

## Written evidence submitted by ArtWorks Cymru

### ARTWORKS CYMRU EVIDENCE: COVID 19 IMPACT PARTICIPATORY ARTS IN WALES

#### ArtWorks Cymru

ArtWorks Cymru is a partnership of organisations, networks and artists across Wales who make art in participatory settings. The partnership comes together to take a strategic view of the sector in Wales, running project work as needed to drive change, and connects to UK-wide issues through its membership of Artworks Alliance.

[www.artworks.cymru](http://www.artworks.cymru)

#### Summary

Participatory Arts work in Wales embraces all of the following: Community Arts; Youth Arts; Arts and Health; Arts and Older People and Socially Engaged Arts. Participatory arts in Wales is a vital part of the arts sector. Creative work is delivered by a range of organisations - small, medium and large - and also by a committed and highly skilled and diverse cohort of freelance artists.

Our submission has been created by a range of sector networks, organisations and artists to send an important message to the government as we emerge from lockdown and start to understand the impact on our work.

It talks about how we have responded to the Covid 19 Lockdown. Let us be clear, whilst much of the arts and culture sector has been paralysed by the crisis it is the participatory arts sector that has been able to reach out to people when they are most in need and this document details some of the ways we have done that. This should be a huge consideration for the Government when considering future sector support.

Our submission also explores how useful short term government support has been in our sector. It calls for the participatory arts sector to have a seat at the table to help plan a way forward. It also explores why participatory arts is such a valuable ally to the government and so important in society at this time.

#### • What has been the immediate impact of Covid-19 on the sector?

The initial impact of lockdown for many organisations was the pausing or, in some cases, cancellation of project work, as they were unable to bring groups together in person. As lockdown progressed this turned to a reframing of projects and an exploration of different ways to adapt delivery.

Organisations have had to consider their financial positions, look at project and staff costs, and work out if they needed to furlough staff or if they could carry on within the bounds of regular funding or existing financial resources. Arts Council Wales has provided the opportunity to apply for stabilisation funding although this has been in high demand with

limited resources. If organisations already had funding for projects, we heard that some were able to negotiate with funders to extend or reframe their projects in the wake of the lockdown. However, cash flow in the current year is still and will continue to be a big problem for many.

Most regular participatory delivery is paid for week by week or term by term. Understanding what they can now charge for in a world where many arts organisations are providing online content for free has been particularly hard for smaller organisations and individual artists. Consequently many organisations are not charging at the moment. But this doesn't help them in the long term, especially as delivering online often requires extra cost. For freelancers who have no access to trusts and grants and rely on direct fees from their clients, there was a reluctance to pay the same fees for online courses and much of this work disappeared instantly.

Participatory arts practice traditionally depends on face to face delivery and moving the practice online has been a huge learning curve for our sector, made more difficult by the fact that most organisations have small teams with very little digital expertise in house. Despite the challenges with digital poverty, many organisations and artists have found a whole range of approaches including online arts classes across artforms, delivering doorstep high quality creative packs, weekly phone calls, and postcards to those who are socially isolating or to people with no access to the internet. The participatory arts sector is by its nature inclusive and supportive and many hours of time have been spent on support to get people online and keep them connected. For small organisations this has been an exhausting process. Artists and organisations had to ensure when working with children and vulnerable adults that we created a safe digital space. This involved adapting and developing safeguarding policies and thinking through the logistics of how to work in a safe and supportive environment online where no-one was put at risk.

Once established, these services have proved a life-line to young people, older adults and to those who are shielding with long term health conditions. The participatory arts sector is able to respond quickly and connect directly to participants to understand their immediate needs. As a sector, we are used to adapting and looking for creative solutions to ensure that our practice is inclusive and relevant. We are the connectors in our communities, we cannot be ignored and forgotten, our practice during this period has demonstrated our ability to respond ably at a critical time.

