

# **Reflections on creative practice – Artists working in the context of community consultation**

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## **Introduction**

This section of the report describes the nature of partnerships in both regeneration and health sectors; where artists have been engaged to act as facilitators, intermediaries, and as deliverers of consultation and communication activities. While outlining some examples of contemporary practice, it also reflects on specific projects undertaken by Jubilee Arts in this field over the period of a decade. This section has been informed in part by a dialogue in January 2007 with four individuals about the essence of these projects. These were:

Emma Yorke, Arts & Health Coordinator, South Staffordshire Healthcare Trust

Mark Webster, Creative Communities Unit, Staffordshire University

Dr. John Middleton, Director of Public Health, Sandwell PCT

Glen Buglas, Lead Officer, Creative Development Team, Walsall M.B.C.

## **Participation and Engagement**

Today, participation is widely viewed as being a key factor in regeneration programmes. Major organisations across the business, statutory and voluntary sectors believe the benefits of increasing participation from their intended client base – from engaging with the community itself - will result in some or all of the following:

- better decision-making
- more effective service delivery
- greater community support
- community development
- renewal of local democracy
- increased resources
- increased knowledge and understanding

The shift in thinking about regeneration towards involving local people is in order to achieve more sustainable community development and improvement in the economic and social fabric of their lives. Shaw (2003) discussed the role of the arts in

neighbourhood renewal, focussing on social impact and the role of the artist in facilitating and improving communication, giving people the skills to envision and plan for a better future. McManus (2002) found that creative projects and organisations 'have expertise in involving and engaging hard to reach people; a major resource for neighbourhood renewal where involvement, consultation and engagement are major issues'.

There have been several studies - much quoted – that have looked at the impact of the social and economic impact of the arts. For example, the Comedia publication *The art of regeneration: urban renewal through cultural activity* (Landry 1996), or *Fewer than six: a study of creativity in regeneration in Yorkshire and the Humber* (McManus 2002), These studies describe how that creativity can and does contribute to regeneration through consultation, strategic planning, delivery or evaluation – or where cultural activity is seen 'as the catalyst and engine of regeneration.'

Artists are commissioned to work with communities to achieve a range of these deliverables. Artists are understood to be able to create respectful relationships with community groups and individuals, to be both socially and culturally sensitive, to be able to enhance personal and social development, to be problem solvers, to encourage communication and expressive skills, and to be used to collaborative and multi-disciplinary team-working. Artists can bring both curiosity and fresh thinking. Cultural activity, in short, can "*drive transformation: it educates, generates skills and confidence, connects people and cements new partnerships.*"

In working with artists, agencies attempt to inject a different kind of thinking into the delivery of a service or a particular outcome, challenging the status quo. However, involving clients and particular target groups in a partnership or consultation also requires a shift in thinking. Emma Yorke, Arts & Health Co-ordinator for South Staffordshire, describes the impact of involving service users - on an interview panel to select an artist for a Mental Health project - as follows:

*"It made me realise I personally was looking for someone who would be 'professional', who'd have a plan, someone who'd be reliable, someone who would come out with an outcome that would meet my particular need. However, the service users were looking for someone they liked, someone they were going to spend two hours a week with and someone they thought they would have fun with. And someone who worked in an art form they actually felt comfortable with. I didn't think*

*that what I was looking for and what the client group were looking for would be different. The service users, by choosing the person they did, told us what they want the role of the artist to be. They don't want it to be someone who has to create something totally amazing, who will change the whole environment, give them a radical experience and challenge them. They wanted something that would be creative, that would build their confidence, and they felt comfortable with – and fun. They wanted to use an art form they had some experience of using before and had enjoyed, that had gone well for them. It was about confidence, their saying, 'Yes, we feel confident about working as equals with this person.' I realised I'd started with a particular agenda, but it was important to allow for the unexpected outcome and respect that gap between my professional view and the instinct of the group itself."*

In a research report for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - *Engaging with Communities, New Deal for Communities 2001-05: An Interim Evaluation* – the need of and demand for partnership is prominent throughout. For example, the report states:

'The local community is at the heart of the Programme. Community engagement and involvement are designed to achieve a number of objectives including increasing self-confidence, enhancing participation in voluntary activities, and boosting community capacity....

Community engagement embraces a wide range of activities including consultation with residents, boosting community infrastructure, involvement of residents in Partnerships and Board members, and direct involvement in devising and running projects...

Partnerships have generally improved channels through which they communicate with the community; more could be done to ensure that Partnerships are committed to the distribution of attractive, regular and frequent publicity material through which residents can respond to Partnership plans and activities. Communications have more of an impact if Partnerships develop a clear brand identity.'

The Creative Communities Unit at Staffordshire University offers learning and development opportunities to voluntary, community and statutory organisations, dealing with the many intricacies of partnership working. Mark Webster, a core member of the Unit, provides this perspective on partnership working:

*“One of the questions we ask participants on our courses is: ‘Can you think of a good partnership, and list some of its features?’ After long discussions they come back and they realise that some of them haven’t had good partnerships. Or they realise that the good partnerships are where they work effectively with other people without always having to keep referring back to why they said they got together in the first place - because the working together has defined where they are going. Most of the effective ones start off because someone has something they want to achieve; they are honest about what they want to achieve and they ask some other people who they think might want to achieve a similar thing - or a related thing - and they see if they can form some common ground. They then work out what each of them could do to meet the joint bit as well as their own bits at the same time. That is at the core of what seems to have made some of the most successful partnerships in the experience of the people who have come on this course. And they are fairly representative of the sector.*

*The ineffective partnerships or the ones that are a little dodgy are the ones where it is not transparent from the start, where people have an agenda they are not clear about, where they are not open about the power they have and use it to direct the partnership. They either don’t realise they have this power or they do realise they have and they’re going to use it cynically anyway. It’s important you start off with honesty – ‘Well, actually I’ve got more power than you but that doesn’t matter’ - because you don’t have to be equal size or have equal resources to have a partnership. It’s really important to recognise that if you are working with community organisations who don’t have funding, or who are doing it in their spare time, because their main resource is their own good will.”*

Transparency, honesty, clarity, commitment, good will, impact. These things are easily stated, but not so easily achieved. Let us take a look at the holding page of one New Deal web site, which stated in January 2006 -

‘We are currently in the process of establishing a new web presence to provide up to date information on all aspects of the New Deal for Communities programme. We anticipate this will go live in March 2006.’

In January 2007, though this particular New Deal programme is into its fifth year of operation, the holding page has remained unchanged over a 12-month period, a virtual dead end, a kind of absurd communiqué to local communities.

**'Let's use the word partnership'**

Overnight, a series of very large signs appeared in my local area, at road junctions, on the top of a hill, by a bus stop and so on. *Welcome to Blakenhall part of the ABCD Regeneration area*, they proudly (and loudly) proclaimed. It was some time, some months, before anyone quite understood what they actually meant. Taxi and bus drivers referred to them, as 'the place where everyone's learning to read'.

