

**Sept 2015**

## **Heart n Soul**

### **Artistic collaboration – how it can enrich socially engaged arts programmes**

Heart n Soul, based at the Albany, Deptford, South East London, works with people with learning disabilities wishing to develop their talents and opportunities. Back in 2011, some participants of Heart n Soul felt that, whilst there was much on offer for 10 to 25 year olds, there was a gap in provision for adults. The idea of Allsorts was born, and a steering team of potential participants was formed. The team designed what the project would look like: adults with learning difficulties would try new arts activities, meet new people and have fun.



*All photographs provided by Heart n Soul*

### **Mixing commissioning with grant funding to promote inclusivity**

After seeing the success of the Allsorts pilot, says Winston Castello, Community Enterprise Manager at Lewisham Council, *“the Council wanted to move away from a purely day centre model and more towards personalised services. It was felt that*

*Allsorts could meet needs not met elsewhere.*” Winston sits within Cultural and Community Development in Lewisham Council, but works closely with Adult Social Care, since the Council recognises the importance of arts engagement as a route to wellbeing.

Now, Allsorts is a key and highly valued part of Lewisham Council’s alternative day provision for adults with learning disabilities. The creative, participative approach of Allsorts brings several benefits for Lewisham Council residents. Says Winston, *“it’s rewarding, stimulating, enjoyable and leads to enhanced wellbeing.”*



### **Artistic Collaborations and “potential creative chaos”**

The Allsorts programme involves collaborations with other creative partners to add range and quality to its work. For example, Emmy award-winning Composer [Michael Price](#) co-produced a season of Allsorts over six weeks in 2014. Through this, Michael and Allsorts participants created the [Forest of Deptford](#) sound installation as part of Heart n Soul’s club night at the [Beautiful Octopus Club](#) at London’s Southbank Centre. The season also involved a session with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Michael describes his approach in his day job – writing music scores for film and television – as low risk. In contrast, for Michael, Allsorts was *“potential creative chaos – anything could happen.”* This strikingly different experience brought benefits and lessons to Michael as an Artist. He explains, *“it challenged my perceptions of what a good outcome is... and I think I have taken that back into my professional life.”* Although he did not have previous experience of working with people with learning difficulties, he felt immediately comfortable due to the atmosphere created by Heart n Soul people: *“I felt incredibly supported because the season was a co-production...”*

*one of the most striking things, if you spend time with Heart n Soul, is that because it is properly integrated, the line between staff and participants is very porous.”*

## **Showcasing talent**

Allsorts has given participants the opportunity to gain new skills, show their talent and progress. Some have gone on to showcase their talents at other cultural institutions, sometimes as part of new commissioning opportunities for Heart n Soul. In February 2015, for example, Heart n Soul was commissioned by the British Museum to produce a creative response to two of their collections. Two emerging artists that had come out of the Allsorts programme, Tillie Milburn, a singer-songwriter and performance artist and Ifeoma Orjiekwe, a visual artist, took their work to the [British Museum](#). As well as exhibiting their own creative responses to the artefacts there, they ran hands-on workshops for museum visitors. Ifeoma found the opportunity enriching as an Artist: *“It makes you very aware of different views of art individually... and how blessed we are in our creativity”*.

### **Key facts**

Project: Allsorts, provided by Heart n Soul

Funding: Part-commissioned by Lewisham Council for its residents. Participants on personal budgets pay £50 per session, whilst those not on personal budgets make a contribution of £5 per session (£120 to attend all 24 sessions annually). Allsorts is also supported with a mixture of grant funding from the Rayne Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Big Lottery Fund and Lewisham Council (£68000 per annum towards Heart n Soul’s core costs and for the development of Allsorts) to ensure inclusivity for those without access to social care.

Timing: On-going since summer 2011

Scale: Over the 2014-15 year, four seasons of Allsorts were held (28 event days), plus four Allsorts extra days. An average of 29 adults attended each session.

Target group: Allsorts works with adults with learning difficulties. 50% of participants are from Lewisham, and the remaining 50% come from 12 other London Boroughs.

## **Learning together**

In the national context of reduced budgets for adult social care, Heart n Soul and Lewisham Council concur in their aim of increasing personal choice for adults with learning difficulties through personal budgets/direct payments. Says Winston, *“we want to be responsive to individual needs. That is what personalisation is all about.”*

However, it has not always been easy to facilitate personal choice. Some participants are able to use their personal budget to attend Allsorts. Others who have more moderate learning difficulties do not have this option. Some participants with personal budgets receive them for care support, some for activities, and some for both. Others have had their budgets block-allocated to day centres or private care providers.

Nevertheless, Heart n Soul and Lewisham are working through these issues. Winston explains, *“in the council we had to identify which individuals had personal budgets. Then, staff learnt the importance of reviewing personal plans on a regular basis, not just annually or every six months, and of being flexible with personal plans.”*

Indeed, a flexible and close relationship between Lewisham and Heart n Soul is key for both parties. Advises Mark Williams, Artistic Director and CEO of Heart n Soul, *“With your commissioner, make sure you have a personal relationship and that your contact is willing to go on a journey with you. If it is just signing service agreements and stats, you may be forced to fit into something which is not what you are aiming for.”*

### **Demonstrating success**

In terms of outcomes, Lewisham Council is most interested in retention and group engagement. Heart n Soul tracks participants across each season using attendance sheets, and incidents where participants make creative choices are recorded.

Such quantitative information is complemented with qualitative measuring techniques. Feedback is gathered from participants, artists and volunteers, which allows structured observations to be made concerning changes in participants' confidence, self-esteem, creativity and skills. In-depth case studies on the journeys made by a few participants allow for rich insights into some of the personalised outcomes. This allows Heart n Soul, says Mark, to illustrate *“the different levels of quality.”*

### **Sharing success**

Heart n Soul has a great track record in building local partnerships, bringing benefits to both sides. The “Lucky Dip” room at Allsorts sessions allows local partners to engage with participants, encouraging effective referrals that benefit both.

Heart n Soul aims to encourage multi-council sharing of the model and has received visits from Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark councils over the 2014-15 period. Also, the organisation is at the preliminary stages of looking into a licensing model for Allsorts. Says Mark, *“we don't want an empire. We want to build an innovative, high quality and effective model and share it.”* The model is expected to involve licensing Allsorts to another third sector organisation, which will be funded by an NHS Trust. It is expected to be piloted later this year.

## The future – paid opportunities for Heart n Soul people

Heart n Soul's [Strategic Plan 2015-2018](#) envisages finding a business partner to help take the design and products of artists that emerge from the programme to places that will sell their work. This way, not only will the organisation continue to take Heart n Soul artists to spaces where they radically challenge the vision of the UK arts, but it will also promote self-employment.



### Find out more

Read more about Heart n Soul at [www.heartnsoul.co.uk](http://www.heartnsoul.co.uk).

For more information and resources on Cultural Commissioning visit <http://www.ncvo.org/CCProg>.

All photos courtesy of Heart n Soul.

Text by Joanna Allan.