



Voluntary Arts



The role of voluntary arts activity in Creative People and Places

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1. Introduction

Creative People and Places was established as an experimental action research programme to enable and encourage innovative approaches to increasing participation in the arts, in particular in areas of the country that currently have the lowest levels of arts participation.

Voluntary Arts is the national representative organisation for the voluntary arts sector across the UK and Ireland – promoting voluntary participation in creative cultural activity in order to develop a healthy, creative and engaged civil society. The ethos of Voluntary Arts is that everyone should have some form of creative self-expression in their lives – because of the wide range of benefits participation in creative cultural activity brings to the individual. Ideally, everyone should practice this creativity collectively with others in social groups – because of the benefits such activity brings to communities.

Voluntary Arts represents and supports a broad range of unpaid voluntary arts activity including formally constituted volunteer-led amateur groups (such as choirs, amateur theatre companies and morris dance troupes) as well as more informal groups (eg folk music sessions) and individual amateur participants (eg those practising painting or crafts in their own homes). As well as traditional amateur arts and crafts activities, the phrase ‘voluntary arts’ encompasses wider (and emerging) definitions of the arts within differing cultures, new forms of digital creativity and other areas of cultural creativity, such as those practised in gardens, kitchens and workshops.

One of Arts Council England’s stated aims for Creative People and Places is “to encourage partnerships across the subsidised, amateur and commercial sectors”. At the end of 2014 Voluntary Arts was contracted by the CPP network to investigate the challenges and opportunities for each CPP in relation to working with the voluntary and amateur arts sector. In 2015 Voluntary Arts interviewed all 21 CPPs to gather local information and build an overall picture. In this first round of interviews Voluntary Arts focussed on the potential involvement of established formal voluntary arts groups within Creative People and Places programmes, emphasising the ‘attainable role models’ that members of voluntary arts groups might represent for other people in the same communities and the long-term sustainable model that voluntary arts groups provide for ongoing participation in creative cultural activity.

The information and learning gathered through these interviews was consolidated in the report ‘Creative People and Places: Engagement with voluntary arts groups’ (February 2016, available at www.voluntaryarts.org/CPP-10-things/) which concluded that the level of engagement between CPP consortia and voluntary arts groups varied considerably. Whilst all CPPs were working with a diverse range of groups from the voluntary, public and private sectors, there were relatively few concrete examples of working closely with voluntary arts groups or placing them at the centre of their planning. Fewer than half of the 21 CPPs could provide examples of significant involvement of voluntary arts groups. This finding prompted Voluntary Arts to look at practical ways in which it could support CPPs that would like more help with involving local voluntary arts groups. It also led Voluntary Arts to think harder about how its understanding of the full range of voluntary arts activity could help CPPs achieve their goals.

Voluntary Arts conducted a second set of interviews with CPPs in March-April 2016 to look at developments and the journey travelled across the CPP network. In these interviews Voluntary Arts looked more broadly at how CPPs are involving established voluntary arts groups but also considered other examples of voluntary arts activity, such as individual voluntary participation. In this context many of the interviewees commented on the current policy interest in 'everyday participation'. This is addressed in the next section of this report.

This report summarises common themes, challenges and examples of good practice around working with voluntary arts groups arising from the interviews with CPPs, as well as identifying implications for peer learning and further research.



Ferry Tales (Market Place)

Photo: Alex McElroy and Libby Appleyard

Cover image: Compagnie Artonik's Holi celebration (CPP Hounslow)

Photo: Vipul Sangoi

2. Everyday Participation

Over the past twelve months the report of The Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value, the BBC Get Creative Campaign, the AHRC Cultural Value Project, the Understanding Everyday Participation research project, and a series of regional seminars commissioned by Arts Council England and organised by 64 Million Artists have all contributed to a context where 'everyday participation' is becoming a key policy area.

"There is mounting evidence that everyday forms of cultural participation and creation (including activities that people carry out in their homes) are of great importance. They are key to leading a rich and fulfilling life as well as crucial for the financial prosperity of the industries that belong to the Cultural and Creative Ecosystem."

Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth – The 2015 Report by the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value

Understanding Everyday Participation: Articulating Cultural Values is a five-year research project (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of their Connected Communities: Cultures and Creative Economies programme) which is looking at the meanings and stakes people attach to their hobbies and pastimes.

"Our aim is to generate new understandings of community formation and capacity through participation, which we will develop through collaborations with partners and participant groups to evolve better practice for policy makers and cultural organisations."

Get Creative is a celebration of the world-class arts, culture and creativity that happens every day across the UK. The campaign shines "a spotlight on the creativity that surrounds us everywhere in venues of all shapes and sizes: from village hall to the concert hall, and of course at home".

In June 2016, 64 Million Artists published the report 'Everyday Creativity: from Great Art and Culture for Everyone, to Great Arts and Culture by, with and for Everyone', which says:

"This report recognises that whilst ACE specifically could and should do more to explicitly recognise and value everyday creativity, the arts sector and society at large can also contribute to shifts in how this wider culture is valued."

In a blog post responding to the 64 Million Artists report, Arts Council England Executive Director, Laura Dyer, wrote:

"We currently support and invest in a range of activity that serves the growing popular appetite for creative expression. The need to acknowledge this was highlighted in the Warwick Commission's report into Cultural Value. In particular, our flagship Creative People and Places programme funds activity in 21 places across England and aims to encourage greater involvement in creativity and culture with by and for the public, both as audiences and as participants. The public are also encouraged to engage as decision makers. We are learning how to apply this

approach more effectively and the lessons will be valuable in shaping our approach to future projects. We want to do more to engage more people actively in art and culture, wherever they live, and however they participate.”

