



Creativity, Accessibility and Inclusion

A Report on the Benefits and Challenges for Creative Community Groups in Dundee

A research report by Luke Whittle
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Art Angel

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Luke Whittle is a PhD History researcher at the University of Dundee, funded by the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities (SGSAH). His research interests include the social history of medicine, diabetes, patient experiences, and 20th century Scotland.

Luke worked with Creative Lives on an internship between April-June 2024, supported by SGSAH. During this time, he conducted research on the intersection between creativity, disability, and health within Dundee's creative community groups. Exploring the benefits of creative groups for disabled people and people with mental health challenges and examining the barriers groups face in providing accessible and inclusive creative activities in Dundee.

Introduction

Creativity, Accessibility, and Inclusion is a research project for Creative Lives, supported by the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities. It explores the intersection of creativity, disability and health in the context of Dundee's creative community groups. It seeks to understand the benefits, challenges, and barriers that exist in incorporating accessibility into group activities and spaces. The main research questions for this report are:

1. What are the benefits of creativity and community groups for disabled people, people with mental health barriers, and those with additional support needs?
2. What are the challenges creative groups in Dundee face in incorporating accessibility and inclusion?
3. What approaches do community groups take to provide accessible and inclusive creative activities for their communities?

As demonstrated within the literature of Disability Studies, disabled people are heavily marginalised within society. The socio-economic structures of society are designed so that certain groups of people cannot be accommodated' [1]. The inequalities between disabled and non-disabled people, in Britain and Scotland, have been exacerbated by austerity, Covid-19, and the cost of living crisis, with disabled people three times more likely to experience poverty and food insecurity [2]. These crises have had a disproportionate effect on the mental and physical wellbeing of those with disabilities [3]. Recognising this, this report will use the 'social model' of disability, which understands society, not the individuals' impairments, as disabling [4].

[1] J.I. Charlton, 'The Dimensions of Disability Oppression: An Overview, in L.J. Davis (ed.) The Disability Studies Reader (Abingdon, 2006), p.218.

[2] C. Harkins, T. Burke, D. Walsh, 'The Impact of the cost of living crisis on disabled people: A Case for Action', Glasgow Centre for Population Health, (August 2023), p.9.

[3] Scope, 'Cost of living: the impact for disabled people' (November 2022), p.21 <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/research-policy/cost-of-living-report#:~:text=Anonymous-,Emotional%20wellbeing%20and%20mental%20health,energy%20bills%20and%20other%20essentials>. (Accessed: 23/06/2024).

[4] 'Social Model of Disability: Language', Disability Rights UK, <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/social-model-disability-language> (Accessed: 24/06/2024).

As will be seen within this report, the benefits of creativity for disabled people and people with mental health barriers have been discussed within the field of disability studies. As Creative Lives mentioned in their report, *Embedding Diversity: 2016-2022*, they seek to do more to engage with disabled people [5]. This report will highlight the benefits of creativity and community groups in Dundee for disabled people, people with mental health barriers, and communities in general. To conduct this research, interviews with group organisers and some group members have been conducted. They vary from smaller grassroots groups to larger, more established groups. Most of them have a focus on providing accessible activities for disabled people or people with mental health barriers, but some strive to be inclusive to everyone, disabled or non-disabled.