*This space is very important, not just for me, but for everyone. It gives us opportunities to be able to talk to people, especially for people who suffer with anxiety, depression or disabilities - it keeps us sane and our feelings whole and warm - it gives us a place to grow as a person.*

- Participant feedback Sparc, Valleys Kids referring to an online drama session during Lockdown

*Just knowing that you are there and that you care for us makes me feel so much happier.*

- Participant from Artis Community's Crafty Cuppa Group referring to creative art packs

*Emma enjoyed the daily theme ideas as it got her taking images each day for it. Certainly helped with her well being. Thanks for creating all these great opportunities.*

- Participant from Arts Connection - Cyswllt Celf online creative programme

ArtWorks Cymru and our partners have been leading zoom discussions with organisations and artists from the Participatory Arts in Wales to understand the impact of the Covid19 Lockdown on our sector. You can see examples of some of the artists who spoke at these events and their reflections on the current situation here:

<https://getthechance.wales/>

**• How effectively has the support provided by DCMS, other Government departments and arms-length bodies addressed the sector's needs?**

Most of the support available to arts organisations and freelance artists has been fed through the Arts Council of Wales funding schemes, although freelancers have also been able to apply for Self Employed Income Support. There have been individual artists in our sector who have fallen through the gaps due to zero hours contracts, working through PAYE, having less than 3 years experience or working in a portfolio way and having less than 50% income from the arts. There have also been small charities who haven't been eligible for schemes offered by ACW and government, who have looked to trusts and foundations to continue their work. Local authority arts development departments have had to cut down their engagement programmes and are facing further budget cuts in the coming years.

Furlough has been more than a lifeline for many venues and organisations who aren't charities. It's been a source of income that has stepped in when earned income has crashed to zero. Without furlough many venues and organisations would have folded, and even those that form part of larger organisations would have been under threat. However for some organisations the opportunities for staff to volunteer to support the organisations charitable objectives would have been invaluable.

But it's clear that this short term support will not be enough. There is no business as usual for our work in the immediate future.

**• What will the likely long-term impacts of Covid-19 be on the sector, and what support is needed to deal with those?**

**It's imperative that the participatory arts sector has a place at the table for discussions about the future of the arts sector.**

It's clear that there are conversations taking place in Westminster and in Cardiff about the future of the arts and how the industry will be supported in the coming year. It's also clear that there are few participatory arts organisations and artists involved in these conversations. We need to be represented - participatory arts is a key part of the arts ecology in Wales and

the U.K delivering in local communities and working hand in hand with a huge range of partner charities in other sectors, including housing, social care, health and education.

The participatory arts sector comprises a large number of smaller arts organisations which are funded by a mixture of grants, trusts, commissions and small scale philanthropy. They often lack the commercial income streams (from ticket, merchandise and refreshment sales) that can be used to underwrite loan finance. Many arts organisations services are free at the point of delivery this makes it hard to raise income. Smaller organisations are not sitting on large reserves or holding funds for capital projects that can be repurposed. Any support to the participatory arts sector should be structured in such a way that doesn't disadvantage smaller, and more community focused, operators, who are often best placed to deliver the most effective interventions. Large organisations cannot be bailed out financially at the expense of smaller ones.

In Wales the participatory arts sector is represented pan Wales, we are by nature collaborative and generous in sharing our practice and working together. Creative work happens in a multitude of different settings, including with older adults, young people in care, people in hospital settings or those suffering with mental health conditions to mention just a few.

### • How might the sector evolve after Covid-19, and how can DCMS support such innovation to deal with future challenges?

#### **Participatory arts organisations and artists regularly work with communities in deprived areas and with groups in society whose voices are not being heard.**

Creativity, as Baroness Kay Andrews argues in her 2014 report *Culture and Poverty*, can be used as a means of encouraging personal development, increasing confidence and aspiration, improving communication and literacy skills, and supporting social cohesion and civic awareness.<sup>1</sup> In 2019 the National Assembly for Wales' Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee also noted in their *Count me in!* Report<sup>2</sup> into culture, social exclusion and poverty the distinct and vital role the participatory arts sector plays in transforming lives.

We work in communities that are often on the breadline, reaching, for example, people living in poverty, young people in the care system and older adults suffering with loneliness and social isolation. At a time when we are moving from prolonged lockdown into economic crisis, participatory arts provides support, connections, skills development and opportunities for self-expression in an unique and personal way.

Our practice is diverse and inclusive, working with BAME communities and refugees, disabled, D/deaf and neurodiverse participants. This inclusivity is always important, but even more important as the pandemic throws the inequalities in our society into even sharper

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<sup>1</sup> *Culture and Poverty* - Andrews (Welsh Government 2014)

<sup>2</sup> *Count me in!* - Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee (National Assembly for Wales 2019)

relief. We have specialist knowledge in working with ACE's and people who experience trauma and we are able to provide access to the arts to people who are bed ridden or unable to leave the house. We work in English, Welsh, BSL, bilingually and multilingually enabling people to access work in the way that is most appropriate to them.