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/value-everyday-creativity>

CPPs each employ a sophisticated mixture of approaches to increasing participation but most CPPs include both some form of large-scale inspirational events involving professional artists or arts organisations as well as some small-scale grassroots activities focusing on everyday participation. There is significant variation amongst CPPs between those who operate much more distinctly towards one or other end of this simple spectrum.

In the telephone interviews conducted by Voluntary Arts in March-April 2016 most CPPs said they were familiar with the current policy interest in everyday participation and recognised voluntary arts activity as falling within this end of the spectrum.

One CPP said about everyday participation *“For us it’s a really big part. When we talk to people about what they want to do, what comes highest is things that involve them having a go. Regular participation in the arts – things people do themselves in an everyday way – that’s more viable in an area like this: things people can do at home or very locally.”*

Another CPP said *“Formal acknowledgement that everyday participation counts as taking part in the arts is important. People are doing it but don’t see it as ‘arts’. It is important for ACE to see this as part of the continuum.”*

Several CPPs felt they need to do more on everyday participation – because *“the community and voluntary is where sustainability sits”*.

It was interesting to hear several CPPs considering how everyday participation links to their other activities. One CPP said *“We don’t do anything specifically to encourage everyday participation, though we do encourage people who do everyday participation to come and join our inspirational activities – take what you have been doing and take it to the next level.”* Conversely another CPP talked about encouraging people it had engaged through various interventions to continue their involvement in the arts through everyday participation – seeing the everyday activity as a progression pathway for people to take on themselves: *“people taking this home with themselves to do with their family – and then starting to form groups.”*

EXAMPLE: Poets at Beans Coffee Shop (First Art)

A poetry group that used to meet at Beans Coffee Shop in Bolsover was re-established through a CPP award from First Art which brought in a poet, Matt Black, to work with them. The group also went on a go-see to Buxton Poetry Festival. The poetry group is now meeting weekly and has become very active.

“Last Friday, a group of poets and/or poem appreciators gathered upstairs at BEANS to read a poem (or two)..... and/or to listen to poems read by others. There were poems about miners, pets, war, shoes, women, ward sisters, turning 50 and..... well, I can’t remember them all. But it was good and there was a lot of laughing and thinking and even time for some chatting. So..... we’re going to do it again. Obviously it won’t be exactly the same – new and different poems are calling us. If you’d like to come along, the next Share a Poem Evening is on 24th June from 7 – 9 pm. We have an 8.30 watershed – well, you know what poets are like. You can read a poem you’ve written – one written by someone else – or just sit and listen. It reminds you just how powerful, moving, funny and fun words can be. And the people are nice too!”

EXAMPLE: Groundworks (Creative Black Country)

Creative Black Country's Groundworks scheme has been pairing groups of local people with a specialist Arts Advisor to provide support and enable creative activities, and a Community Development Worker to support the groups to become self sustaining. Each group goes on a year-long creative journey with local people making decisions about what they would like to do and to see in their local areas. One women's group in Walsall developed an activity combining cake and poetry with also plans to develop a fashion show.

The above examples show some of the interesting ways in which CPPs are using everyday participation to increase engagement. The collective experiences and learning of CPPs about the role of everyday participation in the 'user-journey' for new participants could make a valuable contribution to the current national policy debate.

Within this broader debate the main focus of the telephone interviews conducted by Voluntary Arts in March-April 2016 was how CPPs are specifically involving voluntary arts activity in their programmes. This is addressed in the next section of this report.



Poets at Beans Coffee Shop Gallery - part of Bolsover Stories Festival (First Art)

3. Encouraging voluntary and amateur arts activity in practice

Voluntary Arts asked each CPP how it was encouraging voluntary and amateur arts activity within its programme to increase engagement. Four broad categories emerged from the interviews: working with existing voluntary arts groups; helping to establish new voluntary arts groups; involving individual volunteers; and engaging with non-arts voluntary organisations.

3.1 Existing voluntary arts groups

Almost all CPPs have now worked with existing voluntary arts groups with some CPPs involving a considerable number of amateur groups, including craft groups, knit & natter groups, brass bands, jazz ensembles, amateur theatre companies and choirs. CPPs have also worked with broader groups such as a women's health organisation, which uses the arts to explore diversity, and a local arts club that supports people with learning and physical disabilities.

EXAMPLE: Batley Does Opera (Creative Scene)

Following a series of workshops with professional singers from Opera North, a cast of over 100 local performers took to the stage in Batley's beautiful Methodist Church on Tuesday 22 March 2016 for the inaugural Batley Does Opera event.

The evening of music, song and dance was inspired by Donizetti's light-hearted opera *L'elisir d'amore* (The Elixir of Love). Batley residents performed excerpts from the opera alongside their own original songs composed during the workshop sessions. This was followed by a condensed 'Whistle Stop' version of *The Elixir of Love* performed by artists from Opera North.

Batley Does Opera is an innovative partnership between Creative Scene, Opera North and Batley Business Association. It was initiated by Batley-based lawyer Andrew Marsden, who is one of Creative Scene's 'SceneMakers' – local volunteers who work with the CPP to develop ideas for arts projects to benefit the wider community.

Since its launch, the initiative has attracted the involvement of local schools and community groups from across Batley including Sarah Taylor School of Dance, Acorn Productions, Batley Community Choir, Carlinghow Princess Royal J, I & N School and Batley Parish Junior School. The participants – all drawn from local community groups and schools – range in age from 9 to 75 years.

As well as attending singing and drama workshops with Opera North, those taking part were given the chance to attend the Company's recent production of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* at the Grand Theatre in Leeds, with children from the participating schools enjoying the special schools' matinee performance at the end of February.

Building on the incredible enthusiasm which has already been shown for the project, Batley Does Opera is now planning a larger scale community opera to be performed in Batley in 2017.