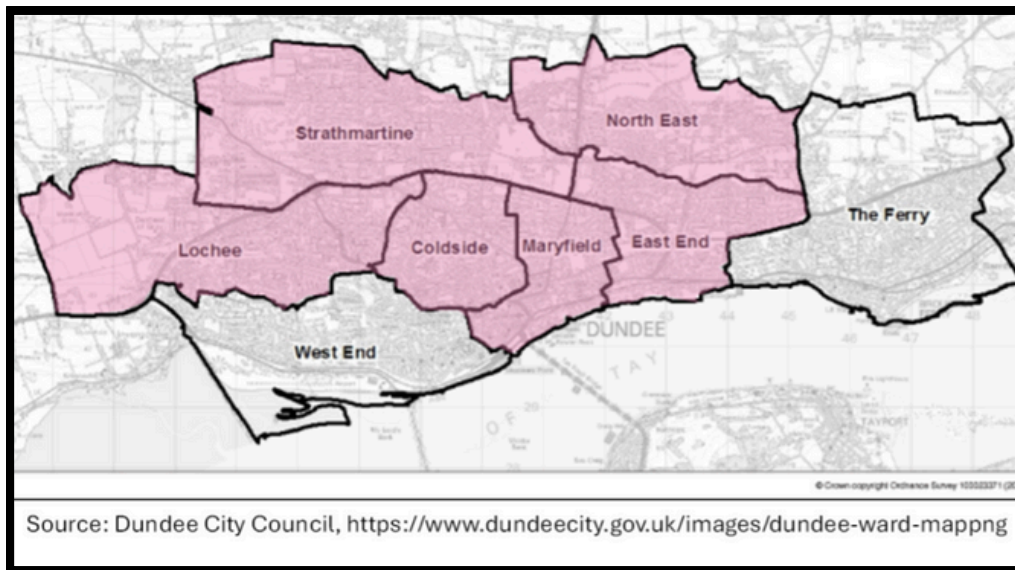
This report has taken Dundee as a case study for this research. Levels of disability and mental health barriers are typically high in Dundee. The most recent figures from 2019, show the percentage of adults with long-term limiting physical or mental health conditions in the city was 29.8%, a steady increase from 24.3% in 2012/13 [6]. This puts Dundee as the seventh highest percentage when compared to other Scottish local authority areas. In 2012, Dundee was in the top 5% for populations prescribed drugs for anxiety/depression/psychosis (3% higher than the Scottish average) and in the top 5% for the number of patients with a psychiatric hospitalisation [7].

[5] Creative Lives, 'Embedding Diversity: 2016-2022 Report', (2022), p.6. <https://www.creative-lives.org/embedding-diversity-report> (Accessed: 10/04/2024).

[6] The Scottish Government, 'Council Area: Dundee City, Disability - Scottish Surveys Core Questions: an observation', <https://statistics.gov.scot/resource?uri=http%3A%2F%2Fstatistics.gov.scot%2Fdata%2Fdisability-sscq%2Fyear%2F2019%2FS12000042%2Flimiting-long-term-physical-or-mental-health-condition%2Flimiting-condition%2Ftype-of-tenure%2Fall%2Fhousehold-type%2Fall%2Fage%2Fall%2Fgender%2Fall%2Fpercent-of-adults%2Fpercent> (Accessed: 12/04/2024).

[7] A. Millard, G. McCartney, A. MacKinnon, et al., 'Dundee City Health and Wellbeing Profiles – key indicators and overview'. ScotPHO, (2016), <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/media/1063/scotpho-hwb-profiles-aug2016-dundee.pdf> (Accessed: 17/06/2024).

Dundee also has a relatively high level of deprivation. The 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) found that Dundee had the 5th largest local share of deprived areas in Scotland, with 38% of its data zones among the 20% most deprived. The Northeast, Central, and West areas of the city are in the most deprived decile. These areas roughly contain the wards of Lochee, Coldside, Maryfield, East End, and Northeast.



Yet, at the same time, Dundee is considered a hub for creativity and culture. In 2014, Dundee was designated as the UK's first UNESCO City of Design and in 2017 was shortlisted for the UK City of Culture. As a city embedded with design and creativity, it was apparent from mapping the community groups in Dundee that this creativity is heavily felt at a community level. However, in 2017, research found that the second most common reason for people not taking part in Dundee's community activities or organisations, was due to health/access issues (18%) and closely followed by issues of costs (13%) [8]. While creativity may offer benefits to people with additional support needs, this is redundant if they are not accessible. In exploring the benefits, challenges, and approaches of incorporating accessibility and inclusion into creativity communities in Dundee, this report can hopefully act as a case study for other areas in Scotland and the UK.