Organisations like Sparc and Head 4 Arts create work in the middle of communities who were already struggling with deprivation before the current crisis hit them. Mess Up The Mess connects with young carers and young people in the care system. Project work allows participants to create a different identity and imagine a different future that they can work towards.

In our recent Zoom conversations we discussed the hard work being done to support the communities around us who were struggling with the loss of work, isolation and grief in the wake of Covid-19. It's clear we all want to do more of this work - we want to take our place in society and use the arts to help our country heal.

And we want to do this in collaboration - in collaboration with other arts organisations, in collaboration with community partners, and in collaboration with our participants. To give some examples: organisations in the South Wales Valleys are already exploring how they can support bereavement services in the area with a creative well-being offer; Sparc, Valleys Kids will work alongside family workers to create bespoke therapeutic stories that help children deal with loss and bereavement and understand their feelings at this difficult time.

We have the opportunity to build a stronger arts sector that recognises the value of big and small organisations and commits to nourishing the whole ecology and spreading resources around even when they are scarce. The government's role should be to make it possible for everyone to be included in this project and to value people's time and expertise.

**Participatory Arts makes a vital contribution to the Welsh economy and the return on that investment is a social one.**

*Efallai mwy nag erioed... We now need perhaps more than ever, financial investment in the arts, and importantly, not just in the larger organisations, but in smaller companies and charities and independent artists who do incredible work in and with communities of people who can otherwise be invisible and feel the weight of injustices, amazing people who are entitled, after all, to explore a world of imagination, creativity and growth.*

**Jên Angharad, CEO Artis Community**

Participatory Arts organisations are generally small organisations but the breadth of their projects and programmes reaches far and wide. From 2018 to 2019 the 10 revenue funded community arts sector provided 174 jobs across Wales<sup>3</sup> and alongside them are a large number of project funded companies, both working in collaboration with a large skilled freelance arts workforce who undertake delivery for a range of organisations.

In our recent Zoom discussions, there was real concern for freelancers who have now lost their regular work and don't have the protection of long term employment contracts with

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<sup>3</sup> Arts Portfolio Wales Survey 2018 - 2019 (Arts Council Wales)

terms and conditions to protect them. This needs to be addressed as we redevelop our sector. We urgently need to find a way to safeguard the valuable contribution of our freelance artists, who are often highly specialist and have invested a lifetime in developing their craft.

Investment in participatory arts ensures a guaranteed return on investment, but not in a financial sense. In the recent report on Age Cymru's cARTrefu programme exploring the social return on investment it is stated that for every £1 of investment the social value of the programme is £6.48.<sup>4</sup> Providing evidence like this takes skilled research, and not every organisation has the resources to create a clear picture of the social return of their work.

The social value of participatory arts is often sidelined within the larger conversations as the outcomes are hard to quantify. Yet they are inherent. We know that the arts can have a positive and transforming effect on individual and community lives, through the engagement and positive outcomes they produce. Empowering people to develop existing and new talents and skills and supporting them in developing their confidence and self-esteem helps people reach their aspirations.

### **Participatory Arts fosters mental health and well-being.**

The 2018 Arts and Health Mapping Report commissioned by Arts Council Wales found 207 arts and health projects running across Wales over the period of its online survey.

*These arts and health interventions are bringing fun, pleasure, stimulation and meaning to people's lives. They're also helping to build personal resilience and contributing to people's general sense of well-being and quality of life.*<sup>5</sup>

The establishment, by Eluned Morgan AM, of a Cross Party Group on Arts and Health in 2016 has brought fresh visibility and energy in moving the agenda forward, putting arts and health firmly on the political agenda.

Our participatory arts organisations have played a major role in this work, partnering with health boards, understanding the needs of their communities and exploring how the arts can address specific health issues such as Dementia and Parkinsons. This is hugely important work and, through the Wales Arts Health and Well-being Network, the sector is now drawing together a set of case studies of best practice project work.

<https://wahwn.cymru/en/knowledge-bank/case-studies>

This work will be needed even more in the years ahead, as people deal with their existing conditions in the aftermath of the virus and deal with the trauma of the pandemic experience. The NHS needs all the help it can get and the participatory arts is its ally.