The ABCD actually stood for All Saints and Blakenhall Community Development, which local councillors were obliged to endlessly explain at various tenants and residents meetings. The signage was part of a New Deal for Communities initiative, though there was no mention of New Deal on the signs, and a conspicuous lack of any funders logos. (There was a graphic representation of a housing/city complex.) To all intents and purposes they looked like any other road sign and so, despite their size, acquired a kind of anonymity. The signs – which so mysteriously blossomed – and the regeneration initiative, brought together two geographically distinct areas under one banner; All Saints to the east of the town centre, Blakenhall to the south, physically separated by two arterial roads, no particular connection except in the mind of the planners who drew up the New Deal boundaries. Some areas, like Goldthorn Park, though technically part of the New Deal area, did not get a sign.

In nearby Walsall, another project was underway, aiming to replace a plethora of old signs, some dating back over 50 years, to improve the visual impact of entering the borough and to give a sense of unity to a local authority made up of several small towns. This was conceived of as a creative project – these were *“not just road signs, these were pieces of public art that are about drawing together Walsall as a place.”* A steering group of funders, the council's senior management team and politicians from the Cabinet was brought together in a 'think tank' to develop the idea, and a member of the Creative Development Team of the council managed the project. An artist then worked with them on creating entrance features for main road routes in and out of the borough as well as six 'district centre' markers. During the project's 18-month lifetime, workshops were held with all nine Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in Walsall to create and design the signs.

People from Walsall, Moxley and Brownhills took part in creative workshops exploring their area's history, identity and hopes for the future. They created their own site specific pieces as another part of the 'gateways' project - again agreed and ratified at local meetings and in the council house. Consensus over style, size, look, images, words and locations was agreed at public meetings chaired by elected representatives. as well as at other locally held workshops.

These perhaps illustrate different approaches to the notion of what partnership involves.

## **Arts & Regeneration: the broader context**

Regeneration aims to build sustainable communities. The Government's *Sustainable Communities Plan* launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in February 2003, recognises that the key requirements of sustainable communities include "effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design and long-term stewardship of their community", alongside a "sense of place" and a "diverse, vibrant and creative culture". Its aims include the regeneration of towns and cities and the creation of "thriving, vibrant, sustainable communities" in which people can "live with pride".

For many, the most important aspect of regeneration is the recognition of integral links between people and places; thus the development of the fabric of towns and cities cannot only be left to architects, engineers and planners. Artists also contribute to the urban fabric, bringing different skills to the complexity of cities, and there are challenges to be confronted when artists move their practice from the studio out into the wider public domain. Though public art commissions often represent a highly visible component of development schemes, artists can be involved in the regeneration process in ways which demand more than the production of a predetermined outcome. There has been an over-emphasis on environmental or physical change, which does not solve the problems of people living in those particular areas. The Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit itself has commented: "Many initiatives have failed to deliver lasting change. Too much emphasis was placed on physical regeneration and not enough on communities themselves."

The Comedia report from 1996 - *The art of regeneration: urban renewal through cultural activity* - used case studies from 15 cities, claiming that culturally-led regeneration could result in the following benefits:

- enhancing social cohesion
- improving local image
- reducing offending behaviour
- promoting interest in the local environment
- developing self-confidence
- building private and public sector partnerships
- exploring identities
- enhancing organisational capacity

- supporting independence
- exploring visions of the future

Neighbourhood renewal – both physical and social – was also at the heart of the Policy Action Team 10 report, *Culture at the heart of regeneration*, DCMS (2004). This also argued strongly for the role of the arts and culture in the process of regeneration; a recognition that the role of an artist can be far more than simply to provide a static art object and should involve a more dynamic practices, with a wide range of community involvement, process based work, social change and collaboration.

***Example:***

Deansfield, a secondary school in Wolverhampton, is a designated Creative Partnership-lead school and receives funding from the Department for Culture Media and Sport for a ‘creative agent’, an artist who helps develop projects. The pupils of the school became involved in the nearby redevelopment of the 12-acre brownfield site by Persimmon Homes. The pupils visited the site on a regular basis, where several blocks of flats had previously existed, and studied its background history. This also gave them the opportunity to understand first hand about the changes happening in the built environment around them. Using *Planning for Real* methods the pupils then created a large-scale model of the site, which became the focal point for extensive community consultation and helped measure public responses and reactions to development plans.

### **Arts & Health: the broader context**

The Arts and Health field has grown increasingly sophisticated in recent years, with work being undertaken right across the UK. The ongoing political priority being given to regeneration, social inclusion, community cohesion, sustainable development, public participation and partnership working has encouraged a wider acknowledgement and understanding of the roles that arts can play in promoting health. Indeed, the Department of Health Public Health documents itemise priorities such as -

- improving health and reducing health inequalities
- cross-government working
- engaging with communities
- addressing the underlying determinants of health
- the importance of local partners and flexible approaches

It is no longer uncommon to find contemporary art in the hospital environment. Artists are perceived to be a key ingredient of any planning and implementation group for major capital refurbishment schemes; specific commissions are undertaken for clinics, treatment rooms, recovery rooms, consultant offices, as well as the wards and public areas of a building; or artists are part of educational outreach and health promotion work. Phil Barton, Director of RENEW, the North West's new Centre for Regeneration Excellence puts it this way: "Artists can provide creative input to planning and consultation processes; provide training for Design Champions; engage local people and professionals in development new forms of engagement as well as contribute to improved health outcomes."

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital was one of the pioneers field from the mid-nineties, with a full-time art co-ordinator responsible for providing visual arts as well as live performances in public areas and wards. Dr James Scott, who chaired the hospital's art selection committee at that time, featured in an article in the Guardian. The article reported that: "patients in the old pre-op anaesthetic room, which had a ceiling painted with a scene from a summer's day, went under with much less stress than those gazing at the usual magnolia ceiling.... his patients now go under in the Chelsea and Westminster to a scene of giant blue macaws and mint-coloured parrots, peering out of a heavenly sky." At the hospital's open day that year 1500 people came to tour the hospital; when asked what impressed them most, the operating theatres were in the first place and the second most popular feature was

the art. The unique activities of the hospital, with the emphasis on challenging works of visual art - over 1000 - and on high quality live music, prompted the setting up of a three-year research project in 1999, a scientific evaluation to support the wealth of anecdotal evidence on the successful use of the arts in healthcare. The study concluded that the integration of the Visual and Performing Arts in Healthcare:

- Induces significant differences in clinical outcomes
- Reduces amount of drug consumption
- Shortens length of stay in hospital
- Improves patient management
- Contributes towards increased job satisfaction
- Enhances the quality of service

In the wider community, the arts are seen to contribute to health and well-being, to enhancing social relationships, social cohesion and a sense of purpose and engagement, and to building 'social capital' – a major determinant of health.

Dr. John Middleton, Director of Public Health, Sandwell PCT, expresses it this way:

*“An artist can be an intermediary between a medical professional on one hand and the knowledge of the lay person on the other. Good art, which involves people, is an extremely powerful means of communication. The ability to communicate complex ideas via media that an artist understands enables large numbers of people to be involved. In effect, the actual art product is a creation of what the lay-person or people involved in the project put into it. The professional knowledge in that sense becomes the raw material that the artist works with. As a result of that you then have a better communication tool for a wider audience to explain to them what the problem is.”*

Meeting health objectives, artists deliver creative health promotion messages on issues such as teenage pregnancy, drug and substance abuse, obesity, heart disease, sexual health, mental health, ageing, testicular cancer and breast cancer. Artists may work with a cross section of the target audience, in consultation to inform and influence the outcome of the product, or to help devise and deliver the project, along with the health promotion message itself.