[8] Dundee City Council, 'Citizen Survey 2019: Research Report', https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/dundee_city_council_citywide_report_2019_final.pdf (Accessed: 16/04/2024).

Part 1: The Benefits of Creative Community Groups

The positive influences that creativity and community activities have upon those with disabilities, additional support needs, and mental health barriers has been explored within the literature. Given the higher rates of disabilities and mental health barriers in Dundee, and the rising challenges in the aftermath of Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, it is important to recognise the role that creative participation offers in alleviating pressures on individuals and communities.

Social Isolation

People with additional support needs are more likely to experience higher levels of loneliness and isolation. In 2018, it was reported that people with physical health problems, long-term conditions or disability in Scotland are two times more likely to report severe loneliness than the general population [9]. Following Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, this worsened. In 2023, 15.1% of disabled people in the UK reported feeling lonely “often or always”, compared to just 3.6% of non-disabled people [10]. In Dundee, as part of a survey into experiences of the cost of living crisis, a focus group with users of British Sign Language (BSL), found that deaf individuals in Dundee, “have become more isolated as a result of the cost of living crisis, especially older people, leading to feelings of loneliness” [11].

[9] J. Tanton, ‘Social Isolation and Loneliness in Scotland: A Review of Prevalence and Trends’, NHS Health Scotland; 2018., <https://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1712/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-scotland-a-review-of-prevalence-and-trends.pdf> (Accessed: 18/06/2024), p.9.

[10] E. Kirk-Wade, ‘UK Disability Statistic: Prevalence and Life Experiences’, House of Commons Library, 23 August 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9602/> (Accessed: 12/04/2024), p.26.

[11] S. Allan, J. Brash, S. Harlow, E. Moir, Engage Dundee Survey 2023: Exploring Citizens’: Experiences of the cost of living crisis (February, 2024), p.35.

Creative Lives' Big Conversation 2022, a large-scale survey of creative participation in the UK and Ireland, found that a common reason for participation was 'feelings of connection with others in the community' and 'friendships' [12]. For those with additional support needs, this benefit is perhaps even more vital as creative groups can bring people together who otherwise may frequently go without social connections. Groups with a particular focus on disability and mental health provide a space for people to connect with others that share lived experiences, and create support networks. For example, Uppertunity, a creative group in Dundee for people with learning disabilities, autism, and mental health barriers, prides itself in providing a sense of community for its members (See Case Study 1).

“I love the fun and laughter of the groups. I enjoy interacting with everyone.”

(Uppertunity member)

Creativity as a method of expression, confidence-building and learning

Creativity and art can be a useful means of expression and self-growth. Research into community-based arts and learning disabilities found that it helps to develop skills, knowledge, and abilities, which are often ignored by society [13]. For Uppertunity, the motivation for delivering a creative group was that it provided a voice for participants who might typically struggle to express themselves through conventional means.


Several group organisers witnessed self-growth and confidence-building. As opposed to clinical environments of healthcare institutions or 'Art Therapy' sessions, which often incorporate models of medicalisation, creative participation offers a space to promote expression, freedom and learning [14]. Therefore, such groups offer an opportunity for individuals

[12] Creative Lives, Big Conversation 2022 – Results, <https://www.creative-lives.org/big-conversation-2022-results-research> (Accessed: 18/06/2024)

[13] M. Richards, R. Lawtham, and R. Runswick-Cole, 'Community-Based Arts Research for People with Learning Disabilities: Challenging Misconceptions about Learning Disabilities' *Disability and Society*, 34(2), 2019, p.205.

[14] P. K. Solvang, 'Between Art Therapy and Disability Aesthetics: A Sociological Approach for Understanding the Intersection Between Art Practice and Disability Discourse', *Disability and Society*, 33(2), 2018, p.241.

to establish and develop their sense of agency and confidence. For some, this level of confidence extended beyond individuals' activities within their groups. For example, some members of Art Angel, an art group for those with mental health barriers, went on to take part in other volunteering opportunities as a result of attending the group (See Case Study 6).



