

September 2015

## Manchester City Council

### Embedding arts and culture in the city-wide approach to complex dependency

Greater Manchester's 2014 [devolution agreement](#) with the UK Government gave it increased powers to implement public service reform, providing [a more co-ordinated approach](#) to public services. One of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's priority areas for reform is its approach to complex dependency: supporting both families and individuals experiencing a combination of complex problems to move towards employment and independence.

Within Manchester City Council, the Culture Team has been working closely with both the Complex Dependency Team and commissioners of public services to ensure that provision of arts and culture is integrated into this work from the start.

#### Complex dependency: a strategic priority in Manchester

People facing complex dependency experience a range of problems that mean they can be particularly dependent on public services. There are [high levels of complex dependency](#) and worklessness in Manchester, and the City Council is scaling up its Troubled Families work to address this. The [City Council's goals](#) include 'reducing levels of worklessness and long-term worklessness, tackling low skills, improving health outcomes, educational attainment and attendance, substance misuse, domestic abuse, and levels of safeguarding demand'.

#### Arts and culture for complex dependency

The Council's Culture Team is clear about the benefits that arts and cultural activity can have for those experiencing multiple and complex problems. Team Leader Jo Johnston explains:

*'For people with complex needs, everything they are dealing with can be a challenge, from anti-social behaviour, to being told their children aren't turning up to school on time, to outstanding rent arrears. Arts and culture offer something unique – it's about bringing positivity into their lives, and harnessing skills and capacity they might not have seen a value in before.'* - Jo Johnston

Hazel Summers, Interim Strategic Director for the Children and Families Directorate in Manchester City Council, says that increased skills and confidence can help people who may not have worked for a long time in their journey towards employment:

*'Arts and cultural activities provide a good route in to learning the skills you need to move towards employment. The arts can really help with building someone's confidence, helping them believe they can work.'* - Hazel Summers

Hazel gives the example of a former rough sleeper who started to attend an arts project while still homeless; he now earns money through selling his paintings.

#### A progression towards an integrated approach

Arts and culture are now embedded in health and social care commissioning in Manchester, with health and social care outcomes included in arts and cultural organisations' contracts or service level agreements. The Complex Dependency Team works closely with commissioners, and its work will be changing the way that services are commissioned in Manchester. Jo stresses the importance of 'being part of that change' through integrating arts and culture into the work from the start.

Jo Johnston says that the ground was paved for this over many years, through many formal and informal conversations, a succession of pilot projects that strengthened the evidence, and a programme of learning with the city's arts and cultural sector to help it identify how it could contribute to city-wide priorities. This established the potential for an expanded role for the sector, and garnered enthusiasm for this.

The first significant piece of work demonstrating the role that arts and culture could play in meeting other council priorities was the Ardwick project.

### The Ardwick embedding cultural activity project

Ardwick is an area of Manchester [experiencing high deprivation and worklessness](#): in 2011, it was within the top 3% of deprived wards in the country. In the Ardwick City Region pilot, Manchester City Council piloted new methods and approaches for tackling social and economic exclusion and engagement across communities. The embedding cultural activity project (which ran from January to March 2011) was commissioned by the Manchester Cultural Partnership Team with the aim of embedding cultural activity within this pilot, with a focus on worklessness, mental health and well being.

The project was overseen by the People's History Museum, and focused on bringing together cultural and community organisations to bridge gaps of understanding and identifying opportunities for working together. Activities included:

- Training and development sessions of cultural staff and community based practitioners
- Joint cultural and service provider/community activity projects
- Establishing a cultural consortium and an on-line directory of cultural venues
- Producing a knowledge bank and effective practice database.

The project [raised awareness](#) of the value that arts and culture can bring to the worklessness, mental health and well-being agendas, brokered relationships, identified barriers to the work and made recommendations for further developments. It led to a number of lasting relationships – for example, the People's History Museum still works with the Workers' Educational Association (a charity providing adult education), hosting workshops for adult learners, providing collection subject matter and expertise, and itself benefiting from a new audience. This has now become a mainstream part of the museum's work.

### The People's History Museum: working to achieve health and social outcomes

The People's History Museum has been closely involved with much of the health and social outcomes work led by the Culture Team, from overseeing the Ardwick project, to supporting the Health Trainers project described below.

Katy Ashton, Director of the People's History Museum, believes that the museum can '*enrich lives and have an incredibly important impact on well being*'. As well as providing a space for people to socialize, learn and connect, it can also help people experiencing inequality and disadvantage to think about social issues: '*The People's History Museum is about equality, about fighting for something you want to change. We can encourage people to think about where they are today and where they want to go in the future*'.