***Example:***

Local research in the West Midlands highlighted that men working in manual labour industries consume less than half the amount of fruit and vegetables than those working in the professional sector. The 'Food for Thought' project aimed to find out why men eat so badly at work and to make them think and reflect on their current eating habits. Funded by Walsall PCT in partnership with Walsall's Health and Business Initiative, it was developed by the Creative Development Team at Walsall M.B.C. working with artists from Round Midnight. They worked with 30 men at James Walker Engineering and Kirkpatrick Ltd in a daytime TV style video project, which resulted in a 30 minute DVD, portraying men's thoughts, feelings and stories around what they eat, as well as promoting the local 5 a day message. The DVD is being used as a tool within wider healthy eating campaigns by local health visitors when engaging men in health checks within local businesses.

## **Creative Community Consultation – Some examples**

Before describing the arts case studies, it may be useful to reflect upon the geographic and social contexts in which they were developed and delivered. The case studies, which then follow, describe in some detail the roles that artists undertook, some of the processes involved and their contribution to increased public participation and enhanced partnership working.

### **The Black Country**

The Black Country consists of three metropolitan borough councils - Walsall, Sandwell, Dudley – and one city, Wolverhampton, awarded this status in the Millennium. The area has a population of over 1 million people, with 450,000 homes and 500,000 jobs. This is 100,000 less than in the 1970's, much of the loss in manufacturing, though this sector still accounts for 22% of employment in the Black Country compared to 13% in England as a whole. 41% of adults in the Black Country have no qualifications compared to 29% nationally; only 12% have higher level qualifications, compare to 20% nationally. Many people in the Black Country live in communities which are considered to be 'deprived' in comparison with communities elsewhere in England. Unsurprisingly, the Black Country scores unfavourably on the Health Poverty Index.

Because of its strong manufacturing base, the area has always attracted skilled manual workers, and has acted as a magnet for global diaspora. As a result the population comprises a rich diversity of cultures, including those of Black African, Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Yemeni peoples with their indigenous skills and crafts. The BME community is significant – 15.2% compared to national average of 9%.

Since the beginning of the 18th century this area has been important in the national transport system - with the main coaching routes, to the North and the West Coast ports, running through the area; the development of the great canal networks of Brindley, Smeaton and Telford; and with the coming of the railroads. Sandwell and Walsall sit at one of the crossroads of the national motorway system, the M5 and M6 interchange.

From the Industrial Revolution onwards the area developed rapidly from a series of small hamlets to a concentration of metal foundries, metalworking and engineering factories; utilising the abundant local supply of mineral deposits of limestone, coal,

ironstone and fireclay. In the 1880's there were 30 coal pits operating in West Bromwich alone. This mineral extraction, along with the production of iron and steel, chemicals and gas, glass, brass, guns, bricks and soap, nails and chains, engines and boilers, all helped provide a solid manufacturing base for the expansion of Imperial Britain. It also earned the area the nickname of 'The Black Country'.

As a result of this industrial past and then industrial decline, it has inherited a range of social, economic and environmental problems. Sandwell, for example, was placed amongst the poorest local authority areas in the country. In 1993, it had the highest proportion of derelict land outside of London (4.7%), but extensive reclamation programmes over a decade reduced this by over half. Partnership regeneration programmes, such as Tipton City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget began to make a significant impact on the quality of life in the borough.

Jubilee Arts were based in Sandwell, receiving funding from both the local council and the Arts Council, but also had agency agreements with Walsall M.B.C, which led to the formulation of the Community Arts Team (now the Creative Development Team) and Dudley M.B.C.

The organisation was characterised by its use of technology and creativity, working with artists, designers, musicians, film-makers, crafts makers and community groups, individuals, public artists and other design professionals. This work was undertaken in a social context, and their artistic practice was based on ideas of active interventions in formal education, youth provision, economic development, creative leisure, planning and urban renewal - exploring new forms of expression, collaboration and presentation.

The philosophy behind this work was summarised as follows:

**Desires:** the creative, imaginative and innovative desires of people should be celebrated and explored.

**Creativity:** the creative work of artists in many forms should be central to project programmes.

**Communities:** communities of interest share cultural values and these are assets of both local distinctiveness and global significance.

**Values:** socially produced work is of the same value, but within a different aesthetic, as work which is produced within the Western tradition of the individual artist.

**Celebration:** the industrial, cultural and social heritage of local should be celebrated and explored.

**Access:** all cultural work can inform and illuminate life; access to the means of production, distribution and presentation of cultural goods should be extended and made available to all people in all sectors of the community.

The following case studies derive primarily from the work of artists working with this community arts organisation throughout the 1990's.

### **Case Studies in Regeneration**

“One of the dangerous although understandable assumptions that we now have is that information is always and forever our friend. It's understandable because in the past, people sought information in order to solve specific problems. But now we're faced with a problem we haven't had before, which is information glut. Information has become a form of garbage. It comes from dozens of sources, it's relentless, it's a commodity that can be bought and sold, it's not directed at anyone in particular. And so we're now faced with the problem, not of how to get information but how to get rid of information in order to give some sort of coherence to our lives.”

- *Dr Neil Postman, New York University*

### **Regeneration project – ‘Sandwell Information Project’ and ‘Safe Zone’**

Development agencies constituted in the Eighties had increased levels of distrust at both a political and community level. The Black Country Development Corporation, established in 1987, covered parts of Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. In contrast to most of the other Urban Development Corporations (UDCs), it contained a significant resident population within its area, together with a substantial number of employers, and it attempted to ensure that these local people benefited from its activities. Given this aim, and the background of the limited impact on local employment made by the London Docklands and Merseyside UDCs, it undertook a range of training and recruitment programmes, alongside significant reclamation programmes. However, as an unelected body, with planning control over the majority of the Borough of Sandwell, it caused huge local resentment and partnership working proved difficult with public and voluntary agencies. It is best remembered for building Britain's most expensive road – the Black Country Spine Road - at a cost of nearly 100 million pounds. Following this experience of UDCs, the City Challenge arrived, a new funding initiative from central government.

