



Get Creative: Arts for All

Good Practice & Core Values

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With thanks to Streetwise Opera

Let's end homelessness together

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Why Arts?

For many people the cycle of homelessness is interwoven with complex issues such as relationship breakdown, discrimination, drugs and alcohol, mental health issues and offending. Creative activities can help people to move on from these issues by re-building self-esteem and improving wellbeing. They provide an opportunity to be part of something positive, enabling people to re-build social networks and learn new skills. Creative activities are also opportunities to find meaning and inspiration, which can change the way people think about and understand themselves and the world around them.

Arts activities range from setting up an in-house arts crafts group to devising a performance in partnership with a national theatre. Different activities require different levels of funding, planning, time and staff commitment and risk assessment (see below). Creative activity often sparks people's attention, helping them to become motivated and forming the first step in their engagement and recovery. Current financial restraints make it increasingly challenging to provide opportunities, however homelessness services should continue to find innovative ways to ensure clients receive the support and inspiration they need to end their cycle of homelessness.

See Homeless Link's Get Creative Influencing Paper for more on the value of arts in ending homelessness.

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/national-projects/get-creative-arts-for-all

Art as therapy

Many arts forms can have therapeutic benefits, which should be celebrated and encouraged. However art therapy as a formal therapeutic intervention needs to be led by qualified practitioners. Art therapists have been formally trained in psychotherapy and use art mediums such as drawing and painting as well as drama and music as a primary mode of communication. To find out more please visit the British Association of Art Therapists (BAAT). www.baat.org/art_therapy.html.

The value of meaningful activity

Participation in activities offers many benefits to people recovering from homelessness. Activities can add structure to people's days, helping them to develop confidence, self-esteem and social skills, as well as skills that may increase their employability and readiness for work. Activities can reduce feelings of boredom and loneliness and act as a catalyst, motivating people to make positive changes. Perhaps most importantly, activities can greatly improve well-being and quality of life for individuals who may have experienced extremely traumatic events or be facing a great deal of stress. Whether benefiting from physical activity on the sports pitch or therapeutic activity in the art room, activities should not be underestimated in their positive impact on the lives of vulnerable people.

Resources from Get Creative

Get Creative has run for 3 years and drawn on the experience and enthusiasm of hundreds of staff, volunteers, service users and artists around the country in order to develop practical resources that will help you to deliver activities.

In this document you'll find our core values for arts activities, developed in partnership with Streetwise Opera, as well as a guide to the Activities Planning Pathway. You can download additional resources – including tools, templates and guidance for each stage of the planning pathway – for free from the Homeless Link website.

10 Core Values of Arts and Homelessness Projects

Homeless Link's arts and homelessness programme Get Creative: Arts for All and Streetwise Opera have been working together since 2011 to deliver arts training in the homelessness sector in England. Through the Get Creative programme we have witnessed and supported a wealth of homeless arts projects that differ widely in their approach, delivery and content. At the same time we have identified a common thread of core values running throughout most projects. This document sets out to summarise these Core Values.

1. **Clear aims and evaluation**
2. **Involving everyone**
3. **The door is always open**
4. **Congratulate and have fun**
5. **Being a creative person**
6. **High expectations**
7. **What people want, testimony and trying something new**
8. **Creating a safe place and establishing boundaries**
9. **Building a community**
10. **Regularity and/or a planned ending**

1. Clear aims and evaluation

- Projects should be well thought through where everyone involved has a clear understanding of what the project is trying to achieve. For instance, is your aim to help participants develop professionally in the arts, personally in their lives or both?
- Evaluation helps you demonstrate that you have achieved your aims but also shows you where you've gone wrong. If you're honest about where things haven't gone well, you can review and make improvements. Evaluation should always involve listening to feedback from your participants.

2. Involving everyone

- Whether an arts project is led by participants themselves, a staff member or an outside artist, it is essential that the ideas and suggestions of the whole group are listened to. Everyone should be involved wherever possible in the planning, delivery and review of the activity. People can often have skills or interests they'd like to share, and if they believe that their ideas will be listened to, it is more likely that they will keep coming back.

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- If an activity is led by an artist/staff member, it can still be possible to create freedom and creativity within a structure, where the artist creates a framework and facilitates the ideas and expression of the participants to come through.