“It doesn’t happen overnight, and people could leave before it actually happens, but in the last six years... the confidence in people from when they came in to now, is incredible.”

(Volunteer practitioner at Dundee City Pipe Band.)

Melinda Maconi, an academic researcher who explored the social narratives of disability and art by observing a theatre group for adults with disabilities, concluded that creative groups must avoid promoting the common narrative of disability as tragedy [15]. By supporting and facilitating participants to be autonomous individuals who express creativity in their own way, they can reclaim agency and challenge social perceptions. As apparent from the case studies, creative community groups are an ideal way for this to take place.

[15] M.L. Maconi, 'More than Therapy: Conformity and Resistance in an Organisational Narrative of Disability and the Performing Arts', in S.E. Green and D.R. Loseke (eds.), *New Narratives of Disability: Construction, Clashes, and Controversies* (Bingley, 2020), p.134.

Challenging perceptions of disability and art

Community groups offer great potential for social connectedness, creative development, and personal growth. Yet groups that are designed to create a safe space for a particular impairment, can have the negative consequence of isolating them from the wider community. In considering the intersection between art practice and disability, academic researcher, Per Koren Solvang, described how such art groups can, by their very nature, be ‘an isolated island of hope in a social context of prejudice and discrimination’ [16]. As recent research has shown, stigmas of disability within the UK are exacerbated by the lack of interaction between disabled and non-disabled people. In researching attitudes towards disability, the UK disability charity, Scope found that proximity to disabled people, positively impacts perceptions of disability. Having any type of contact with a disabled person, significantly reduced perceptions that disabled people ‘got in the way’ and increased awareness of societal prejudice [17]. By facilitating interactions, creative groups contribute to the breakdown of social stigmas and misconceptions.

Edward Hall, an academic researcher who has considered the role of creative participation in providing social inclusion, demonstrates that by sharing creative outputs, creative groups for individuals with learning disabilities can interact with broader society, whilst maintaining safe spaces for personal growth. He suggests that by ‘gifting’ art to the public, participants can find a more intimate sense of belonging and connection in their community and challenge perceptions [18].

[16] Solvang, ‘Art Practice and Disability Discourse’, p.241.

[17] S. Dixon, C. Smith, and A. Touchet, ‘The Disability Perception Gap: Policy Report’, Scope, May 2018, pp.12-13.

[18] E. Hall, ‘Making and Gifting Belonging: Creative Arts and People with Learning Disabilities’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 45(2), 2013, p.244.

Creative groups such as Uppertunity or Art Angel exemplify this. In May 2024, Uppertunity organised their annual art festival. The organiser suggested that by showcasing their creativity, they were challenging norms and creating an opportunity for people to learn from one another (See Case Study 1). Likewise, Art Angel strongly believes that member's creative outputs are their personal expressions. While traditional mental health art projects often 'finish off' participant's work, Art Angel stresses the importance of showcasing the art as it is. This challenges perceptions of art and raises mental health awareness (See Case Study 6).

There are also several groups in Dundee, such as Dundee City Pipe Band (DCPB) and Ninewells Community Gardens (NCG), that encourage inclusivity and interactions between all groups of people. Through this, they develop safe spaces for personal growth and enjoyment, as well as improving social connections through its diverse membership. As an inclusive alternative to traditional Highland Pipe Bands, DCPB was built for everyone, disabled or able-bodied alike (See Case Study 2).

Groups as a pathway to additional needs

The socio-economic conditions affecting people with disabilities and mental health barriers is a significant disabling feature. In Dundee, five of the six highest deprivation Local Community Planning Partnership areas (LLCP) have a higher average of people with physical disabilities than the Scottish and Dundee average. For example, in the East End, 72.9 per 1,000 people have a physical disability, compared to West End, with 26.6 per 1,000 people [19]. 47% of people with a learning disability in Dundee live in the most deprived areas (SIMD 1) [20]. There is a higher rate of mental health conditions in Lochee, East End, and Coldside. East End has almost double the rate of people with mental health conditions, compared to The Ferry [21].