EXAMPLE: Bolsover Festival of Brass (First Art)

First Art broadcast a live web stream of Bolsover Festival of Brass – one of the biggest brass band festivals in the country – a one-day event involving 40 bands and 2,000 musicians.

Staged on Sunday 4 October 2015 at Heritage High School in Clowne (Derbyshire) the 10-hour live web-stream showcased the event as it happened and featured live web chats with band members and arts professionals.

The webcast was watched by more than 3,000 people in 33 countries. Darren Henley and Ed Vaizey tweeted about it. As a result, two of the finalists were then offered places in the national finals at the Royal Albert Hall.

The festival was broadcast on a new section of the First Art website dedicated to streaming live arts performances (and pre-recorded webcasts/podcasts) to audiences in the First Art area and internationally. This channel will become integral in creating a digital arts hub for the people of the area, and raising the profile of these areas nationally and internationally.

EXAMPLE: Ferry Tales (Market Place)

This project in Brandon was completely built around existing voluntary arts groups. One of them, local amateur dramatics group, Shoestring Theatre Company, worked with professionals to create a heritage trail, commissioning a writer and some performers to tell the story of Brandon down the High Street. The resulting event, in September 2016, was Ferry Tales – a magical celebration of Brandon's rich heritage of hospitality and of the people who have passed through.

As part of Ferry Tales, Shoestring Theatre Company, working with the storytelling organisation Snail Tails, presented Brandon Ghosts and Stories at various locations along the High Street in Brandon Town Centre, journeying through time and folklore to uncover some of Suffolk's most intriguing, exciting, and engaging mysteries. As people passed through the riverside market town of Brandon, they spotted ghosts from various centuries all the way back to Saxon times: *"Speak with some to hear their tales, and you will start gathering clues to a treasure so great, it would change the course of English history... And, once you find that treasure, collect your reward – a keepsake to remember all the history, mythology and fun you've enjoyed!"*

The groups were heavily involved in the planning of the event, with one of the professional artists brought to work alongside them being chosen because he talked about working "with them", rather than "working on them...". This created the basis for their strong ownership of the project.

In the report from the first round of interviews with CPPs conducted by Voluntary Arts ('Creative People and Places: Engagement with voluntary arts groups' - February 2016, available at www.voluntaryarts.org/CPP-10-things/), it was noted that small scale commissioning – also known as micro-commissioning – was already proving to be a particularly effective way of engaging existing voluntary arts groups. The second round of interviews revealed that some CPPs have deliberately avoided this route. One CPP said *"We wanted to play down expectations that we are a grant funder. If we are having a conversation with a group and find out what they want to do we co-commission it with them. We are trying to move it away from being a financial transaction."*

The first report pointed out that voluntary arts groups can represent the full range of artistic quality – from beginner to 'great art' and said "don't assume that voluntary or amateur means low quality but build in criteria to ensure that groups selected for micro-commissioning or capacity building can demonstrate the appropriate level of quality for the role you are asking them to play". Issues of quality still seem to be a barrier in some cases, with one CPP saying in the second round of interviews *"we did have one volunteer-led project in the last round but the panel was unsure about quality as there wasn't a professional artist involved."*



Batley Does Opera (Creative Scene)
Photo: Len Grant

The first report warned that CPPs cannot assume that voluntary arts groups are aware of the opportunities or have the capacity to engage. In the second round of interviews many of the CPPs who had offered opportunities for micro-commissioning reported that it had been difficult to get existing voluntary arts groups to apply. One CPP said *“because it has to be about reaching new audiences the classic voluntary arts groups haven’t applied because they can’t take on any more: they just want to do what they do – but would like some money to do so.”*

It is important to recognise the level of resources amateurs put into their activity – particularly time and money. The biggest funders of voluntary arts activity are the participants themselves. Of course they usually benefit from this input – but so do many others who cannot afford to put in such resources and benefit from the generosity of these others. The DCMS/Arts Council England Report ‘Our Creative Talent’ (2008) says: *“In a society where there is a significant amount of competition for people’s time and money, this level of personal and financial commitment is a huge asset for the sector and an indicator of its value. Crucially, the voluntary arts sector is a prime example of balancing supply and demand at a local level. This has enabled many groups to be sustainable over a long period of time, some for decades and even over 100 years, and indicates that the sector is highly valued by those directly participating in creative activity, by audiences and by the wider community.”*

Two of Arts Council England’s stated aims for Creative People and Places are “to learn more about how to establish sustainable arts and cultural opportunities” and “to encourage partnerships across the subsidised, amateur and commercial sectors”. In many communities, particularly where there is little professional arts provision, voluntary arts groups represent a sustainable long-term framework for local cultural activity. Voluntary Arts believes it is important, therefore, for CPPs to engage with established voluntary arts groups but acknowledges that this may require a careful process of building understanding and trust.

One CPP diagnosed the challenge, saying *“We want to enable the community to be more active in putting on the small and the regular but the community don’t necessarily want to collaborate: they have no sense of ownership. They want to be supported in their own events – then they would be more up for collaborating. But they are being asked to collaborate while they are struggling to do the stuff they want to do.”*

Another CPP said: *“Lots of groups applied for funding to do their own thing but we wanted to work with them to inter-weave them into the CPP programme. We saw it as a development opportunity but it was a challenge to get that message across. We don’t want to take over their activity but to provide them with the opportunity to take it a stage further and to give them more profile.”*

Many voluntary arts groups are already at capacity and may find it difficult to engage with CPP. People running voluntary arts groups do so in their spare time. Many have demanding day jobs and do their group’s administration in evenings and at weekends. Running a successful voluntary arts group can be incredibly demanding and just putting on the regular annual programme of activities is a challenge in terms of the time capacity of the volunteers. So the first reaction if groups are asked to do something additional and different may well be negative because the extra administrative demands may seem unmanageable.

