A Decade On
Arts & Older People Programme

Ten years combatting poverty, loneliness and isolation through the arts

SUMMARY
About the programme

The Arts & Older People Programme, developed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in partnership with the Public Health Agency and The Baring Foundation, has been running successfully throughout Northern Ireland since 2010. The programme aims to combat the rising incidence of poverty, isolation and loneliness amongst older people, using participation in the arts as a vehicle for social development change.

The arts are widely recognised for their effectiveness in reducing isolation and loneliness, factors which are known to have a significant impact on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and even mortality.

Arts & Older People projects are led by trained professional artists and participants are encouraged to contribute fully to the planning process. Participants attend free of charge and transport is provided where required.

What we’ve achieved so far

28,000 older people participated in arts activities

£2m invested in increasing opportunities for older people to engage in the arts

150 artist-led projects successfully delivered

Improving health & mental wellbeing

Independent research identifies notable impacts on participants, male and female, living in urban and rural areas, and living in deprived areas, including:

- improved health and mental wellbeing
- decreased levels of loneliness
- increased enjoyment of life
**About the participants**

- 69% of participants live in areas of high deprivation
- 44% of participants have a long-term illness, health problem or disability
- 20% of participants are classified as Lonely

**Tackling isolation & loneliness**

Participants say they felt motivated to join an Arts & Older People project for a better social life, companionship, to try something different and to learn new skills.

- 89% tried and learned new things
- 88% felt good about their achievements
- 86% built good friendships
- 84% gained renewed confidence to try different things
- 81% appreciated opportunity to express themselves
- 62% have gone on to take part in other group activities as a result of the programme

**Changing perceptions of the arts**

Many participants had not previously engaged in the arts because of a [mis]perception that the arts are highbrow and “not for me”. After participating on an Arts & Older People project:

- 82% now want to participate in more arts activities
- 74% now want to attend more arts events
**Additional benefits**

**Volunteers** identified a range of benefits associated with volunteering on the programme:

- **greater awareness of older people’s needs**
- **learning new skills**
- **improved confidence**

**Audiences** attending Arts & Older People events have been impressed on many levels:

- 99% rated the project event they attended as very good/good
- 65% said they had become much more aware of the issues faced by older people
- 72% said the project event they attended made them think more positively about older people

**Artists** working on Arts & Older People projects benefitted professionally:

- 50% said the project greatly increased their knowledge of older people’s social issues
- 75% said the project contributed significantly to their artistic development
- 100% said they would be interested in working with older people again

**Research conducted by ARK in November 2019**


Further information from: info@artscouncil-ni.org
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