[19] Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership, 'Strategic and Commissioning Statement for Adults with Physical Disability, 2018-2021'

https://www.dundeehscp.com/sites/default/files/publications/final_pd_sc_statement_v1.pdf
(Accessed: 19/06/2024).

[20] Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership, 'Supporting People with Learning Disabilities, Strategic Update', 23 Feb 2022, <https://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/reports/reports/DIJB10-2022.pdf>
(Accessed: 19/06/2024).

[21] Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership, 'Mental Health Services Indicators', 1st Feb 2023, <https://www.dundeeecity.gov.uk/reports/reports/PAC2-2023.pdf>

Such inequalities cannot be solved by creative community groups, but they can and do help. As Edward Hall discussed, the idea of ‘social inclusion/exclusion’ is traditionally defined through employment. Those outside economic activity are deemed outside social participation [22]. Creative community groups offer purpose and social activity for those without employment. For example, it was said that some members participating at Ninewells Community Garden (NCG), view their creative participation like it was a full-time job (See Case Study 4). Additionally, organisers of Art Angel mentioned that many of their members are unemployed but exhibiting their creativity is purposeful and socially valuable (See Case Study 6). So, creative groups provide an opportunity for social inclusion for those typically excluded.

Significantly, many groups in Dundee provide additional, tangible support that goes beyond creative activities. A common occurrence was groups’ commitment to providing a warm space - particularly relevant during the current cost of living and increased fuel prices. Some groups like NCG and Scrap Antics, provide access to food, clothing donations or necessary supplies (See Case studies 4 and 5). Scrap Antics has also begun hosting additional services, such as a community nurse or a benefit advisor at its weekly sessions. While most groups appreciate this goes beyond their primary purpose, they recognise that people in their communities are facing increased hardships. Through mutual aid, creative community groups play a significant role.

Enjoyment

“I enjoy coming here. It’s a friendly place and very fun.”
(Member of Uppertunity)

All groups mentioned that one of their most significant benefits was the sense of enjoyment and fun that it provides members. While creative community groups can provide benefits and even services

[22] Hall, ‘Making and Gifting’, p.245.

for people with additional support needs, the basic reason for attending groups is that they enjoy themselves when they are there. Like all creative community groups, the joy of taking part in an activity, hobby, or creative expression is often the main driver for participation. This should not be undervalued as a benefit to individuals and communities.

“

“What was it that attracted you to the choir?”

“I think probably that I like singing. That was the first thing, I do like singing.”

(Interview with members of Loadsaweeminsingin’ choir)

Part 2: Challenges to Providing Accessible Spaces and Activities

Unsurprisingly, many of the challenges groups experience in providing accessible and inclusive activities, overlap with the experiences groups are facing in general. Several of the issues that groups mentioned related to themes of spaces, costs, and gaining valuable recognition. These were themes raised in The Big Conversation in 2022 [23]. However, this research has also found additional challenges to incorporating accessibility, such as venue location and travel, navigating institutions and systems, funding, and perceived level of knowledge and skills.

Venues and Spaces:

The landscape of creative participation in Dundee is hosted across a variety of venues. These include but are not limited to, large cultural and tourist venues; heritage sites; community centres; shopping centre units; gardens; art studios; museums; pubs; cafes. Creative Dundee has recently established *The Creative Spaces Working Group* which has sought to gather information on the need for creative spaces in the city and established a vision for improvement. They highlighted that there is a collective desire amongst Dundee's creative communities for change when it comes to access to spaces [24].

The variety of spaces, the use of venues for non-traditional purposes, and the community drive for creative spaces, highlights a desire for creative placemaking and community cohesion. However, availability of spaces and the use of different spaces pose challenges for accessibility. As reported in Creative Lives' *Spaces for Creativity* report, 35% of respondents highlighted accessibility of the building as an issue [25].