The museum has benefited from its involvement:

*'We have really good relationships with the Culture Team and they are a conduit into what's happening in other areas, for example the worklessness agenda or mental health.*

*'It's really useful – it's about getting involved in the city-wide agenda'.*



Image: People's History Museum

The Ardwick project also provided evidence of the potential impact that arts and culture could have on mental health and well being. Along with local and national research,<sup>1</sup> this provided a good evidence base for continuing this approach, which the Culture Team was able to take to Public Health commissioners. This contributed to the development of the Health Trainers project.

### **The Health Trainers project: cultural attendance and public mental health**

The Health Trainer service is provided through the Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust, to help improve the health of people within communities experiencing high health inequalities. In this pilot project, supported by Public Health and the Culture Team, the Health Trainers referred people with complex health problems into one of six participating cultural institutions: the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester Art Gallery, People's History Museum, music venue Band on the Wall, the Central Library and the National Cycling Centre.

Delana Lawson, the Health Trainers Programme Manager, saw great potential in the project:

*'It's a great initiative. Arts and cultural activities can provide key components of well being, such as being engaged, noticing what's going on around you in your city. We take a holistic approach to well being and were enthused that this could be an additional part of our offer.'* - Delana Lawson

Delana valued the engagement of the arts and cultural organisations in the programme, from attending team meetings and providing familiarisation sessions for the Health Trainers, to being a point of contact during a visit. She thinks extending it to include local activity would overcome practical issues of travel and help overcome psychological barriers (the feeling that 'that's not for me, I don't go to these places'):

*'I'd like to see something going on in the local library, community centre, café or voluntary association – with the benefits of experiencing arts and culture within your own community in an engaged and collaborative way.'* - Delana Lawson

An evaluation, conducted by the University of Central Lancashire, demonstrated that attending a cultural event could:

- 'Evoke personal skills and capacities which individuals have lost touch with'
- 'Set in motion more profound changes which lead to renewed personal agency'
- 'Offer an additional resource to work with complex psychosocial problems'

It concluded that an extended programme would 'enrich Health Trainers' skills base and role, and the range of interventions they can offer [to include] personalised social and cultural opportunities to enhance well being' and could 'help[...] to disseminate habits of cultural attendance through communities'.

The Health Trainers project cost little beyond staff time and expenses, and Jo Johnston stresses that making use of universal arts and cultural offers is 'excellent value for money'. This project was an important part of the progression towards increased understanding of and commitment to the role that arts and culture can play in achieving health and social outcomes, including in complex dependency:

*'As a result of the evaluation of the Health Trainers project, the commissioners in Public Health and the arts are completely committed to having arts and culture embedded in services'* – Jo Johnston



Image: People's History Museum

<sup>1</sup> A particularly helpful paper was M. O'Neill, 2010. Cultural attendance and public mental health – from research to practice. *Journal of Public Mental Health* 9 (4): 22-29

### **Case study from the Health Trainers project evaluation: Asha**

Asha attended some toddler and family events at the Manchester Art Gallery after these were mentioned by her Health Trainer.

*'I guess I had postnatal depression and my weight was an issue.*

*[...]*

*'[At the event, my son] was covered in paint and it's free and he loves it. ... The pleasure of seeing my son enjoy it made me feel better [...] I find that I am getting involved [with other groups] and I have made some friends. ... I am happy! I am back to my old self. I was going through that blip and nothing else was getting me there.*

*[...]*

*'My weight has been an issue and it's one of the things I was getting down about and this has made me more active and got my own self back. Now I am mentally feeling better [...] Now I am feeling better I can really do something.'*

This is an abbreviated version of a case example included in the University of Central Lancashire's [evaluation](#) report (Froggett, L. and Roy, A. (2014) *Cultural Attendance and Public Mental Health: Evaluation of Pilot Project 2012-2014*. University of Central Lancashire and Manchester City Council.)

### **Aspirations: embedding arts and culture in the response to complex dependency**

The Culture Team is now working to ensure that arts and culture is embedded in the city-wide response to complex dependency as it is developed. In November 2014, a scoping exercise with the Complex Dependency Team identified opportunities for arts and culture to respond to the challenge. This identified three potential intervention points:

1. Early intervention – helping to prevent people from developing complex dependency.
2. Targeted intervention – embedding existing, targeted activities within the developing Greater Manchester complex dependency work.
3. Enabling sustainable outcomes – providing structured engagement to support people to transition into stable lifestyles and maintain resilience.

The team is now seeking funding to take this work forward in an action research project, and has secured strategic commitment for this from across council departments. This would help build evidence of the impact of arts and cultural activity on people with complex dependency, enable assessment of consequent reductions in public spending, and strengthen strategic and delivery partnerships.

*'We will continue to work together [with the Culture Team] around the priorities for the city and, I hope, really tackling some of the issues around complex dependency'. - Hazel Summers*

### **Further information**

[Ardwick: embedding cultural activity project: final report May 2011](#)

[Cultural activity and public mental health: evaluation of pilot programme 2012-2014](#)

Case study written by Juliette Hough