To develop a constructive relationship with voluntary arts groups it might be necessary to invest some time and care into separate preliminary discussions with each organisation to help the CPP and the relevant groups to begin to understand each other’s capacity, skills and limitations. Formal recognition and praise, particularly from someone working professionally in the arts, is incredibly motivating for amateurs. The power of praise should not be underestimated but it is important to bear in mind that amateurs will see through false plaudits: take time to experience the artistic product of a group’s activity and to appreciate it.

Voluntary Arts is now working directly in partnership with several CPPs to support the involvement of voluntary and amateur arts activity in their programmes. For example Voluntary Arts and Super Slow Way have embarked on an ‘Epic Place’ project in Oswaldtwistle to create a community arts forum and offer capacity building support/training, and a ‘Culture Guides’ project working with volunteers to get more people involved in voluntary and amateur arts activities.

Despite the challenges of engaging existing voluntary arts groups, it is important to include them as CPPs seek to strengthen the local cultural ecology by joining-up the full range of creative activity. Voluntary arts groups often form a significant part of that ecology, involving considerable numbers of local people as participants and audience members over many years.

One CPP said: *“Working with organisations that do things a certain way and always have done takes time. Getting people round a table to discuss it leads to lengthy meetings. [The CPP] is seen as the ones with the money but we don’t want to be in control. We need to be very transparent about why certain things aren’t feasible.”*

Voluntary Arts has produced a factsheet for CPPs which identifies '10 things you need to know about working with amateur arts groups' - available as a free download from <http://www.voluntaryarts.org/CPP-10-things/>

The two sets of interviews with CPPs conducted by Voluntary Arts have highlighted some of the difficulties of involving voluntary arts groups but have also revealed the many rewards of doing so – as demonstrated in the above examples. The key lessons drawn from the interviews are:

- invest time and care into separate preliminary discussions with each voluntary arts group to help the CPP and the relevant group to begin to understand each other's capacity, skills and limitations;
- manage the expectations of voluntary arts groups carefully from the outset, particularly in relation to the availability of funding from CPPs;
- assess the artistic quality of voluntary arts groups as with any other artists or arts organisations, rather than assuming that their voluntary status suggests a particular level of quality.

3.2 Establishing new voluntary arts groups

Most CPPs have been involved in establishing new voluntary arts groups as a way of sustaining participation after the end of a CPP initiative. One CPP said: "our main focus is to create new groups". It is clear that lots of new groups are emerging from CPP programmes across the country. These new groups provide a safe, stable environment in which people can develop new skills and explore their creativity.

EXAMPLE: Corby International Orchestra (Made in Corby)

Made in Corby, in partnership with The Core at Corby Cube, commissioned internationally renowned British-Asian musician and composer Arun Ghosh to form a new ensemble drawing upon the varied musical communities in Corby. They performed over an hour of new music as the finale to Corby's International Day celebrations on Saturday 5 September 2015.

The aim of the project was to bring together musicians across the borough, many of whom gather in distinct groups or as individuals who play with each other informally and infrequently. Made in Corby wanted to create a performance that truly reflected the diversity of musical traditions in Corby and the only way to do this was to create new music, composed with, by and for the local population. They also wanted to showcase the talent in Corby and attract new audiences.

Made in Corby brought skills and knowledge around engaging the local community and worked with Arun to identify a range of groups for him to visit. As well as talking about the project, he led taster sessions, joined a local choir for an evening and performed at several local jam nights. Made in Corby then issued an invitation for any local musician, regardless of background or ability, to take part in a two week residency to devise material for the final performance.

The performance was part of Corby's International Day, an event organised by Corby VCS and Corby Borough Council to celebrate the diversity of the town. The main event happened in a public square directly outside the theatre and incorporated performances by local amateur groups and a range of international food stalls. Made in Corby also ran three internationally-themed taster sessions of visual art, storytelling and belly dance during the afternoon in the theatre.

Corby International Orchestra project involved 20 local musicians, alongside Corby Silver Band, the Deep Roots Tall Trees Choir and other existing groups. These 20 musicians were keen to keep working together. Made in Corby helped to write a constitution for the new group (The Corby Music Collective) and looked for funding from a local community foundation towards the costs of a composer, rehearsal space and another performance. As one participant said *“I want to play more and more. Obviously not every day for two weeks. But still continue to collaborate and write new music together. I want the band to be looked at by the local area as “the” must see band. I think we can do it.”*

EXAMPLE: Time to Enjoy (Bait)

Bait's Time to Enjoy arts for health initiative involves people experiencing, or at risk of mental health problems. At the end of each twelve week programme there is sometimes a group that want to carry on and develop further. Sometimes the group includes natural leaders who can make it happen, but often there is a need for more hand-holding by bait, or Northumberland Council for Voluntary Associations (NCVA) which is a member of the CPP consortium, or by one of bait's Creative Connectors (local people who want to develop a mix of volunteer and paid work in the arts).

Bedlington Community Centre hosted Time to Enjoy craft sessions with artist Elaine Porter, making crafts benefiting the participants, their family and the community centre's wider events. The Time to Enjoy programme was so successful that the community centre wanted to carry on offering activities and collaborated with bait and NCVA to submit a funding application to Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts. The successful funding bid led to the development of Bedlington Creatives - a group that meets on a Thursday morning in the community centre, working with different artists to produce pieces for an exhibition in February 2017. They are delving into the history and heritage of Bedlington and so far wildlife and old photographs have been an inspiration for local artist Yvette Hawkins for some printing work and a collage. Artist Stevie Ronnie has led sessions on creative writing and upcycling, with the group visiting the local market to buy items for upcycling. The group is currently working with animation artist Sheryl Jenkins. Alongside the Thursday group, a weekend creatives group has developed. They meet on a Saturday morning in the community centre where the focus is textile art.

