland
November 2017

FOREWORD

The Prison Arts Foundation provides an important therapeutic service in the custodial setting. The work conducted by a range of talented artists not only gives disengaged participants the opportunity to acquire new creative skills, but has been shown to improve their self-confidence. This can be the first step towards positive engagement with other interventions available to people in custody aimed at supporting their resettlement and rehabilitation.

Research tells us that it is important for people to take responsibility for their behaviour and develop skills which ultimately support their successful rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. I fully appreciate the work completed by Prison Arts Foundation.

Louise Cooper

Acting Director of Rehabilitation Northern Ireland Prison Service

November 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Prison Arts Foundation and Dr Shelley Tracey would like to express our gratitude to all the parties who have provided ongoing support for our programmes both in the community and prison setting.

Thank you to all the individuals who attended for interview, bringing their enthusiasm, experiences and expertise. The artists, writers and musicians in residence who have enthused, supported the participants in our arts programmes. The institutions which host PAF's arts programmes: Hydebank Wood College, HMP Maghaberry and HMP Magilligan and those members of staff who support participation in the arts programmes.

Finally, we would like to thank the Arts Council of Northern Ireland who provided the funding for this research project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this document, you'll find a summary of the independent study PAF commissioned: 'Building Foundations for change through the Arts'. If you want to read about the research study in more depth, you can download the full report from www.prisonartsfoundation.com

The report explores the impact and benefits of Prison Arts Foundation's (PAF's) arts programmes, through the lenses of fourteen participants in these programmes. These include six individuals who have continued with their arts practice since release, and current members of a creative writing group in HMP Magilligan.

PAF is a registered charity which seeks to provide access to the arts for those people who have offended in Northern Ireland. Its mission is to inspire creativity and encourage personal and social change through the arts within the criminal justice system. PAF provides visual arts, creative writing, music and drama programmes in all three prisons in Northern Ireland. It also offers a mentoring programme post-release to support individuals to develop their skills, knowledge and participation in the arts community.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The inquiry complements PAF's ongoing evaluation practices. Its purpose was to create a series of case studies about the experiences and stories of individuals who have participated in PAF's arts programmes, with the following objectives:

- To identify the key benefits and impact of being involved with PAF's programmes,
- To reveal the personal and social changes which individuals might have experienced as a result of participation, for example: confidence and self-esteem, sense of identity, feelings about prison and attitudes towards others,
- To identify the institutional and other factors which contribute to positive outcomes for participants in PAF's programmes, and
- To explore the capacity of the arts to facilitate change and rehabilitation

METHODS

This inquiry used a case study approach to address the limited detail available about individuals' experiences of arts programmes in custody. Semi-structured interviews drew on the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM),¹ a psychosocial approach to life histories interviewing. Interviews were completed in February and March 2017.

Six individuals were interviewed in the PAF's Creative Hub space in Belfast, and a creative writing group in HMP Magilligan, with eight members, was interviewed in a dedicated creative writing space in the institution. The duration of the interviews was approximately two hours.

The case studies were synthesised from the interview transcripts and a thematic analysis of the art, literary or musical work created by each of the participants. Each of the case studies presents the participants' experiences of art, incorporating direct quotations from the interviews, and where appropriate, extracts from their work or images from their art works.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Individual interviews: 4 males, 2 females. They included two visual artists, a writer and a songwriter/ musician. The other individuals practised more than one art form on an equal basis: visual art and writing in one case, and craft, writing and singing in another. Two of the writers, in addition to stories, fiction and poetry, wrote plays on prison-based themes. Both of these acclaimed plays were performed by the authors and fellow-prisoners to a range of audiences while they were in custody.

Group interview: 8 males; 1 female (writer in residence HMP Magilligan). Experiences

Participation in arts programmes: Although many of the participants had shown some talent in their art forms when they were at school, none of them practised the arts on a regular basis before they began to participate in PAF's programmes.

All of the research participants had also experienced other arts forms besides their own specialisation while they were in custody, and commented on their enjoyment of the process. They observed that fellow-prisoners also appeared to benefit from these programmes, giving examples of how some of their peers seemed to develop self-confidence and a new sense of purpose through the arts.

¹ Wengraf, 2004.

KEY FINDINGS

Benefits and impact of being involved with PAF's programmes *and* personal and social changes which individuals might have experienced as a result of participation

While the arts and life experiences of the research participants differed, the case studies revealed a number of common themes and benefits. All individuals were positive about participation in the arts programmes, affirming the central role which the arts now play in their lives. All reported a renewed sense of purpose and positivity. All of the case studies suggest that participants gained a new and positive sense of identity, as successful artists who were able to communicate their ideas effectively.

The majority of the research participants have won awards for their art, writing or music. Three of the visual artists have achieved art qualifications as a result of the programme.

Participants referred to the contributions they were able to make to others through their art:

- to their families and friends by creating works of art for them,
- to charities and other organisations,
- to PAF by participating in events and exhibitions, and
- to the prisons where their work was displayed.