In 1993, Tipton City Challenge began a five-year £37.5 million regeneration programme in Tipton, Princes End, Ocker Hill and Burnt Tree areas of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Partnership working was high on the agenda and the Education and Training Forum commissioned Jubilee Arts to work with them on a 3 year 'Communications Project'; to improve the Challenge's ability to communicate with local people, advise on their overall communications strategy, and provide training opportunities for local people. Dr John Middleton puts it this way: *"I think the Tipton City Challenge one in the early 90's had far more visible outcomes in terms of real schemes, whether they were housing schemes, crime reduction, or reversal of a long term trend in long term unemployment. I thought it was rather comic at the time that all the railings got painted blue and that sort of thing, but there was a real energy about that initiative. I think that one thing learned from that, and with the subsequent schemes was that 5 years is not enough, and another 5 is needed."*

The issue of how to effectively communicate with, to both inform and work with local people (or stakeholders) was moving to the forefront. By the mid-Nineties contractions of various government funding schemes – the Single Regeneration Budget for instance - did have *"the benefit of forcing people to come together."* The challenge for statutory and voluntary agencies, encouraged and directed to engage in community partnerships was how to improve communications between public services (eg. education & community services, health) and the people that they serve. There was an increasing emphasis on customised training, and enhancing the ability of local people to 'make independent decisions based on improved access to relevant information.' A significant communications project was undertaken within the Single Regeneration Budget in Sandwell. It intended to involve local communities in the creation and delivery of information by using creative and artistic means.

The partners in this enterprise, working under the Community Advocacy umbrella of SRB, were Jubilee Arts, Tipton Community Safety Unit and Sandwell Libraries. This partnership recognised at the outset that information was available as never before, but understood that the styles of delivery of this information was crucial. Rather than viewing people as the receivers or consumers of the message, it aimed to involve people in the creation of the message in the first place, believing that this leads to a richer, fuller, more complex, yet more easily understandable message. One of the key issues identified across the borough throughout a number of redevelopment schemes and by partner groups was 'fear of crime' and community safety issues. This led to a concentration of projects under the umbrella of 'The Safe Zone'.

The Safe Zone projects (1997/99) – coordinated by Emma Chetcuti - were undertaken to give local people the opportunity to make and promote information on community safety issues through a diverse range of art forms. Following a pilot with Tipton Community Safety Unit, the projects ran from over a two year period, challenging prejudices and myths that surround safety issues, and helping to provide a framework for a new partnership approach to community safety issues in regeneration projects.

These artist led projects brought together a diverse range of groups to examine the issues - Asian young men and white elderly; youth dancers, choreographers, and rappers; physically disabled adults; disaffected, excluded secondary pupils; young single mothers; peer educators; elders from West Bromwich Afro-Caribbean Day Centre and elders from sheltered housing; young women from a Muslim Centre; Sandwell Young Women's Forum. Individual projects were showcased as they unfolded through a series of events. These were linked to local government seminars on the issues raised and the development of local community safety forums.

A group of people came together to take part in a project with Surely, a multimedia artist collective, and the choreographer Maggie Lewis. The group wanted to explore ideas about their identity in every day situations, examining the relationship between how they were perceived on the street and how they perceived themselves. The choreographic process worked in tandem with the multimedia process, both shaping and defining the issues of gender and sub-culture, which were of most concern to the group. They selected images which were data projected onto a backdrop behind the dancers in performance. This backdrop provided a context for the dance creating settings, environments and reflecting moods.

Young people at Holly House Education Centre took part in a project with Roz Hall using photography and digital imaging. Holly House Education Centre worked with disaffected, excluded secondary pupils and aimed to support them towards accreditation, further education and employment. The project theme of community safety was discussed with the group before deciding what images to take and how to take them. The first photographs taken were Polaroid images to illustrate particular things which made these boys feel safe or unsafe. The group then used a medium format camera and a studio flash kit to take portraits of each other looking scared, threatening and safe. These images were scanned into a computer and text was added using Adobe Photoshop. Images were also montaged together using the

same programme. Some of the boys then made their images into animated sequences using Macromind Director. The project culminated in the exhibition of their images on the sides of double-decker buses, which travelled throughout the Black Country.

Adults from the Causeway Green Day Centre for physically disabled people worked with artists Anita Kaushik, Paul Smith and Rachel McArdle to explore and comment on issues of community safety. Mixed media workshops were run at the centre, introducing new techniques and skills to the participants: photography, computer imagery, textile/collage, painting, mosaics, woodwork and photocopy collages. The participants created a large sculptural installation – the Pyramid – working on panels in small groups or as individuals, employing the artform/technique most suitable to the expression of the idea and issue of their choice. The Pyramid itself originated from the participants very personal thoughts and ideas about community safety as well as their views about specific environments and situations which place them at risk, reflecting the concerns of physically disabled adults. Thus, the bottom layer of the pyramid symbolised ‘negative’ aspects of safety such as access to buildings. The middle layer reflected ‘positive’ actions and feelings. The top section evoked images from an ‘ideal/ imaginary future’.

Young people who met at the Maypole group worked with Roz Hall to produce images which communicate something of themselves. This group met on a weekly basis, in Birmingham, and offered a physical meeting space for young people who identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The images were then included on a web site conceptualised and designed by the young people at Maypole. The site explored the potential of the internet as providing a safe space in which young lesbian, gay and bisexual people can meet and communicate. The site continued to grow and develop as visitors were invited add text to the site over a 2 year period.

Young women living in Cradley Heath worked with Anita Kaushik and Pauline Bailey to produce a video short about domestic violence. The young women were particularly concerned with the effect that domestic violence has on children, who are often witness to, if not also the victims of the same abuse. The video was made from the perspective of a young person, setting out to explore the cyclical nature of domestic violence and to voice, through the video, the possibility for women to seek help in ‘Breaking the Cycle’. The project developed through a series of video

production workshops and was written, performed, filmed and edited by the young women participating.

Two young peer educators, Dennis Cohoone and Leroy Shand, supported by community artist Beverley Harvey, worked with local youth to formulate ideas and thoughts about issues of community safety. The group decided that they would like to explore issues related to life on the streets of Sandwell, from their experience, through rap music. Two new songs, 'Street Life' and 'Tonight's the Night' were written, performed and produced by the participants from lyric writing and music production workshops. The songs represented the issues uncovered in the workshop process. 'Street Life' considered the pressures placed on the individual in a consumer society. It presented the contradiction between lack of opportunity and poor job prospects against the need to own and consume the riches of the advertising agencies - which promise 'better lives, improved sex appeal, whiter teeth and glossier hair' - and the consequent dangers and temptation to turn to crime to pay for things which aren't available to us all. 'Tonight's the Night' explores the danger and glamour of casual relationships and casual sex, set against the particulars of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The two-track cassette was made available to youth groups in the Sandwell area and accompanying workshop activity developed for schools, community centres and youth clubs.

One project linked elders from West Bromwich Afro-Caribbean Day Centre and elders from sheltered housing at Home Mead and Butterworth Court, Bristol. Carolyn Hassan worked with these two groups using photography, video, and audio recordings to explore their ideas about how safe they felt in their own homes and in their communities. She facilitated the exchange of ideas between the elders and worked towards presenting the material they produced in a form that reflected the varied and thought provoking views and feelings they wanted to share with a wider audience. The final installation consisted of an armchair, CCTV video footage, spy holes and sound. It reflected the environment in which many of the participants lived and provided a context in which to experience, listen to and absorb the comments that the two groups made about the wider society, and their feelings about how safe or not they felt in their lives.

Young women from the Tipton Muslim Centre worked on a series of lyric writing and music production workshops to explore issues of community safety. The young

women identified female friendship and solidarity as central to their sense of well-being and safeness. Each participant was then encouraged to contribute a verse to the Rap, writing individually to explore the theme of friendship. Workshops were undertaken in Rap Delivery and Music Production, at the Bat Cave recording studios, with rapper Hard Kaur and the resulting recording distributed to schools.