[23] Creative Lives, 'Big Conversation 2022'

[24] Creative Dundee, 'Creative Sharing: A Vision for Creative Space', 23 May 2024, <https://creativedundee.com/2023/05/creative-exchange-a-shared-vision-for-creative-space/> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

[25] Creative Lives, 'Spaces for Creativity: A Report from Creative Lives', January 2024, <https://www.creative-lives.org/spaces-for-creativity-2024> (Accessed: 19/06/2024).

Groups like Loadsaweeminsingin', have been hosted in large cultural venues, such as Discovery Point (See Case Study 3). Such venues, particularly those built in the last 10-30 years, have accessibility built into the design, such as ramps, automatic doors, accessible toilets. They are also more likely to feature on accessibility websites such as Euan's Guide or AccessAble. However, as Creative Dundee highlighted, such venues can continue to improve their practices and thinking [26]. Such organisations often have larger budgets and a larger workforce who can address concerns. Smaller community groups rarely have this luxury.

The nature of creative groups means most do not own their space, with some unable to rent a regular venue. For example, the Dundee storytelling group, Blether Tay-Gither, has frequently been forced to change venues. Groups with permanent spaces, such as Uppertunity, Scrap Antics and Art Angel, all expressed the importance of incorporating inclusivity and accessibility. Without a permanent space, it is harder for groups to communicate accessibility issues to their audience, as it can regularly change. This may mean individuals feel less comfortable attending a group if they are unsure of the levels of access. Permanent venues also allow for groups to establish 'safe spaces' for community and growth. Uppertunity was originally held in numerous community centres. Yet, the lack of consistency, and control over how the space was set up, caused anxiety amongst some members (See Case Study 1).

Venue ownership presents challenges to adapting or incorporating new accessibility features. For instance, while Uppertunity rents a permanent space in Dudhope Castle, its A-listed categorisation creates barriers to adapting the spaces, such as widening doors and entrances. While adaptations can be made through the proper channels and planning systems, this is a time-consuming task for smaller community groups (See Case Study 1). Getting venue owners to agree to adaptations also presents challenges. As NCG found, trying to navigate NHS Tayside's channels of communication, so they can improve the wheelchair accessibility of paths, has proved slow moving and difficult to navigate. (See Case Study 4).

[26] Creative Dundee, 'Open to All? Exploring Access to Dundee's Cultural Spaces: Part 3 Continued Inclusion', 23 Feb 2023, <https://creativedundee.com/2023/02/open-to-all-part-3/> (Accessed: 05/04/2024).

Additionally, making adaptations to spaces can be costly. For example, Uppertunity mentioned that some adaptations such as purchasing adjustable tables for wheelchair users, is far beyond their budget. Likewise, for NCG to undertake adaptations to the paths without assistance, would be financially difficult. (See Case Studies 1 and 4)

Travel

Many groups highlighted location and transport links as an accessibility issue. A similar concern across the UK and Ireland was reported in the Spaces for Creativity Report, with 50% of groups citing location and travel to the building as an issue [27]. For those with additional support needs, travel poses increased challenges. According to research by Kirk-Wade, in 2022 disabled people with conditions that limited day-to-day activities took 260 less trips than non-disabled people [28]. Uppertunity is aware of several members who no longer attend their group due to travel anxieties. Several others cannot use the bus and are reliant on taxis, which is not financially viable. A recent study into the cost of living, found that 50% of people in Dundee struggle with the cost of public transport and 77% struggle with the cost of taxis [29].

A recurring theme amongst groups is the inadequacy of Dundee's bus services. In 2023, Dundee City Council cut subsidies for five bus routes and is in consultation to remove dozens of bus stops across the city [30]. On a national level, in January 2024, the Scottish Government cancelled its £500 million commitment to bus priorities [31]. With buses being most

[27] Creative Lives, 'Spaces for Creativity', p.8.