EXAMPLE – Hounslow Community Choir (Hounslow)

The idea of a community choir in Hounslow came about following consultation with local people. The choir is led by Hounslow Music Service, one of the CPP Hounslow consortium partners and it first met in September 2015 in central Hounslow. After only eleven rehearsals, the choir gave its debut performance at the Treaty Shopping Centre on Hounslow High Street. Performing a mixture of festive music and popular classics for half an hour, approximately one hundred and twenty people stopped to listen to this free event. Song sheets were handed out and the audience were encouraged to join in and sing along. The atmosphere was fantastic.

News of the choir continued to spread, with new members joining all the time. The first rehearsal of 2016 saw over thirty people turn up, with the membership base offering a snapshot of Hounslow's ethnically diverse population. Members range from young adults to retirees, those who can read music and have sung before to individuals trying it out for the very first time, and perhaps most surprisingly, the choir now boasts a male voice 'section'.

February saw the choir try something completely new as part of BBC Get Creative. Whereas in their last performance the choir had sung to a passing audience, on this occasion they wanted people to actively join in and have a chance to take a leading role. Taking over a vacant shop for the day in the Treaty Shopping Centre, the choir staged 'Choir-oke!', an opportunity for anyone to choose a song from the choir's selection of music and karaoke classics to sing with the choir as backing singers.

As soon as the shop doors opened, shoppers were intrigued by what was going on and it wasn't long until the choir was tackling some pretty varied repertoire, singing everything from Spice Girls to Elvis, along with some particularly impressive head banging to Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody! The choir had a great time and rose to the challenge of singing music, which some members had never heard before. The event was a huge success, with 111 people entering the shop over two hours.

The choir are now looking forward to ending their first year with an invitation to perform at Hounslow's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the London Fire Brigade.



*Hounslow Community Choir (Hounslow CPP)
Photo: Alex Brenner*

As with most existing voluntary arts organisations, new groups often seek to improve their creative technique and understanding by bringing in expert tutors or leaders, though one CPP noted: "it's not about paying artists every session: people also want to learn from each other. They are bringing in guest artists – including local people whose talents have been hidden."

Several CPPs spoke about the benefits for groups of forming their own networks with each other. It is important to ensure that new groups emerging from CPP programmes have the support they need to develop and sustain themselves. But such support should not be the role of the CPPs themselves.

CPPs, by their nature, are only in place for a time-limited period. One CPP said: *“When we come across things that need troubleshooting we try to help – taking on a kind of arts development role.”* At a particularly difficult time in the cycle of local government funding cuts, some CPPs said they felt pressure to try to fill a gap in local authority arts development provision. One CPP spoke about the difficulties of being seen as a pseudo local authority arts development service and said: *“really we should be encouraging the work of creative hubs that already exist – those are our route to sustainability beyond CPP – and building stronger relationships with other arts organisations.”*

There is a real danger of CPP being seen by voluntary arts groups (and other cultural organisations) as replacing local authority Arts Development Officers (where those posts have been lost). This is clearly not a sustainable solution and moving towards providing more general support for cultural organisations would risk distracting the CPP from its specific purpose to increase engagement.

One CPP said: *“We need to be clear that CPP is part of the arts ecology – it is not the arts ecology.”*

It is important, therefore, for CPPs to be helping to link arts organisations, particularly new voluntary arts groups, to each other and to sustainable sources of support such as local Councils for Voluntary Service. For example new voluntary arts groups initiated as part of Bait’s ‘Time to Enjoy’ programme benefit from the hand-holding support provided by Northumberland Council for Voluntary Action (a Bait consortium member). Similarly Transported is working with Community Links to support new voluntary arts groups established as a result of its CPP taster workshops.

Voluntary Arts provides a wide range of information briefings to help people setting up and running voluntary arts groups. Our briefings are written in plain English. Briefings talk you through a range of tasks you may face, and signpost you to further help should you need it. From writing a funding application to using Facebook, from child protection to planning a marketing campaign, there are over 150 Voluntary Arts briefings designed to make your life easier. All our briefings are free to download from the ‘Resources’ section on our website – where you’ll also find more in-depth publications and toolkits: www.voluntaryarts.org

3.3 Individual volunteers

One of the main findings of the first set of interviews with CPPs conducted by Voluntary Arts in 2015 was that, while many CPPs had been finding it difficult to involve existing voluntary arts groups in their programmes, most CPPs had found it much easier and more effective to work with individual volunteers. Many of these volunteers were also members of local voluntary arts groups (such as amateur theatre companies or choral societies) or non-arts voluntary organisations (including residents’ associations and Women’s Institutes) but their engagement with the CPP programme did not require the approval of the relevant groups’ committees or the commitment of the groups as a whole.

In its second round of interviews with CPPs, Voluntary Arts was keen to look at how this involvement of volunteers had developed and how it was helping CPPs to use voluntary and amateur arts activities.

One CPP said: *“our whole programme is built on this”.*

Another CPP said: *“our approach has always been about individuals. It’s individuals that make change – the go-to people that like to make stuff happen.”*

One CPP commented: “someone you trust saying this is a good thing to get involved in, eg on social media, can be very persuasive: the normal person who lives down the street who has got involved in an arts activity.”

EXAMPLE: Minster Gatehouse, Sheerness, Kent (Ideas Test)

“Mary, one of the volunteers at Minster Gatehouse museum (which is completely run by volunteers), came to talk to us about doing something creative. We came up with idea of working with artists to create a timeline for the museum. Two locally based artists worked with volunteers and young people from local schools to paint a timeline up the spiral staircase in the Gatehouse. Everyone else got on board over time but Mary was the key driver.”