Sandwell Young Women's Forum worked with photographer Kate Green to build up their photography and interviewing skills, before venturing onto the street to interview a range of women about their thoughts, feelings and experiences of safety around them. In their words: "We are working to raise awareness of the vulnerability of women today in our community, using photographs and sound recordings. We think this is a crucial issue which affects all of us. At first we were really apprehensive about approaching women and asking them to be photographed. Now, we have lots of confidence in our abilities." The photographs were displayed on large scale panels sound loops of the sound recordings.

Kate Allen was commissioned to create a physical and virtual installation for an all day consultation event at a Town Hall, which showcased all the projects. The Safety Net created a moment of reflection, bringing together the diverse ideas of all the different projects. The complex concerns surrounding safety emphasise the many forms the subject of safety can take. The Safety Net encouraged the audience to become involved, by physically entering or lying on the soft objects and interacting with these objects on screen. The artist explained it this way: "The notion of safety can often be termed as virtual. Whether we feel safe or not, to a large extent depends on how we feel and what we know about our environment. The less we know of any danger the safer we may feel, but unless we know the risks we cannot take evasive action. This is the paradox surrounding the issue of safety and was the inspiration for the Safety Net. One person's idea of safety could become another persons infringement of personal liberty. When all dangers are highlighted, no risks taken, life could become suffocating and controlled. It could be argued that we are living in an increasingly 'Nanny State' with government directives as to what we may eat and CCTV springing up in every high street, all for our added safety. While realising that raising awareness of safety can be a positive force in the community, enabling us to take control of our lives, the Virtual Net, the giant soft objects, safety net and mat, create an environment that takes the notion of protection to an absurd degree. We are treated to a childlike experience, where we are given the opportunity to 'play' in a soft environment."

This environment formed part of the design for the Town Hall event, which provided an opportunity for a new community safety forum to take place, chaired by a leading Councillor. The forum gave the audience the opportunity to discuss issues raised by the projects, and actors in character provided interactions with audience members. The event involved an audience of 100 community delegates and attracted an audience of over 400.

Delegates were divided into discussion groups in order to explore their feelings about the images that they were exposed to and to uncover how they may have had an influence on their opinions. The SRB Partnership intended that the delegates begin to develop an objective view about community safety which draws in many contributing factors in order that they could take this back into their organisations or neighbourhoods and begin the task of identifying realistic ways forward to tackling crime on an equal footing with professional crime/community safety agencies. Following lunch, an open forum exposed a panel of expert professionals to questions posed by the audience of delegates, video footage taken during the consultation exercise and also actors representing aspects of the arts projects. Again, this aimed to broaden the vision held by delegates, encouraging the panellists to explain what their agencies were doing to reduce crime and to begin the process of forging new bonds between professionals and local residents.

Following the showcase event, the virtual representation of the Safety Net formed the interface for the Safe Zone CD-ROM. The Safe Zone CD-ROM and accompanying Education Pack explore the idea of 'Community Safety' based on the project work undertaken. The CD-ROM contained 3D animations, video footage, audio interviews, digital imaging and music, all of which were selected to appeal to young people. The CD-ROM was distributed to schools and agencies, locally regionally and nationally.

These outcomes led to a new way of thinking about community safety in terms of consultation from agencies charged with these responsibilities, and in terms of the 'depth and breadth' of consultation required to effectively engage with local groups and local individuals.

### ***What lessons were learnt?***

In a modern media-saturated environment, while information is perceived to be constant and free-flowing, it is not value-free. It is more often characterised as 'disinformation'. Corporate information – that which is produced by statutory bodies

(such as a local authority) or commercial bodies is considered to be sanitised in some way, to have been 'approved' or 'branded' - or 'spun' in the common parlance of the day. The challenge is create a language of change, and to combat cynicism and distrust evident in local communities. This project recognised these dilemmas at the outset, that all information is mediated in some way, and engaged people in a multiplicity of ways to decode, understand and share the results of their 'investigations'.

Community Safety, as a theme, elicited highly emotional responses which were not necessarily based on any facts – i.e.: while statistics said that crime rates were actually falling, the perception was completely the opposite. Fear of crime, generated by a constant diet of 'bad news stories' in the local news and local newspapers was wholly disproportionate to the reality. Real life as portrayed through the news media exposed people to information about crime everyday in a very intimate way, which shapes the ways in which we view the world and formulate our opinions about crime, offenders and victims. We are subject to the preferences held by the editor. Considerable effort went into unpicking stereotypical responses, recognising that the subject was a complex and multi-layered subject – groups were encouraged to explore a topic of particular concern and relevance to them and to share this on a wider stage through a range of media. This helped to identify the contributing influences which formulate their ideas of what community safety was – in effect, demystifying a highly specialised subject, often the preserve of experts, yet a subject on which everyone had a strong opinion and polarised position. The project results influenced the nature of future communications between the community organisations in Sandwell and began the task of identifying realistic ways forward to tackling crime on an equal footing with professional crime/community safety/statutory agencies. Young people in particular, who were mostly portrayed as the perpetrators of crime, and (at that time) excluded from the conversation, were encouraged to have a greater profile and say in the project overall.

### **Regeneration project – ‘The Lyng Reborn’**

The Lyng estate is adjacent to West Bromwich town centre (the principal shopping centre for Sandwell) and new Midland Metro line. The Lyng got its name because fields of heather (or 'lyng') used to cover the area. First settled in the 17th century, the exploitation of coal in the locality in the mid-19th century led to the rapid industrialisation of the area. The estate covered 12 hectares and was constructed in the 1960's - after slum clearance programmes took away most of the old terraced style houses - to high density using non-traditional building methods. There were 330 units in 7 high-rise blocks, 650 in low-rise blocks of flats and maisonettes, a parade of small shops, 2 churches and a local estate office. By the 1990's the estate was decaying badly. Suffering from a poor image, it became hard to let and run down. Repairs to the flat roofs of the estate exceeded the entire annual housing repairs budget of the local authority. The image of the estate declined: a large single housing project with a maze of poorly lit and unsurveyed pedestrian routes, poorly defined public space, and bad access for private, service and emergency vehicles.

The regeneration of this estate, in partnership with local people and local agencies, over a minimum 5-7 year period, was intended to meet key local, regional and local priorities. Partnership in the context of the redevelopment of the Lyng meant that 'the community would be at the heart of the decision making'. The existent Lyng Community Association were not perceived as simply a vehicle for consultation but were encouraged to operate as a full partner.

From the outset, artists were an integral component, working with local groups to create a series of negotiated spaces, representations and transformations of the estate. This was the largest and most ambitious housing development the local authority had ever undertaken. From initial open days in 1996, creating 'Three Wishes' for the estate, then working with the Association to increase their profile with print and media, through to a 12-month programme of commissions. This arts activity produced material in a wide range of media which reflected upon the approach taken in the early stages of the project, the period from December 1999 (the launch of the Lyng Framework Document) through to planning permission being granted for the Lyng Phase One Development with the Beazer Consortium (December 2000).

