



Creative dialogue for participatory arts across the West Midlands

Pilot Year (September 08 – December 09)

Project Report

1. Introduction

In line with NHS priorities to tackle health inequalities which place an emphasis on wellbeing rather than just treating the sick the underlying principles of praXis are to continue to put communities at the centre of the wellbeing agenda. Over recent years Government ministers have expressed their support for this approach to arts in health work. In September 2008 the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Johnson said:

“I would like to see the benefits of participation in the arts recognised more widely by health and social care professionals, particularly those involved in commissioning services for people with mental health problems. This is not some kind of eccentric add-on – it should be part of the mainstream in both health and social care.”¹

Within this context, praXis focuses on creative activities which involve people in order to:

- Promote and improve health and wellbeing through public health strategies, health education, health promotion and social marketing
- Tackle major health priorities and issues
- Improve the quality of health care and health settings
- Have a positive impact on mental health
- Support community cohesion, regeneration and improve public health.

To achieve these aims, work has been developed during the pilot year under two main areas, **Examining & Supporting Practice** and **Generating Practice**.

This interim report summarises work that has taken place under these themes and outlines plans for future work.

¹ Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Health, Tuesday 16 September 2008, www.lahf.org.uk

2. Examining & Supporting Practice

2.1 Pilot Year

This year has been a successful one, as representatives from the arts, health and community sectors were brought together, with praXis taking a leadership role, acting as a hub or common connecting point for arts and health in the region. So far praXis has demonstrated that it has increased capacity at a local level, sustained work beyond one off projects and improved practice.

The pilot year has focused on developing the network around the 'workforce', ie. professionals within the arts, health or community sectors who are using participatory arts work to improve public health and wellbeing and support community cohesion and regeneration.

In order to effectively develop and sustain critical thinking and ensure accessible dialogue and debate of arts and health in the region, a number of different approaches have been taken.

The **praXis database** currently stands at 313 and current members include:

- Individual artists
- Arts organisations (local, regional and national)
- Development workers / commissioners from NHS Primary Care, Foundation Hospital, Social Care and Mental Health Trusts
- Local authority arts development and education teams
- Universities and research centres
- Youth arts organisations
- Teachers
- Specialist magazines and community development organisations.

Praxis provided opportunities throughout the pilot year for the workforce throughout the West Midlands to come together at a range of free events and develop shared learning in arts and health practice. Three **sub-regional events** were held, each one developed in collaboration with local authority arts partners.

- Worcestershire / Herefordshire: March 2009 (20 attendees)
- Warwickshire / Coventry / Solihull: June 2009 (35 attendees)
- Telford / Shropshire: June 2009 (12 attendees)

Four '**Insider Guide**' events were also held, to support learning around the Black Country Joint Commissioning Programme, in conjunction with evaluation of the work itself. These events were run by health professionals in the form of action learning workshops. The participants from across the West Midlands had an opportunity to do some 'hands on' work and discuss fully the issues being raised:

- '*An Insider's Guide to Marketing the Arts to Primary Care Trusts*' Paul Southon, Public Health Practitioner from Wolverhampton City PCT in February 2009 at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. (24 attendees)
- '*An Insider's Guide to Working Creatively for Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing*' was delivered by Colleen Shekerie, Mental Health Community Development Worker Co-ordinator for Sandwell PCT in June 2009 at West Bromwich. (20 attendees)
- '*An Insider's Guide to Delivering Arts in Hospitals*' was delivered by Janet Hetherington, Arts Manager for Birmingham Childrens Hospital in September 2009. (20 attendees)
- '*An Insider's Guide to Evaluating Arts Projects*' was facilitated by creativityteam. This event was aimed at experienced arts development workers who were evaluating arts and health work. It provided an opportunity to share ideas and resources. (10 attendees). Notes from the workshop were used to produce an evaluation tool kit which is available on the community pages of the praXis website (below).

praXis supported this learning via 12 **monthly e-bulletins** to all members, linked to the **website** (www.paxisartsandhealth.org.uk) with news on the current developments in the region, profiles on the work of practitioners, practical ideas and inspiration on thinking and acting positively – personal 'healthy practice'. Members also had the opportunity to promote their own learning-based events and projects to others across the network. The website received over 10,000 visitors in one year.