A visual artist, who had participated in creating a Holocaust Museums at Magilligan, described how this experience had transformed his prejudices into a desire to communicate the importance of tolerance and acceptance.

The Magilligan writing groups identified a number of therapeutic benefits from involvement in the writing process, such as the ability to connect with others, impacts on physical health and well-being, and the liberating aspects of self-expression.

Institutional and other factors which contribute to positive outcomes for participants in PAF's programmes

Institutional factors:

- Prison staff who take an interest in participants' arts experiences and acknowledge their achievements
- Responsibilities given to artists by prison staff for creating visual art, drama and music

- Opportunities to attend a variety of classes, such as Saturday pottery and poetry classes in Hydebank Wood and the in-house choir in the institution
- A classroom space set aside for the exclusive use of the creative writing group in Magilligan, reinforcing a sense of belonging to the group and commitment to the writing process

PAF Artists and mentors:

All of the research participants made extensive reference in their interviews to PAF mentors and artists, writers and musicians in residence.

The participants noted the way in which these artists encouraged them, in the first instance, to participate in the arts programmes. They also referred to

- their ongoing encouragement,
- their useful and generous feedback,
- their willingness to share their expertise in terms of skills, knowledge and current arts practices, and
- informal mentoring and support offered post-release.

Participants also appreciated support from artists to enter competitions and have work displayed, published or performed. Three of the participants, who are now involved in PAF's post-release mentoring programme, expressed their appreciation of the support which they are receiving.

The capacity of the arts to facilitate change and rehabilitation

The outcomes of the case studies were mapped against McHugh's illustrative outcomes framework for the effects of arts in prisons². The findings from the inquiry suggest that all of McHugh's personal and social indicators for change and rehabilitation are being addressed through PAF's arts programmes, including: ***change in attitudes to offending, superior coping skills, higher levels of social responsibility, self-confidence and self-esteem, improved self-image, sense of achievement, cooperation, establishment of friendships, team-working, peer review and support, and the ability to mix with others.***

The case studies also revealed the positive impact of arts participation on mental health, with two of the individual participants ascribing their recovery from serious mental health problems to their arts experiences.

² McHugh, R. (2011) 'Art in Custody: Guilty until Proven Innocent. Strengthening the case by demonstrating the value of prison arts interventions'. MSc dissertation in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Prison Service, p. 60.

CONCLUSIONS

The case studies in this report give examples of how participation in the arts can foster change, rehabilitation and a positive sense of self in individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Participants' stories reveal that art programmes in custody are not superficial leisure activities, but have transformative potential, with long-term benefits. The findings suggest that the participation in the arts can foster "deep" desistance. This term refers to long-lasting changes in the rehabilitation process through which the individual develops a new sense of identity and outlook³.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The case-studies which emerged from the inquiry offer illuminating insights into individuals' experiences of arts programmes in custody, and of effective practice in these programmes. The creation of further case studies would add to knowledge for PAF and other arts organisations.

The case studies reveal that participants gained insights into their experiences and achievements from the process of talking about their art and artistic practices. Further opportunities for talking about arts practices are recommended, not only for participants in arts programmes, but also for artists and mentors.

Interviews with family members have the potential to extend understanding of the impact of the arts programmes.

The inquiry identified the wide-ranging contributions which PAF's artists in residence and mentors make to the arts experiences and change processes of individuals. It might be useful to interview artists and mentors to identify elements of good practice.

³ <http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/null/Introducing%20Desistance%20-%20August%202013.pdf>

FINAL WORDS

PAF's decision to commission the case studies has enabled their voices of participants in its arts programmes to be heard. The creation of further case studies, including those of artists-in-residence, might contribute more knowledge to an under-researched area. The benefits obtained by the individuals who took part in the arts programmes makes the case for continued funding of this work in the criminal justice system⁴.

An aim of the inquiry was to create spaces for the views and voices of participants in PAF arts programmes. It is fitting, therefore, that this report should end with the words of one of the participants. The poem below was composed during the group interview at Magilligan. The writer expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to take part in the inquiry, commends the camaraderie in the writing group, and makes a plea for more contact time with the writer-in-residence:

*“It was a wonderful day when we got a review,
As we could all put across our points of view,
It was a wonderful day in creative writing,
Away from the noise, shouting and fighting,
We all come together, a real good team,
We worked together like a dream,
So now we show the Prison Arts,
That everything we do comes from our hearts,
So hopefully our tutor can extend their hours,
So we have more time to show our amazing powers,
So I thank you for taking the time to come in,
For everyone involved it's a win win.”*

T McC (Magilligan)

⁴ Hammitt, (2011) writing about the US context, states that “prison art programs consistently demonstrate beneficial savings in comparison to their rather insignificant cost of implementation” (p. 579).

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For more information about the Prison Arts Foundation's programmes, becoming involved with our work please visit:

www.prisonartsfoundation.com

The Prison Arts Foundation

Unit 3 Clanmil Arts & Business Centre

2-10 Bridge Street

Belfast

BT11LU

02890 247872

info@prisonartsfoundation.com

Charity No. NIC101557

Company Registered No. NI607881