3. The door is always open

- Setting up any barrier to attendance should be avoided unless it is for the safety of the group e.g. if someone is being violent or abusive.
- Auditions can make people feel rejected and having strict attendance criteria is often unrealistic for people leading complex lives.

4. Congratulate and have fun

- It is well documented in well-being research that instilling positive thoughts and affirmation leads to longer-term positivity and well-being. This is particularly important for a group of people who often feel looked down upon and are rarely congratulated in their daily lives.
- Whatever the activity, it should be fun (and ideally involve laughter!)

5. Being a creative person

- One of the great strengths of the arts in this context is that it can help change the way people regard themselves – helping to redefine their identity from a person with needs to a person with talents. All projects should enable participants to be creative whether that is through creating their own work or performing/working on existing material.

6. High expectations

- Facing homelessness often results in facing low expectations – from others and from yourself. Immediate benefits can be seen in people's self-esteem when they realise that a project has been set up with the expectation that they will do well. If you show that you believe in people, it will encourage them to believe in themselves.
- It is vital that projects hit the right level of ambition and expectation – unrealistically high expectations can lead to disappointment or even stop people from taking part in the fear that they will fail. However having low ambitions for the project can prevent people from challenging themselves and achieving more than they thought or believed.
- Don't be afraid to start small or concentrate on one aim first, e.g. raising confidence or self-esteem. These often undervalued outcomes can be fundamental to people moving away from homelessness.
- At the same time, don't be afraid to aim high artistically – many arts projects in this field have a strong process, are inclusive and are also regarded as of mainstream artistic quality. This can lead to further participant benefit and can help change public perceptions about homelessness.

7. What people want, testimony and trying something new

- Methods used to decide on the content of arts projects can vary widely. There are three main approaches and some projects use all three:
 1. Asking participants what they want to do, and responding to existing interests and talents
 2. Offering a new experience that participants may not have previously known about or considered
 3. Responding to participants' personal stories in an artistic context to help them face the challenges they are experiencing
- Each approach clearly has its merits: Asking participants what they want to do will give them the most immediate buy-in and ensure relevance; overcoming the challenge of trying something new can broaden horizons, demystify other new experiences, and give people the courage to try other new things or tackle other problems that they didn't think they could; testimony and issue-based work can directly address participants' needs and issues.
- Taster sessions can be a good way of introducing new activities.
- It is important to be clear about the type of project you are running. Clear communication will ensure that participants know whether they can leave their issues 'at the door' or whether the content will be informed by their personal stories.

8. Creating a safe place and establishing boundaries

- Arts projects need to be in a safe place which could mean a variety of locations but where the members *feel* safe. This feeling of safety can be created in a variety of ways: using a familiar place; having someone present that participants know and trust; ensuring that participants are listened to; having a structured approach to the session; having an atmosphere of acceptance and respect where people know they won't be laughed at and inappropriate behaviour is dealt with; having high quality and well-trained leaders.
- Group agreements can be a good way of establishing a common understanding of behaviour and how the group as a whole is going to look after each other e.g. Streetwise Opera's, *'Attend and participate, respect each other, zero agro, stay clean and sober, have fun!'*
- Effective use of boundaries can often increase the feeling of safety. Many people who have faced homelessness have had relationships that have been damaging which can make social situations, making friends and interacting with strangers potentially confusing. Arts projects can further heighten emotion. Establishing boundaries between leaders/outside artists and participants can be empowering and reassuring for both groups.

9. Building a community

- The chance for participants to meet each other and work together as a team is often one of the most valuable parts of a creative project, partly because homeless and ex-homeless people often feel isolated.
- It can be positive to build opportunities outside the project for participants to meet each other through trips and events.

10. Regularity or a planned ending

- Having a regular activity that participants can rely on can be incredibly important for people facing the challenges and uncertainty of homelessness or when people have been re-housed and become isolated in their new accommodation.
- Arts projects often culminate in a performance, event or exhibition and if the project finishes there, the sense of loss can be great, leaving people with nowhere to take their new-found self-belief. The best arts and homelessness projects schedule events in the context of a regular programme – then you can build on the positivity of the event, support participants afterwards and help them progress e.g. personally, artistically or through progression routes such as volunteering, college courses, work placements etc.
- If projects must end, it is always best to do so with sufficient wind-down after the event/exhibition/performance, a solid exit strategy and by offering clear signposting to other similar activities.

