

*What Works Centre for Wellbeing and  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing*

# Arts Engagement and Wellbeing

Policy Briefing – July 2017

## Key Messages:

- **The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing has undertaken a major Inquiry into the role of the arts in health and wellbeing.**
- **A new report – Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing – contains evidence of ways in which arts engagement can improve wellbeing across the life course.**
- **This takes account of childhood development, the wellbeing of workers and older adults and the ways in which built and natural environments enhance wellbeing.**

## Children and Young People

- Arts engagement in schools can improve social and emotional wellbeing in pupils.
- The Art Room – which every week provides a studio environment for over 500 children and young people in more than 40 primary and secondary schools in Oxfordshire, London and Edinburgh – has shown an 87.5 percent improvement in pupils' self-reported mood and self-esteem.
- Community-based arts activities help children and young people explore identities, build confidence and increase coping strategies.
- The Alchemy Project – a co-production between a dance company and the early intervention in psychosis team at South London and Maudsley NHS Trust – found that participants demonstrated clinically significant improvements in wellbeing.
- Participatory arts in children's hospitals provide a pleasurable diversion from the anxiety of treatment and the boredom of long waiting times.

## Working-Age Adults

- Creative activity undertaken outside of work can hasten recovery from work strain and enhance work-related performance.
- Within the NHS, one of the UK's largest employers, there is a recognised link between staff wellbeing and patient satisfaction.
- Cultural engagement and arts therapy can improve wellbeing in healthcare staff.
- Arts engagement can enhance wellbeing in adults recovering from illness or injury, including stroke, and living with long-term conditions, such as cancer, respiratory disease and Parkinson's disease.
- Arts engagement has also been found to increase wellbeing in carers, of which there are an estimated 5.5 million in England.

## Older Adults

- There is evidence that arts engagement should be thought of as an integral part of healthy ageing.
- An analysis of data from more than 15,000 older people published by Age UK in February 2017 found that engagement in creative and cultural activities made the highest contribution to overall wellbeing.
- Social isolation and loneliness affect people of all ages. In older adults, social participation is more beneficial for health than giving up smoking.
- Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council has set up four community anchor organisations, each with a micro-commissioning budget of £50,000, to stimulate arts activities in response to local need. The success of the project has led it to become a universal service funded by the council.
- A body of evidence is accumulating which suggests a relationship between arts engagement and

wellbeing in people with dementia and their carers. *Creative Health* presents examples of practice and research in this area across eight different art forms.

#### End of Life

- Art-making and art-viewing have been seen to have a positive impact on wellbeing in the palliative care environment.

The participatory arts and arts therapies can:

- offer physical, psychological, spiritual and social support to people facing death.
- assuage the pain and anxiety of terminal illness and assist people in coming to terms with dying.
- help people to find meaning in the story of their lives and develop hopeful narratives.
- provide access to deep, nuanced feelings, communicated through metaphor and imagery.
- form part of a legacy, through the creation of artworks to be shared with loved ones.
- give voice to those who no longer feel able to speak and restore a sense of control to those who feel powerless.

#### Place, Community, Environment

- A study of more than 21,000 urban residents in 34 European nations found that access to open spaces helped to diminish wellbeing inequalities.
- The arts, including architecture and design, can improve the quality of healthcare environments.
- A review commissioned by the Department of Health showed that the physical environment of healthcare facilities contributed to social and psychological wellbeing.
- An estimated one in five GP visits is made for non-medical reasons. As part of a move towards place-based care, social prescribing seeks solutions to psychosocial problems in the community beyond the clinical environment. The most common outcomes of such community referral schemes are: increases in self-esteem and confidence; a greater sense of control and empowerment; improvements in psychological wellbeing; and reductions in anxiety and depression.

- Arts on prescription is a vital part of social prescribing, providing participatory creative activities that help to restore people's wellbeing and reduce anxiety, depression and stress. One such programme in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire showed that GP consultation rates dropped by 37 percent and hospital admissions by 27 percent, representing a saving of £216 per patient.

#### How Can we Turn this Evidence into Action?

*Creative Health* makes a series of suggestions, aimed at improving practice, research and funding, and ten specific recommendations as catalysts for the change of thinking and practice that can open the way for the potential of the arts for health and wellbeing to be realised.

#### Information and Contact Details

The APPG on Arts, Health and Wellbeing is chaired by Rt Hon. Ed Vaizey MP and Rt Hon. Lord Howarth of Newport CBE, and the secretariat is provided by the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing. *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing* was researched and drafted by Dr Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt at King's College London.

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