Two of the tower blocks in poor condition, Bowater House and Braybrook House, which lay along the edge of the estate, were scheduled for early demolition. As a result of consultation, it was decided to retain these blocks and renovate them in a

cost-effective way, whilst attempting to demonstrate innovative technology and signal the regeneration process in the area. In 1998, the first refurbishment - of Bowater - was undertaken. This 9 storey block was considered to be an ideal project to demonstrate quality and innovation, and to create a landmark building at the gateway to the town centre. During their relocation period, Tracy Holland was commissioned to work with the displaced residents, all of whom were in their 50's and had lived in Bowater since it was built - and the majority wished to return. Based on their personal stories, photographs, objects and histories, the artist created work for the foyer and entrance area to the block, and for individual flats.

Community development work began in earnest in January 1999, when a group of 15-20 volunteers from the tenants undertook a training programme to prepare themselves for potential roles on or supporting a reconstituted Lyng Community Association. Training included the financial, technical and legal issues they would face, both in terms of the specific redevelopment of the estate as well as the functions that would be required as a Board member of the Association. Several working visits were undertaken to a number of housing schemes and regeneration projects around the UK involving community associations, to help inform the drawing up of a constitution for the new Association. This group were the key partner of the arts programme. Young people were identified as one group who were often missed out of consultation processes, so projects were devised to address this, working with the school population, who will provide the future citizens of community.

Jane Rendell, a writer and lecturer at Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, worked with the artists as a 'critical friend' and she described the developmental process of work with the Association as follows: "People given responsibility for representing the views of the 'community' may need training in techniques of information gathering, interpretation, analysis and presentation. In something as pertinent and emotional as designs of new homes it seems vital that those responsible for representing the views of a much larger group of people should be given support. In order, on other people's behalf, to make decisions they need relevant information but - more importantly - support. If not, then is it fair to expect them to represent the ideals of 'participation'?"

To highlight the emergence of a new Association and to develop interest in the Lyng Framework Document, the arts programme developed these projects over an 18 month period:

- **Re-Generation:** renewing the urban form - taking a look at the broader context for the redevelopment of the estate, exhibitions and presentations were undertaken with tenants groups.
  
- **Insight:** video box and photo-diary – sharing some of the thoughts of board members of the Community Association as the development progressed.
  
- **Digital Postcards:** young children from Lyng Primary School worked to create their own contemporary postcards.
  
- **Intelligent & Green:** young people took the opportunity to look at environmental issues as the Lyng's first new build took shape, investigating the construction of a group of 'intelligent and green' houses on the southern boundary of the estate.
  
- **The Estate of Imagination:** Acting out the role of junior planners and architects, young people from the estate created their imaginary townscape of the future, both as physical installation and a virtual presence
  
- **SoundTown:** An exploratory soundscape, based on audio recordings of daily life of the estate.
  
- **A Walk Down Memory Lane:** Memories, stories and photographs presented by members of the Lyng History project.
  
- **Virtual Tour:** A virtual tour of the Lyng, a game environment representing a snapshot of the old estate in May 1999.

The arts projects were documented and the work finally compiled in an interactive CD- ROM – as an 'heirloom for the estate'. The CD-ROM both provided a portrait of the estate and a further tool for consultation and community participation, with commentaries from Jane Rendell. It told the story of an estate, being demolished and rebuilt for the second time in 40 years. The story was considered important to record.

Jane Rendell described it this way:

“A story is a presentation of events and experiences told through words - written and spoken. Story telling is a way of organising knowledge - has an element of explanation. The qualities of a special location are more than a mere backdrop to the events that take place there, they are the ‘plot’ of life. Certain environments allow specific events to ‘take place’ and remain strong in the memory and the imagination. Particular places contain over time the power to evoke all kinds of emotions - good and bad - because of past events that have occurred.”

The CD-ROM also included background material from interviews with 14 individuals with roles to play in the development of the Lyng and the adjacent town centre. In school contexts it was used to examine both environmental and housing issues, as well as exploring what citizenship and local participation meant. For other agencies and community groups involved in regeneration of their areas, it highlighted the work of the growing partnership between Lyng Community Association and Sandwell Housing Department. The CD-ROM was also used for training staff in Neighbourhood Housing Offices of the local authority - an unexpected outcome - as it provided a comprehensive look at some of the drivers of regeneration.

### ***What lessons were learnt?***

The partners in the Lyng project recognised the danger that community consultation can become ‘as long as a piece of string’. Furthermore, the question of ‘who is the community’ was paramount. For a plan which, in effect, knocked down and 90% of the estate and rebuilt it for (as it emerged) a 10 year period, the problem of consultation meant that people making decisions in the name of participation were not necessarily those who would live in the end results.

There needed to be several different strategies to engage with people - this meant a series of projects on a shorter more manageable time scale needed to be undertaken, whereby people could see some kind of tangible result – the individual arts projects being one aspect of this, the educational programme another. It was recognised that young people are often not consulted – it is not enough to invite them to meeting or to sit on a committee – and that activities to involve them need to be devised specifically and given equal prominence in marketing and publicity.

The longevity of generational planning is difficult for a community to grasp. In this instance 5 year plan became a 10 year plan and these periods alone were difficult for a community member to consider in any consultation process. Rather than providing a one-off blueprint which attempts to solve everything at once, thinking on the Lyng project focussed on providing much more dynamic structures on order to embrace ongoing change and uncertainty. The development placed importance on process as well as product and also involved the use of new media to create 'models' that are interactive rather than static. Project activities targeted at young people provided a route to parents, families and peers. Arts tools can effectively reach out to people who have stories to tell, issues to discuss, feelings to express, people who may have little opportunity to normally make their voice heard except through criticism and opposition. It can create an opportunity to be pro-active rather than reactive.

## **Case Studies in Arts and Health**

“The well being of our shared society not only relies on the skilled clinician and the diagnoses of illness by the skilled professionals in this field, it also relies upon the ambience of that care and the approach adopted towards learning about the nature of illnesses and causes and cures. In addition it relies on the sharing and acknowledgement of a number of individual and collective values and codes. In this we include the range of cultural values which belong to each grouping and strata within our communities. Individuals are often able to find a means of expression through relating their own experiences to others by a creative means: writing, storytelling, painting, music, photography and dance to name a few. Eating and talking, social contact and exchange are all ways in which we relate to each other, creative work also allows for sharing of ideas and exchanges of views and information. Within all of these are a number of learning processes and the means to cater for a sharing of cultural values and differences.”

*- Maurice Maguire, De Montfort University*

### **Arts & Health project – ‘Sex Get Serious’**

Sex Get Serious was a multimedia project by Jubilee Arts commissioned by Sandwell Health Authority, following a bid made to the regional HIV/AIDS committee. The project originated with a proposal from an outreach health team who wanted to produce a series of educational leaflets targeting Afro-Caribbean youth about sexual health and safe sex. From planning workshops with artists and young people, the idea to develop an ‘arcade style interactive’ game developed. The pilot version was made at a point when new programmes and techniques were emerging on the market. As a result, it went through many different formats in response to the new options available.