Activities Planning Pathway

Use the Planning Pathway to structure your approach to planning, delivering, improving and perfecting your activities programme. Service users should be engaged and motivated to lead and take part at every stage of the pathway.



Consulting: getting started

Clients should be at the centre of all activity provision, which means involving them in planning, delivery and review. The first step in planning and delivering any activity is to consult with clients on what they want, need and any barriers to participation. This involvement is key to improving engagement and ensuring positive outcomes for clients. If you cannot engage them at this stage, it is still important to provide activities that inspire and challenge clients to get involved.

- Involving clients will mean you deliver more interesting, diverse and creative projects that meet need and inspire change in individuals and your organisation
- It can help to break down barriers between staff and clients as they start to plan and then evaluate on equal terms
- It will enable you to identify any potential barriers

Peer champions

Up-skilling clients to be peer champions that are able to plan and review activities and services can provide meaningful opportunities for clients and improve services. Enabling clients to plan and evaluate activities independently via peer-to-peer methods is excellent practice to work towards. Get Creative resources can be used by clients who want to take the lead in working towards a peer review approach.

Top tips

- ✓ Consulting can be done in various ways depending on time and resources available.
- ✓ Involving clients in planning and designing activities will ensure lasting engagement and build pathways for clients.

Scoping: how will it work?

Once you have an idea of what you are hoping to achieve it is important to determine how it will work. This scoping exercise leads on from the consultation process and input from stakeholders ensures you plan something feasible, appropriate and relevant.

Questions to ask

It may help to go through a list of questions that you can ask yourselves (staff, participants, projects) to focus your plans and determine exactly what and how you hope to achieve.

Managing Risk

It is important to ensure a safe space for activities and a crucial part to this is assessing and managing risk. Risk assessments are often considered a way of saying 'no' to something, but should be thought of as a way to say 'yes!' By managing risk you acknowledge possible threats to the project's success and act accordingly to prevent and mitigate these.

Activities beyond homelessness

Many activities have the ultimate aim of supporting individuals toward independent living. For some, moving into their own accommodation can be an isolating experience as they lose the immediate social network that they had in their shared accommodation. There is also a challenge, raised by many homelessness organisations offering activities, around the need to encourage clients to access activities in the wider community, and not be reliant on those offered by their hostel or day centre.

It can be argued that allowing clients to access activities after they have left a service is sustaining their ties with homelessness and possibly taking resources and places away from current clients. Alternatively clients who have moved on may act as role models to others and some projects have established mentoring pathways for individuals to take on leadership roles.

Resourcing: getting things in place

Once you have an idea of what will be needed to run your activity your attention will turn to getting things in place to deliver. This should not immediately mean a funding application, although sometimes finances are the only way to ensure a project's success. It is important, especially as budgets become more restricted, to think outside the box and consider potential partners and supporters. Ultimately it will be the can-do attitude of staff and volunteers that will ensure activities are successful.

Partnership working

With cuts to resources, partnership working has never been more relevant in the homelessness sector. Working with partners can be a very challenging process but when these challenges are overcome the results are much greater than for those working in isolation. Partners can be identified from the homelessness sector or other sectors (e.g. sports or arts organisations, other community groups, local authorities, etc).

Personnel

When delivering activities the key ingredient to their success is staff. Enthusiastic, skilled and passionate staff members, who are often working beyond their remit, tend to be the common factor across effective projects. Staff time can be very limited and some activities may require skills or qualifications that your staff don't have. There are different ways that these various challenges can be addressed and some examples are below.

Finding staff time

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Ensuring priority is given to activities will need to come from an organisation's leadership. They can support frontline staff to offer activities by including them in all job descriptions and facilitating an ongoing conversation through team meetings and supervisions. While sharing responsibility for activities across a staff team is a great way to create a positive atmosphere, there is a need to have one lead member of staff who is able to coordinate and maintain direction for the activities programme.

Some organisations will split activities and have leads for different areas (e.g. arts, sports, gardening), while others will have one overall Activities Coordinator with other staff and clients are able to initiate and lead sessions on a regular or ad hoc basis. At one hostel in Westminster all job descriptions include the requisite skill 'irrational optimism' as leading activities can be a frustrating and challenge task at times but, with persistence and 'irrational optimism', amazing outcomes can be achieved.

Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers can be an effective way to deliver activities in homelessness projects and there is a lot of information on how to recruit, manage and retain volunteers in our Effective Action guide 'Managing Volunteers in Homelessness Services'. Also in the guide are suggestions as to where you can recruit activities volunteers (e.g. Arts teachers, coaches etc).

Student placements

One way that homelessness organisations have successfully recruited and retained skilled volunteers is engaging university students on a placement. These typically last for a term or an academic year and count toward the student's degree.

What's happening locally?

There will be many different organisations operating in your area who offer the types of activities that your clients may like to access. As an organisation you may be able to promote these local opportunities to clients. Start by looking at:

- Local authority webpages (leisure, sport, culture, arts, etc.)
- Local organisations such as sports clubs (amateur and professional), art galleries, theatres, community groups.
- Other services in your area – homelessness, drug and alcohol teams, probationary services, mental health teams – that clients may be eligible to access.
- Follow local groups and organisations on Twitter and Facebook who will collect and share this type of information.

Funding

You can secure funding through a number of sources including applications to charitable trusts and foundations, individual donations (e.g. Just Giving) and support from local businesses, community groups, churches etc. Download the funding resources for more information.

Non-Financial Resources

You may be able to secure in-kind donations of resources to deliver your activities, as well as financial contributions. Approaching relevant local businesses to donate art supplies, sports equipment and kit, gardening tools, seeds, provide incentives or coverage of the work you are doing may be just as helpful to ensuring your activities project succeeds. Some local organisations will provide the water and food for activities and events (e.g. art exhibition, sports day, tournament). Be sure to thank the organisations that support you financially and also those that give in-kind contributions and keep them informed of the great work that you're doing.

Launching: inspiring and motivating

Feedback from clients and staff across projects shows that timing and promotion are key to a successful activities programme. If you're starting a new activity it's important to make sure all relevant people and organisations know when and where it will begin and how they can be involved.

Promotion

If you stick with the key principles of delivering activities you will have ensured that clients and staff are involved in the planning and development of your activities. This will ensure word of mouth promotion of your new activity. Client feedback has shown that actually putting information under people's doors will work better than putting information up on noticeboards. One client pointed out that if the service he uses really wants them to know about something, for example when an issue has arisen that is of concern to staff, notices will go under people's doors; he wondered why not use the same tactic to advertise activities.

Some clients are computer savvy, but others aren't; one staff member talked about sitting down with a client at the computer to assist them in navigating and locating sports activities they are interested in.

In order to make a client feel comfortable to attend a new activity it's likely to take more than a notice on the board or under the door – some participants indicated that they needed to know people before they were prepared to get involved in something new. This might involve a staff person attending with them or pairing people together. Ultimately, word of mouth promotion is most successful.

Timing

By all accounts putting some thought into the timing will pay off. One hostel with limited resources wanted to set up a walking group and did so by running a competition during the month of May – national walking month. Launching an arts project with a visit to a gallery or a regular sports session with a tournament has been a successful way of initially engaging participants and creating a 'buzz' about the activity.

Timing can also be important when considering the clients who you are trying to engage and what you're trying to achieve. Staff at King George's recognised that for crack users it's the third day after they've last used that they're starting to feel more normal and the boredom starts to kick in, this is the time for staff to try and motivate them to give some physical activity a go. If most people are in education during the day or volunteering it may be that activities should be run on the weekends. Conversely there may be a need to establish regular routines and having activities during weekdays will help with this.

The learning from successful projects is that consistency is important to developing a valuable activities programme. It is rare for any project to be a success from the beginning, but staff suggest that simply consistency – same time, same day – will help.

Reviewing: did it work and how can we be better?

As with any service you deliver, it is important to review your activities in order to identify and evidence the following:

- ✓ What you have delivered and how many clients took part
- ✓ Client satisfaction with the activities
- ✓ Outcomes for clients
- ✓ Ideas for improvement

Following the same principle as when planning your activities, clients should be fully involved in any review. Peer review is not only empowering for clients, but can also lead to more meaningful feedback.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

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