Some CPPs have developed formal networks of volunteers to act as promoters, commissioners or ambassadors. Other CPPs have a more ad-hoc approach, bringing in key individuals with good local connections to act as catalysts for particular activities.

EXAMPLE: Community Teams (Right Up Our Street)

Right Up Our Street appealed for help from local people, saying *“Whether you can give just an hour or a regular afternoon, we’d love to hear from you! In return you’ll meet new people, get involved in social events, trips and visits, be offered support and professional training opportunities, gain valuable experience, new skills and confidence and have the chance to make something exciting happen in your community.”*

In targeted areas around Doncaster, freelance Arts Supporters built volunteer Community Teams and led a range of fantastic and varied projects. In 2016, 18 Community Associates were drawn from these local Community Teams to form the main programming team for Right Up Our Street.

Right Up Our Street is now commissioning and employing some people who started as volunteers to run workshops, lead choirs, lead poetry writing etc. The volunteers received mentoring and support from Right Up Our Street so they can now confidently lead and deliver professional workshops themselves.

EXAMPLE: Community Champions (The Cultural Spring)

The Cultural Spring has recruited more than 100 local volunteer Community Champions to help shape the CPP programme. The Community Champions: spread the word about Cultural Spring projects in your neighbourhood; help to decide what art is programmed; curate and commission; take the lead in developing new activities; help to advocate for more arts activity locally; take part in cultural trips to theatres galleries and festivals across the North East; and get involved in local training about managing arts projects.

Lucyanne Mackie, Cultural Spring Community Champion, said *“Being involved with the Cultural Spring Project has been such a positive experience for me in many ways. Initially it was a pleasure to become absorbed in lots of different art and music taster sessions, it really reminded me how much I enjoyed both the creative input as well as getting together with like-minded people in the community. Before long I realised that I was watching other people as well as myself grow in confidence under the gentle and reassuring guidance of the artists leading the sessions. What participants do and don’t want to have a go at is valued, and ideas for new taster sessions are encouraged. The emphasis really does seem to be upon enjoyment and self discovery without pressure, and there have been many hilarious moments.”*

Some CPPs have experienced difficulties in recruiting volunteers because of the ad hoc nature of what they are delivering. Some CPPs said it was easier to get community activists interested who were already involved in non-arts community organisations (such as Rotary Clubs or Women's Institutes).

One CPP said it was in the process of developing a Volunteer Policy. Given the extensive use of volunteers throughout the CPP programme, it is advisable for all CPPs to have a formal Volunteer Policy to ensure they adhere to current legislation and best practice in relation to the recruitment, selection, management and reward of volunteers.

Volunteering in the arts: a toolkit created by Voluntary Arts and Volunteering England with support from Arts Council England is available as a free download at:

<http://www.voluntaryarts.org/volunteering-in-the-arts-toolkit/>

One CPP commented: *"by forming a relationship with an individual that can lead to a relationship with a group. Approaching group committees can be quite slow. Whereas one keen person can sell it back to the group."*

Another CPP said: *"we have found that groups are quite fixed in their views. It has worked much better for us to target individuals ... though quite a lot of them are members of voluntary arts groups."*

Recruiting individual volunteers appears to be an effective way for CPPs to develop voluntary and amateur arts activity and to encourage the involvement of existing voluntary arts groups in their programmes but this creates a responsibility for the CPP to ensure its volunteers are being properly managed.



HeckmondFRIGHT (Creative Scene)

3.4 Non-arts voluntary organisations

Another key finding from Voluntary Arts' first set of interviews with CPPs was the extent to which they were working with non-arts voluntary organisations. The second set of interviews with CPPs confirmed that this has emerged as one of the main ways in which CPPs are effectively engaging new participants in cultural activities.

A significant proportion of voluntary and amateur arts activity has always taken place within voluntary organisations whose main purpose is not related to a specific artform. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport/Arts Council England research report 'Our Creative Talent' (DCMS, 2008) identified 24,330 such 'generalist' groups in England who regularly undertake some voluntary arts activity. Voluntary Arts has previously worked with the National Federation of Women's Institutes, National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs and others to support such activity.

One CPP said: *"A lot of our partnerships are with groups whose starting point is something else."*

In the telephone interviews CPPs reported having worked with non-arts voluntary organisations including: local community groups, neighbourhood associations, tenant and residents associations, social clubs, schools, nurseries, a miners welfare centre, libraries, sport groups, Women's Institutes, town centre partnerships, a railway group, and a group for people recovering from alcohol abuse.

One CPP said *"we hope the organisations we are working with will continue to do arts activities afterwards (some had done some before but not at this level)."*

Another CPP stressed that it was important that *"every project connects with a community of place or interest."*

EXAMPLE: Strood Community Association, Kent (Ideas Test)

Strood Community Association was a key player in Ideas Test's 'Strood Out of the Ordinary Places' project. The group surveyed everyone who came through the door. They were very keen for something to happen in Strood. The project turned into a community pantomime called 'No Tail' about Strood (which had been perceived as having no stories) – providing an opportunity for people to bring their own stories. A lovely handwritten letter from an elderly audience member about a local chip shop was mentioned in the performance which took place in a historic building in an industrial estate in Strood.

EXAMPLE: The Midland Pub Association (Creative Black Country)

For over 30 years, The Black Country has been quietly incubating a revolution in the pub trade known as 'Desi pub' - local curry pubs or Asian pubs. It's an East meets West story, where the classic English pub with its ales, darts, dominos & sports meets Punjabi food and Bhangra music. Asian landlords have been salvaging the struggling pub trade by reinventing failed pubs as independent businesses reaching out to a wide range of customers from the Black Country's diverse communities. What started as a safe-haven for young Asian pub goers in the 70s has blossomed into a unique Black Country success story.