Over a 18 month period, artists worked with young people in Sandwell, aged from 12 to 20, examining issues of sexual health through workshops using drama, video, visual arts and photography. These workshops determined the content, look and feel of the final computer piece, which was intended to be part of a standalone touring display. Young people were enabled to make a significant contribution to the style and manner of presentation of the end product. For example, in Kooltown, their mythical name for Sandwell, you can visit the Youth Club, Unity Health Centre, the NiteClub, the Flat; pop into the Newsagents or just hang around in the Bus Station.

Sex Get Serious v1.0 was created for the launch of the new centre for sexual health, Unity House in Oldbury, on World AIDS Day 1993. This version was then tested with a range of groups and subsequently adapted and re-authored. The new version toured the borough from July 1994, as part of a health fair, to over 35 venues organised by Unity.

Sex Get Serious was nominated for - and won - a Health of the Nation Award. It was also featured on a BBC television programme 'Computing for the Less Terrified', and adapted for use in the exhibition 'Brenda & Other Stories... Art + HIV+ You' curated by Walsall Art Gallery, which gathered record crowds and then toured to several venues nationally. It was also shown in 'alt.youth.media' at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City in 1996.

As the project progressed, access to secondary school children - the key audience - became problematic, with new government legislation in 1993 taking HIV out of the core curriculum and leaving it to the discretion of Head Teachers. Sex Get Serious was consequently used as part of a School Governor Training Scheme in the borough as an example of educational use of new and emergent technology. This led for calls for it to be distributed to local schools, from the school governors themselves. A revised CD-ROM v.3.0, for both PC & Mac, with a new NiteClub section and accompanying education pack, was distributed to all Sandwell Schools by 1998, and the CD was distributed nationally by Youth Clubs UK. Adaptations were also made for North Birmingham Health Authority for use with gay & lesbian teenagers, and for Shropshire Health Authority for use with young offenders in institutional contexts.

### **Arts & Health project – ‘Sounding It Out’**

Sandwell Healthcare Trust commissioned Jubilee Arts in 1995 to undertake a project to explore and examine opinions and views around in relation to the aim of enhancing services and access to Black and Minority Ethnic people. Sessions took place on the maternity wards at Sandwell District General Hospital, and at ASRA, a sheltered housing complex for Asian elderly in Smethwick, and with members of the Afro Caribbean Community through Oscar, an organisation providing support for people who suffer from sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia. From the outset of the consultation, broader issues came into play. Parallel reports by Public Management Associates and a Patient Satisfactory Survey raised many issues about the 'look and feel' of the hospital environment to patients from an ethnic minority background, and recommended the greater deployment of audio-visual resources.

To address these issues a project was undertaken to examine the use of audio resources for patients, providing key information on hospital services in ethnic minority languages on audio-tape in a walkman style housing. The Hospital considered that Punjabi should be the main language used, but in artist-led workshops with staff, and in particular Maternity staff, it emerged that it was the Bengali speaking community that was the most difficult to effectively communicate with. While the content of the tape was intended to welcome patients, it took the form of a 'soap opera' which told the story of several characters, revolving around the process of coming to hospital to have a baby. The script was developed by working with groups from a local Bangladeshi centre, who were able to both devise and act it out, based on their experiences and needs.

The tape was not only produced for patients entering the hospital for the first time, but had a wider use out in the community, accessed through G.P surgeries. In the case of the Maternity Unit, the first point of access to such an information tape was the Antenatal Clinic, many months before the patients come into the hospital for delivery. While the distribution of the tape was limited within the available budget, the effectiveness of the material led to several programmes for interpretation and translation services from the Healthcare Trust.

### **Arts & Health project – ‘Asthma Attack’ and ‘Ease the Wheeze’**

The Withymoor surgery in Brierley Hill had pioneered the use of the arts as part of its practice. Withymoor was used as the only arts in Primary Health example in *‘Helping to Heal - The Arts in Health Care’*, (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London 1993).

The first project at the surgery was a week long residency, in 1988, which incorporated craft workshops, storytelling and the decoration of the reception space. The work developed into a health education collaboration over the period of a year between the surgery, Brierley Hill Health Centre and Thornes Community College. For example, 'A Breath of Fresh Air' encompassed residencies, lantern processions, life size mobiles depicting how people abuse their lungs, memory and health boxes created with personal memorabilia.

Another project took the form of a writer-in-residence project, focusing on the stories, memories and observations of local people compiled into a book called 'Prescribed Reading'. Dr Malcom Rigler, writing in the Royal College GP's Report, describes it as follows: "Copies are kept in the waiting room and cover patients' own experiences of miscarriage, tonsillitis, depression - all kinds of medical traumas and sometimes happy medical events! One young woman wrote about the stress of doing everything to please her mother, another woman about the trauma of being beaten over many years. The idea is that other people faced with a similar thing can read about it from a real person's point of view. These accounts are to be made available to far more people as they are to become part of the regional information system. We do not carry out these activities at the expense of the sick people waiting to see us. They are always uppermost in our minds. However, some unobtrusive activity can often help people to relax while they wait and the more boisterous fun takes place outside surgery hours." What was interesting about this surgery was that it consistently had one of the lowest drugs bills in the whole area.

In Dudley, the establishment of a Multi-Media Curriculum Development Initiative helped create an opportunity to develop mixed media projects around chosen health topics. As part of this, Jubilee Arts were approached in 1996 by the Education Department to advise on ways of facilitating the production of multimedia in schools. Teachers had been reporting problems on many levels with engaging in this arena: their pupils had high expectations, fuelled by the quality of multimedia they experienced in commercial products. Schools often had less than state-of-the-art equipment and software. Multimedia productions quickly become very complex, and teachers wanted guidance on how to structure this sort of project.

The challenge was to produce a multimedia piece in two days from scratch with twenty pupils from the fourth year of a secondary school in Brierley Hill working with five artists. The pupils selected for the experiment had no special aptitude for the

subject, but represented a reasonable cross section of fourth year students. The solution to the problem set was to simplify the process. Based on their growing experience of the field, the artists identified several distinct stages in the production of any multimedia piece, which they then applied to the project. For example:

- Writing a project brief in consultation with a 'client'
- Forming 'specialist' groups of pupils and allocate tasks such as research, material gathering, creation of artwork
- Production
- Post production
- User testing.

For this experiment a subject and client needed to be identified. Asthma was chosen as the subject, due to the interest in and advocacy for the role of arts in health education by Dr Rigler at Withymoor. An informal grouping of arts and health workers constituted the 'client' group. This group wrote down the issues which they felt needed to be covered. The form which this brief took then indicated a possible way forward; a 'template' was to be produced in a multimedia authoring programme which contained all the major points which the 'client' wanted included but with no detail. It was like a book with chapter headings but no words or pictures. The pupils' job was then to research the subject point by point and produce the content.

In two intensive days work, the pupils were able to produce a complete and satisfactory project about asthma in multi-media. Six months on, the school reported that the educational ability of the group who had participated in the project had notably increased compared to that of the control group who had not had this particular experience.