During the pilot year praXis built on the success of the **Arts & Health: Artist Professional Development Programme** an accredited learning programme at Staffordshire University for artists wishing to develop health-based work. In 2009 The Regional Arts and Health Network supported this programme by providing a **mechanism for commissioners** from all over the region, to network, share

outcomes and thoughts and support each other to evaluate their individual projects. The **Employers Forum** met in December 2008, March and May 2009. The events attracted mostly commissioners attached to the Programme (there were 14 of these in total), but was open to others and explored the development of a checklist of good practice containing expectations from Commissioners, the University and Students. A very successful 'Meet the Artist' event was also held.

Ensuring the practical **sustainability of the programme** and a model for future years was important. During 2009 the programme was accredited at Masters level which enabled 23 artists and development workers to participate in the course, which was mainstreamed as part of the University's short course programme. The Arts & Health: Artist Professional Development Programme is now fully supported financially by the University of Staffordshire and a further 25 students will be joining it during 2010.

2.2 Years Two & Three

praXis will develop the following areas of work between January 2010 and December 2011:

e-tools (website and e-bulletin). These have proved to be popular and exist as a forum for debate, discussion and support around learning and reflective practice in participatory arts and health. Regular content is already being submitted and the intention is to increase dialogues and conversations within these forums, creating stronger accessibility to the website via a series of community pages. These will contain notes, photos, presentations and film footage from events which can be accessed and commented upon. There will also be updates from and links to the new National Forum for Arts and Health and Creative Remedies (see below). Any comments can be made via a blog on the website, with a direct link from the regular e-bulletin. It is anticipated that these pages will grow and develop organically, with endless possibilities for new 'areas' (eg. artists' showcase, on-line learning linked to the Artist Professional Development Programme, on-line peer support & mentoring, etc).

The blog will have dedicated support to moderate and maintain it. praXis will also identify and support a group of 'champions' – experienced people drawn from a variety of backgrounds from across the West Midlands, who can provide focus for

debate from a number of regional, national and international sources, which will generate and contribute to discussion. It is anticipated that the discussion will be wide ranging but one of the areas to be explored will be how to ensure arts and health projects combine the highest possible artistic qualities and meet health outcomes.

Events have also been incredibly popular and all have been over-subscribed. The **'Insiders Guide'** series will therefore be developed to respond directly to key themes identified with partners, within the community pages and through other conversations across the region. This range of events will be accessible to anyone, with praXis members having priority booking.

Hand in hand with the initiatives above is the need to build more established and long term partnerships with the **sub-regional arts and health networks** which were initially supported in year one (eg. discussions are already underway for future work in the Warwickshire sub-region). This element is vitally important for building the arts and health infrastructure within the region. In addition, an exciting new partnership has recently been initiated with Staffordshire. The **Creative Remedies** website (www.creativeremedies.org.uk) will now take the lead on showcasing projects and will primarily focus on arts and health within Staffordshire County. In 2010 the website will be rebranded and include case studies which illustrate the range of arts and health work happening in Staffordshire. It will still offer general support, advice and signposting for those wanting to find their 'first steps' into arts and health. Praxis will focus on supporting practitioners from across the West Midlands to examine arts and health practice by facilitating opportunities for people to explore and critically reflect on their work.

The databases for Creative Remedies and praXis will be merged, under this new development, which means that one, streamlined e-bulletin will send out information on arts and health opportunities across the region, information about praXis learning events and provide a direct link to the Creative Remedies website.

Alongside this, praXis is now representing the West Midlands region on the new **National Forum for Arts and Health**. Since the closure of the National Network for Arts in Health three years ago, there has been no strategic overview or national lobbying organisation to represent the arts and health infrastructure. London Arts in Health Forum has received

funding from Arts Council England to take the lead in drawing together a group of organisations from across the country who will act as partners to build the capacity of arts in health nationally.

This should result in greater understanding of the impact the arts can have on health and wellbeing, along with a better co-ordinated sector. Initially the Forum will focus its efforts on advocacy and co-ordination and the development of a strategic agenda for arts and health nationally. Emphasis will be on regional representation that is responsive and so praxis will keep the new database of members updated and consult with them about issues raised. Full notes will also be available on the praXis website as well as further background information to the National Forum, and again a direct link will be established to the new National Forum website 'portal' when it is developed. This exciting relationship with a national representative body, and a co-ordinated approach from the region means that there will be many more opportunities to consolidate further the West Midlands' place on the national arts and health map.