Creative Black Country worked with The Midland Pub Association to commission six local and regional artists to create bespoke artworks with eight Desi Pubs, working closely with the landlords, staff and regulars to reflect the Desi pub story and how they have redefined Black Country pub culture.

Senna Atwal, Chair of the Midland Pub Association, said *“we are really excited to be involved in this. Our members have worked hard to build their businesses and have great relationships with their customers. To have such talented artists value this and use their incredible talent tell the story of the ‘Desi pubs’ and bring people together in this way is an honour and an amazing opportunity for the pubs”.*

EXAMPLE – Long Sutton Civic Society (Transported)

Long Sutton Civic Society responded to Transported’s ‘On your Doorstep offer’ and selected the visual artist Robyn Woolston to work with them to come up with suggestions for interventions. Robyn developed a series of artworks for Long Sutton Common Pit, working with the Long Sutton Civic Society and the rest of the community in Long Sutton, to create an exciting and engaging installation – The Imaginarium of Common Understanding. This was a series of sculptural interventions that encourage an engagement with site, history and geographical context within Long Sutton Common Pit. Utilising the idea that an ‘Imaginarium’ is a place devoted to the imagination, or a space of stimulation and cultivation, the project draws upon pre-existing physical elements such as the wooden boundary fence alongside social engagement via virtual platforms. The process involved creative workshops, an Artists’ Talk and a Celebration Event/Festival of Imaginaria. The members of the Civic Society loved and responded to the work.

As these examples demonstrate, CPPs across the country have shown the effectiveness of working in partnership with established non-arts voluntary organisations with knowledge and understanding of local communities and strong, credible local connections. In particular the role of non-arts voluntary organisations is likely to be a significant factor in extending the models developed by CPP to parts of the country that have not been part of the CPP programme.

In addition to those non-arts voluntary organisations that have been undertaking arts and cultural activities for some time, many others (such as those groups described in the above examples) have now been encouraged by CPP to get involved in arts activities for the first time. Working with established groups that are trusted by their members and the wider local community provides a safe, unthreatening way for CPPs to engage new participants in voluntary arts activities. This approach could helpfully form a key part of a national push to increase arts participation, though the experience of CPPs suggests that its implementation would need to be fine-tuned for each local area.

One CPP said: *“There will never be a single answer for the whole country. The bravery of CPP was empowering local consortia to understand the particular challenges of each area. Delegating out to different parts of the country was absolutely right and very brave. ACE needs to take this on with all its other strategic funding and increase the regional voice.”*

Another CPP said: *“Our work is very dependent on a close relationship with the people and the place.”*

Another CPP said: *“CPPs need to convincingly tell everyone where they succeeded and where there are models that can be copied by other areas ... we need to share things that work with areas that haven’t had CPP funding to inspire them to try things and use the tools.”*

CPPs have much to teach the arts sector about working with non-arts groups. To encourage approaches developed by CPPs to be used in other parts of the country it could be important to explore the role that could be played by the regional and national networks that represent non-arts voluntary organisations. Encouraging federations of neighbourhood associations, library networks or the National Federation of Women’s Institutes to ask their members to develop arts

and culture activities and to collaborate with cultural organisations could be an effective way to increasing arts participation across the whole country.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) represents more than 12,500 voluntary and community organisations across England, including hundreds of national and regional networks and membership organisations. You can search the full list of NCVO members by name and location at: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/about-us/join-ncvo/our-members>



Imaginarium of Common Understanding (Transported)
Photo: Electric Egg Ltd

4. Use of non-arts venues

One of the reasons that voluntary and amateur arts activity can play a key role in increasing cultural engagement in areas of least engagement is that it does not necessarily require substantial direct funding or resources. But much voluntary and amateur arts activity does rely on the availability of safe, accessible venues or spaces. Cuts in public funding over recent years, particularly from local authorities, have presented significant challenges to the local cultural infrastructure in many parts of the country.

CPPs have already made considerable progress in bringing non-arts venues into cultural use. CPPs have run activities in churches (*“part of the key infrastructure in these towns”*), community centres, church halls, recovery centres, Quaker meeting houses, cafes, restaurants, pubs, empty shops, disused warehouses and office blocks, libraries, children’s centres, youth centres, working men’s clubs and outdoor spaces such as parks and the streets.

One CPP said: *“we are breathing cultural life into existing spaces and getting the spaces for free: we bring the art, the audiences, new audiences.”*

EXAMPLE: Swale and Medway (Ideas Test)

“The Volunteer Promoter Network came about proactively from Ideas Test because we knew there was interest in supporting community assets, including community centres, village halls, schools etc. We are helping groups put on events that generate income to support those venues. ‘No Show’ is all about working in spaces that are there (but not thought of as arts spaces). Our model is about where people are – going to them rather than requiring them to come to us.”

EXAMPLE: St Helens (Heart of Glass)

“We utilise unloved, abandoned or emerging infrastructure, from empty shops to disused warehouses and office blocks. We are talking to housing associations and navigating the difficulty of using empty housing in St Helens. We are helping local arts groups to use these spaces. We acted as the agency to broker a relationship between an arts group and a retail space. We are still talking to them about rate relief, electricity bills, water bills etc – and being passed from energy company to energy company etc. We have been talking to the new Town Centre Manager. We need to make this easier to do: the red tape and bureaucracy is overwhelming for volunteers. We have been able to do that on behalf of groups but a way to make that easier would be transformative. There are empty shop units in the town centre and we know a myriad of groups who would be delighted to take over the space if it was free of red tape.”