*The day we met to close our dance sessions because of the impending lockdown was both sad and scary. It really brought the reality of the situation home. We rely on this weekly event to cheer us up, we meet old friends, chat, dance and laugh and leave feeling happier, looser, more able somehow. Since the start of lock down I have heard from group members*

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<sup>4</sup> cARTrefu: A national arts in care homes participatory and mentoring programme - A social return on investment analysis (Algar-Skaife, Bangor University 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Arts and Health in Wales - A mapping Study of Current Activity (Arts Council Wales 2018)

*who are longing to meet up again, they have tried to keep mobile and practice dancing at home but it just isn't the same without each other. We are missing one another, our teachers and dancing. Nothing quite replaces it.* Participant in the **Strictly Parkinson's** programme

## **Participatory Arts and Future Generations**

Future West End, ballet, Glastonbury and Netflix stars get their inspiration, initial training and access from grassroots community participatory arts activity. Along with the teachers, scientists, philosophers and thought leaders who are given confidence and space to think creatively through our work in schools and youth centres across Wales.

We are hugely concerned for our children and young people in Wales - they have been through a traumatic and difficult experience. Despite the best effort of their parents and teachers, their education has been disrupted and they are struggling at home. Anecdotally we know that they are feeling anxious and stressed, missing their peers and finding it difficult to cope.

For many young people arts is a lifeline. We know that for young people with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) having an expressive outlet and being able to work with a trusted adult can build resilience and enable young people to cope. Participatory arts is about long term and embedded relationships, a place where young people can meet with their peers in a safe and supported space. Six Welsh companies have participated in the hugely successful Company Three CoronaVirus Time Capsule Project <http://www.companythree.co.uk> enabling young people to process their feelings and share valuable insights into their experience at this time.

The participatory arts sector provides a way for politicians and policy makers to connect with groups who may struggle to actively engage in the democratic process. Post Covid 19 will be a crucial time to listen to communities before taking action and there is an opportunity to hear voices that are rarely brought to the table, the sector can actively assist with this.

A Parent from the BAME community expresses her views on participatory arts and explains why she would like her voice to be heard by policy makers in the future.

*"In the hope (laughs) that you know you might just switch a light bulb on in someone's head and make them do something they may not have considered or may do things differently."*<sup>6</sup>

Generosity and collaboration are values that our sector values highly. We are aiming for valuable dialogue over the next six months about our collective future across all stakeholders. **Abdul Shayek, Artistic Director of FIO**, ably sums up our hopes and fears:

*This period could be marked by greater collaboration, clarity, and integrity around community co-creation and "public art" than any other period that precedes it. But it could also fall into historic duplicitousness, hypocrisies, divisions, and confusions of core values and identity, and lead to old painful systems of communities and community-focused artists being*

<sup>6</sup> *If Only We Asked" AHRC, Clore Leadership Research Paper. (Ballin, 2019)*

*“pimped” for their social benefit and drip-fed meagre fees to deliver the bulk of the philanthropic work.*

**SUBMITTED BY ARTWORKS CYMRU ON BEHALF OF THE FOLLOWING SIGNATORIES:**

**Artists:**

ALI FRANKS  
ALISON MOGER  
ANGHARAD HARROP  
BETHAN PAGE  
BETH CAUDLE  
BILL TAYLOR-BEALES, HUSHLAND CREATIVE  
FRANCESCA PICKARD  
HANNA HUGHES  
HANNAH MCPAKE  
HEIDI WILSON  
HELEN WOODS  
KATE MERCER  
LAURA BRADSHAW  
MEDHI RAZI  
ZOSIA JO, JOON DANCE

**Organisations:**

ABERYSTWYTH ARTS CENTRE  
AFON COMMUNITY DANCE  
ARTS ACTIVE TRUST  
ARTIS COMMUNITY CYMUNED  
ARTS CONNECTION CYSWLLT CELF  
BALLET CYMRU  
BETH PICKARD - CREATIVE AND THERAPEUTIC ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES  
COMMUNITY MUSIC WALES  
FIO  
GWANWYN - AGE CYMRU  
HEAD4ARTS  
IMPELO  
INSIDE OUT CYMRU  
KOKORO ARTS LTD  
LITERATURE WALES  
NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY WALES  
NOFIT STATE CIRCUS  
MESS UP THE MESS  
MICHAEL CARCLIN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH WALES  
OPERASONIC  
PAPERTRAIL PRODUCTIONS  
RAVEN DRAMA  
REALITY THEATRE CIC  
RIVERFRONT THEATRE  
RUBICON DANCE  
TANIO  
YOUTH ARTS NETWORK CYMRU  
SPARC, VALLEYS KIDS  
STEPH MESKELL-BROCKEN, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH THEATRES  
STRATA FLORIDA TRUST  
WALES MILLENNIUM CENTRE  
WALES WIDE TRAINING PROGRAMME  
WELSH NATIONAL OPERA