3 Generating Practice

3.1 Pilot Year

PraXis is far more than a simple forum for facilitating discussion, as the professional expertise of its members both in the public and private sector enable projects to be run with greater efficiency, allowing creative interventions to be rolled out on a greater scale than normally possible.

The role of praXis is to test out innovative arts and health work, develop new ideas and push back boundaries. As many commissioners (particularly in the current financial climate) are wary of funding any sort of risk-taking, praXis places itself in a prime position to do this and thus 'Generate Practice'

praXis remains committed to putting communities at the centre of the wellbeing agenda and therefore broadening the opportunities for participation in the arts, particularly aimed at those who are economically disadvantaged. This approach was developed in the pilot year through the **joint commissioning programme**, run by the Black Country Commissioning Partnership. The visual arts project '*What is Happiness?*' delivered by Multistory is exploring the concept of what happiness means to different people. A range of target groups (nominated by support workers

and prioritised by PCT and local authority partners) created 'stories of happiness' these were interpreted using photography, illustration, crafts or animation. The 'stories' were then transferred onto pre-made cardboard play houses to create a 'Happiness Estate' that will form the basis of a Black Country wide touring exhibition. Participants also created a 'Happiness Map' of the Black Country. Alongside the workshops a text campaign was run to enable people to submit their stories or ideas of happiness to the Multistory website. The whole project was participant-led, with the support of artists and a set of case studies have been produced on behalf of the partners. You can read these at www.praxisartsandhealth.org.uk

3.2 Years Two & Three

The use of the arts for social marketing purposes has not historically been employed in the most effective of ways. Projects have tended to be on a very small scale, usually meaning high investment (time and finances) affecting only a small proportion of the community. Black Country Commissioning Partnership brings experience of social marketing and experience with engaging those groups in the community considered hard to reach by the health agencies enabling arts health projects to take effect where they are most needed. In years two and three this work will be developed. Priorities for 'Generating Practice' projects will be identified in collaboration with PCTs and local authorities from across the West Midlands and then arts organisations will be asked to submit appropriate tried and tested small scale projects which can be 'upscaled' and meet these priorities.

4. Management of praXis

The management, financial and accounting responsibility for praXis will be undertaken by Creative Health (Arts & Health) Community Interest Company. Creative Health CIC is the new independent Arts and Health Community Interest Company for the Black Country and the West Midlands, officially incorporated on 25th February 2009 and registered at Companies House (Company No. 06829813).

Creative Health oversees the joint planning, commissioning, delivery and profile-raising of arts into health work in the Black Country and beyond. The company acts as a broker between arts, health and community partners. Its core services are arts and health Consultancy Support (including policy development and project management); Programme Evaluation and Development / Delivery of Training.

Creative Health supports praXis to nurture reflective practice and test out innovative arts and health work. praXis is therefore the 'creative lab' wherein new ideas can be developed, manageable risks can be taken and boundaries pushed back.

As a community interest company, Creative Health does not exist to make profit for itself but to channel those profits into the enhancement of its community.

The Board of Directors of this company represent Walsall Council, Wolverhampton City Council and creativityteam. Each of these organisations brings individual strengths, capacity and added value to the partnership.

5. Evaluation

During the pilot year praXis has developed and implemented a comprehensive evaluation framework. The long term goal for praXis is to increase capacity in both arts and health sectors to deliver and sustain high quality arts and health work. Two primary areas of focus for the evaluation are to look at *What has Changed* and *How PraXis is Valued*, for this duration of time. For example, the impact on people's practice, success in developing projects and partnerships, confidence to procure work, new commissions by the health sector, what specifically people value about praXis and the role praXis has played in their professional development.

To achieve this the evaluation aims to measure the following outcomes amongst artists/arts organisations and health care professionals :

- Increased **knowledge and awareness** of participatory arts and health work
- Increased **understanding of the benefits** of participatory arts and health work
- Increased **understanding of how to develop** participatory arts and health work.

It also seeks to quantify in the longer term:

- Whether there have been more **partnerships** between the arts and health sectors, how wide ranging these have been and whether they put understanding into practice
- How much increased **financial investment** there has been for arts and health work
- Whether the **strategic positioning** of participatory arts and health work has improved.

The evaluation framework consists largely of a detailed questionnaire which has been tailored for every praXis event & workshop. The impacts being explored via this questionnaire and the method of collection have been tested in the pilot year, with responses acting as consultation with practitioners. This information has been used to generate a package of baseline information and influence plans for year two and three.

Karen Bell and Kate Gant

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