CPPs have started to document examples of their work in 'everyday spaces' at: http://creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-impact?field_impact_story_tag_tid=30

And this video shows how CPPs are Bringing Art to Everyday Spaces: https://youtu.be/uLBDp2uga_o

The extensive use of non-arts venues by CPPs is proving an effective way to engage new participants ("going to them rather than requiring them to come to us"). It also provides a useful model that could be implemented in other parts of the country to increase arts participation without significant new funding from ACE. And by bringing venues that have previously not been used for arts or cultural activities into play, CPPs are helping to create the stronger local cultural infrastructure necessary to sustain existing and emerging voluntary and amateur arts groups.

CPPs should be encouraged to share with local voluntary arts groups their experiences of working with non-arts venues, in order to develop a stronger local cultural infrastructure.



Corby International Orchestra with Corby Silver Band (Made in Corby)

Photo: Kate Dyer

5. Conclusion

In the twelve months since Voluntary Arts first interviewed the network of CPPs, there have been several significant developments. All CPPs' models and methods are now much clearer and more coherent: there is a noticeable increase in confidence and understanding amongst CPPs.

CPPs are using voluntary and amateur arts activity in four broad categories: working with existing voluntary arts groups; helping to establish new voluntary arts groups; involving individual volunteers; and engaging with non-arts voluntary organisations.

Despite the challenges of engaging existing voluntary arts groups, it is important to include them as CPPs seek to strengthen the local cultural ecology by joining-up the full range of creative activity. Voluntary arts groups often form a significant part of that ecology, involving considerable numbers of local people as participants and audience members over many years.

The key lessons drawn from the interviews are:

- invest time and care into separate preliminary discussions with each voluntary arts group to help the CPP and the relevant group to begin to understand each other's capacity, skills and limitations;
- manage the expectations of voluntary arts groups carefully from the outset, particularly in relation to the availability of funding from CPPs;
- assess the artistic quality of voluntary arts groups as with any other artists or arts organisations, rather than assuming that their voluntary status suggests a particular level of quality;
- link arts organisations, particularly new voluntary arts groups, to each other and to sustainable sources of support such as local Councils for Voluntary Service;
- use individual volunteers as an effective way to develop voluntary and amateur arts activity and to encourage the involvement of existing voluntary arts groups in CPP programmes;
- ensure volunteers are being properly managed by developing a formal Volunteer Policy to follow current legislation and best practice in relation to the recruitment, selection, management and reward of volunteers;
- work with established non-arts voluntary organisations that are trusted by their members and the wider local community as a safe, unthreatening way to engage new participants in voluntary arts activities;
- share with local voluntary arts groups CPP experiences of working with non-arts venues, in order to develop a stronger local cultural infrastructure.

Voluntary Arts has benefited from the experiences and learning of the CPPs in developing its thinking about the role of voluntary and amateur arts activity in relation to increasing cultural engagement – moving from a simplistic discussion about the involvement of existing voluntary arts groups in CPP to a more sophisticated understanding of a range of approaches to voluntary and amateur arts activity.

Voluntary and amateur arts activity has demonstrated its potential to contribute to the aims of Creative People and Places and CPPs have demonstrated their potential to make an incredibly value contribution to the local voluntary arts sector: helping voluntary arts groups to become more artistically ambitious; providing vital support, advice and funding; attracting new members and audiences; and linking groups to innovative spaces and venues in which to undertake their creative cultural activities. While it is important to be wary of creating any unsustainable dependency, I hope to see CPPs and voluntary arts groups developing more mutually beneficial relationships over the coming years.

The individuals leading CPPs continue to demonstrate high levels of creativity, ingenuity, perseverance and determination. They are doing very important work and deserve our congratulations and thanks.

*Robin Simpson
Chief Executive
Voluntary Arts
October 2016*



*Ferry Tales (Market Place)
Photo: Alex McElroy and Libby Appleyard*

APPENDIX: Interviewees

<u>Creative People & Places</u>	<u>Interviewee</u>	<u>Date</u>
First Art (Ashfield, Mansfield, Bolsover & North East Derbyshire)	Paul Steele	5 April 2016
Creative Barking & Dagenham (Barking & Dagenham)	Helen Ball	1 April 2016
LeftCoast (Blackpool & Wyre)	Julia Turpin	25 April 2016
Transported (Boston & South Holland)	Nick Jones	27 April 2016
Made In Corby (Corby)	Helen Willmott	30 March 2016
Right Up Our Street (Doncaster)	Andrew Loretto	5 April 2016
East Durham Creates (East Durham)	Nikki Locke	22 April 2016
Market Place (Fenland & Forest Heath)	Kate Hall	30 March 2016
CP&P Hounslow (Hounslow)	Keiko Higashi	31 March 2016
Revoluton (Luton)	Topher Campbell	7 April 2016
	Shabnam Shabazi	5 May 2016
Creative Scene (North Kirklees)	Nancy Barrett	7 April 2016
Super Slow Way (Pennine Lancashire)	Katy May	25 April 2016
Peterborough Presents (Peterborough)	Josie Hickin	17 March 2016
Heart of Glass (St Helens)	Patrick Fox	8 April 2016
Creative Black Country (Sandwell, Walsall & Wolverhampton)	Sajida Carr	15 April 2016
Home (Slough)	Claire Skeates	25 April 2016
bait (South East Northumberland)	Rachel Adam	31 March 2016
Appetite (Stoke-on-Trent)	Karl Greenwood	22 April 2016
The Cultural Spring (Sunderland & South Tyneside)	Emma Horsman	7 April 2016
Ideas Test (Swale & Medway)	Steph Fuller	17 March 2016

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