Following this pilot project, Jubilee Arts were commissioned in 1999 by the Joint Asthma Task Force in Sandwell and Dudley to develop the Ease the Wheeze project. Asthma is one medical condition which the patient can control and self-medicate with a reasonable success if they have the right information and knowledge, so medical professionals were keen to make this information readily available.

Ease the Wheeze became a multimedia computer programme giving information on Asthma. Housed in a small portable kiosk, it included sound, animation, graphics, text (over 50,000 words to explore should the user wish to) and photographs as part

of a composite landscape through which the user travels. It was created from workshops with young people and adults, both in school and community settings, with artists from Jubilee Arts working with Murray Hall Community Trust - a community based organisation which encouraged local people to play an active role in the development of local services. The Trust, based at Neptune Health Park in Tipton, had an ongoing series of projects to contribute to better health, better opportunities and better quality of life for local people. They were recipients of the SmithKline Beecham Impact Award for innovative community health work. Content was created through an advisory group of health professionals (consultants, general practitioners, nurses) who identified key topics or information to develop. This was then interpreted through a series of creative activities.

For example:

- two artists working in a primary school with a school nurse and two classes, with school children making a large scale asthma map of their local area, interviewing asthma sufferers, undertaking role play, making a series of information posters.
- an artist working with a group to make a comic strip based on a trip to a local swimming baths, using an underwater camera, and interviewing 'Dr Dive' who explained the health benefits of swimming.
- an artist worked with a secondary school group to undertake an asthma audit of their school – a photographic and text trail which identified triggers in their environment.

Apart from testing with the participating schools, the product was tested in a week long demonstration in Queens Square with passer-bys and shoppers – over 500 people took part. The product was housed in a custom designed kiosk which toured to venues from throughout 1999 and 2000 – for use in both for individual viewing and to stimulate group work – to schools, libraries, GP surgeries, pharmacies and community centres. The project won the Regional Health of the Nation Award.

### **Arts & Health project – 'Buzz'**

Buzz was a multimedia package providing an entertaining, accessible and balanced account of the causes and effects of drug use, as perceived by young people, alongside information and sources of support. By the late nineties, drug use had been identified by the Health Authorities as a key area for debate, education and engagement. The 1995 Annual Report to the Director of Public Health, 'Safer Sandwell', produced by Sandwell Health Authority, highlighted a survey of drugs and

young people - the first in the borough. The survey revealed that over 60% of teenagers had been offered illicit drugs, and 43% claimed to have used at least one illicit drug.

The Buzz project provided information and raised awareness of the properties and effects of drugs use by using an engaging, accessible new technology medium, and where the design of the content and style was informed by the existing knowledge and attitudes of young people. A demonstration pilot was undertaken with a youth counselling project in Walsall – this involved creating an installation – a nightclub and party environment – with young people, in which various dramas unfolded and were recorded, filmed and edited. This formed the basis of a test interactive interface using film, animation and sound, which was then piloted with three schools.

Following this, the project was undertaken over a two year period. Understanding of drug related issues by young people was increased and personal development encouraged by involving them – over 300 individuals - through workshops with a variety of artists throughout the production process. The final CD-ROM was used as an educational tool within all secondary schools in the Black Country and then distributed nationally by Youth Clubs UK. Buzz contained an inventive and entertaining mix of animation and video, music and digital art, making this an 'interactive and excellent aid to any drugs education programme'. Buzz was designed to be used for five group sessions, for individual work, as a trigger for discussion, as a focus for a quiz, a project, or coursework. The product contained two CD's – disc 1, 'The Facts', contained information on the properties, effects, and legal issues of drugs. Disc 2, 'The Arcade', consolidates this knowledge with two 'fun' game environments.

### ***What lessons were learnt?***

By being prepared to invest in new media tools– literally, the fast changing nature of the technology meant that the envisaged outcomes themselves changed – the outcomes that were created that had a surprising longevity (Sex Get Serious in particular). New media tools proved effective in engaging with a technologically savvy audience.

By involving the recipients of the information in the design, the look and feel and the editorial of the content the products reached out to and had strong appeal to many

different sectors. The messages delivered travelled further and wider afield than originally envisaged.

By participating in creating content, young people were given a sense of value about their creative input – their voices, experiences and priorities were important. These projects constructed platforms of debate and investigation, thereby facilitating opportunities for people to develop their own critiques and questions. Participants were able to develop forms of information that were relevant and useful to them and their peers – in short, they experienced self-empowerment.

In testing, contrary to the professional judgment expressed by steering groups, audiences wanted more information available, rather than less. Having the choice of information was important to people – though they liked the material to be designed to available on several levels that could be gone into at their leisure.

Commissioners needed to be flexible in outcomes. With Sex Get Serious, the original target group for the information was 15 – 21. It proved to be accessible to both 12 year olds and 29 year olds.

Access – the ability of people to become involved - was a key consideration. The forms of these projects took were intentionally multi-layered and non-prescriptive – to a degree the idea of ‘play’ was important, regardless of the age of the participant. Activities were delivered in a variety of locations. Maintaining the goodwill of participants is crucial – this is often the main resource that community groups have.

Professional knowledge and lay knowledge were perceived to have equal value. Professionals were encouraged to find ways to communicate their message, their information, in more user-friendly ways. Participants were encouraged to gain greater skills (both technical and social) and greater knowledge in order to become confident in engaging in dialogue with professional expertise.

## Some conclusions...

*“A good partnership is one where you both learn something, where you are doing things collaboratively with other people person and you have learnt more about the way you work at the end of it than you knew before. There are unexpected outcomes, in the gap between professional knowledge and instinct, and the artist can bring in that fun thing - that creativity that wouldn't happen if they were not there. It's not just about filling in the risk assessments forms properly. Artists have always had to work in partnership, getting funding for projects from several sources rather than relying on one sole funder. And they can bring a practical real element to consultation and engagement with people.”*

- Emma Yorke, Arts & Health Coordinator, South Staffordshire Healthcare Trust

*“I sometimes think of us as the Heineken branch, you know, reaching the parts that other agencies can't reach, and I think that's because we actually go out and do things with people.”*

- Glen Buglas, Creative Development Team, Walsall M.B.C.

What does an artist engaged in a creative consultation bring to the mix? Over the years, a degree of consensus has emerged from public agencies that arts projects working with people do indeed achieve some and all of the following:

*Engaging Communities:* creative work that engages with groups in communities and then explores issues develops a greater sense of ownership by those involved than many other approaches.

*Developing Social Capital and Community Capacity:* by successfully engaging with people, creative projects result in the generation of social networks, thus building community capacity and developing 'social capital'.

*Enabling the Identification of Needs:* creative projects both address and identify the needs of a given group or individuals in the community.

*Enabling People to Explore and Address Complex Issues:* creative project work is successful in enabling communities to explore and address their needs in accessible ways.

*Enabling People to Develop Options:* creative projects enable participants to see options to both improve their personal circumstance (self-esteem, personal development, confidence) and be pro-active in their community.

*Enabling People to Communicate their Ideas, Views, Needs and Aspirations:* All creative projects play an important role in developing people's confidence to voice their opinions and views. Artists are successful in providing a non-threatening, accessible means of communication. This role is particularly important when working with people who are often excluded.

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