[28] Kirk-Wade, 'UK Disability Statistics' p.35.

[29] S. Allan, J. Brash, S. Harlow, E. Moir, Engage Dundee Survey 2023: Exploring Citizens. Experiences of the Cost of Living Crisis (February 2024),

https://www.dundee.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/engage_dundee_report_2024.pdf (Accessed:16/04/2024), p.17

[30] J. Keith, 'Funding for Five Dundee Bus Routes Scrapped After SNP Administrations Budget Approved' The Courier (23 Feb 2023),

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/dundee/4172005/funding-cut-five-dundee-bus-routes-council/> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).; L. Devlin, 'Dozens of Dundee Bus Stops could be Axed to Reduce Journey Times', The Courier (23 April 2024).

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/dundee/4956336/dozens-dundee-bus-stops-potentially-axed-council-plans-reduce-journey-times/> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

[31] Transform Scotland, 'Where's the Priority? Our Reform to Bus Funding Cancellation' (18 Jan 2024), <https://transform.scot/2024/01/18/wheres-the-priority-our-reaction-to-bus-funding-cancellation/> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

heavily used by vulnerable people, the loss of services disproportionately affects this population. Groups such as Loadsaweeminsingin' mentioned that many of their members drive or provide lifts. While Discovery Point has a dedicated car park with disabled spaces, previous venues only had on-street parking, forcing some members with mobility issues to walk unreasonable distances.

“Buses are not what they used to be, they’re quite unreliable these days. Certainly parking, and being able to get close enough to the building, is a big issue for them.”

(Organiser of Loadsaweeminsingin’)

Without accessible and reliable transport links or suitable parking for members, it is society’s most vulnerable who suffer the most. Without the means to travel to activities, individuals are less likely to socialise and will see increased isolation. Witnessing this happening to their own members, the Tayside Deaf Links group, hosts of Signed Songs R Us, are raising funds for a minibus to enable group members to be picked up and dropped off [32].

“Even in the city centre you’ve got to get the bus, but the bus is rubbish or it doesn’t show up. And actually getting on and off the bus is quite hard.”

(Organiser of Ninewells Community Garden)

[32] Allan, Engage Dundee, p.36.

Funding

Five out of the six case studies mention funding as a challenge, if not the biggest challenge to delivering activities and incorporating accessibility. For several groups, paying the venue costs has become increasingly difficult. 75% of groups across the UK and Ireland reported an increase in venue costs within the last two years [33]. This situation is similarly experienced in Dundee. DCPB mentioned they now ask for member donations to help cover the venue hire. Providing free activities was part of DCPB's ethos of accessibility within their community, so they chose not to make it compulsory, but they are only just covering the costs. (See Case Study 2).

Additional costs, such as heating, food and drink, and materials are also increasingly unaffordable. Art Angel state that the largest part of their budget goes towards gas. While they receive funding, they have no funding to cover costs such as heating. Several groups mentioned temperature as an accessibility issue when establishing a safe, comfortable space. The Loadsaweeminsingin organiser mentioned that with the older demographic of their group, low temperatures in venues have impacted their rehearsals. (See Case Study 3).

Challenges to applying for and receiving funding have been experienced by almost every group. It was mentioned that the task of finding funding, writing applications, conducting monitoring and evaluations is time consuming and requires a level of knowledge and ability. This was particularly difficult for smaller groups and those reliant on volunteers, as funding opportunities may be overlooked and applications not submitted. For example, DCPB is fortunate to have an employee, funded through the Scottish Government, who dedicates a portion of time to funding applications. With their Scottish Government funding ending this year, they fear the group will struggle to continue in its current form (See Case Study 2).

[33] Creative Lives, 'Spaces for Creativity', p.2.

Another recurring challenge is the relationship with funding bodies. Scrap Antics, Uppertunity and DCPB mention that funding opportunities are mostly short-term. An analysis by 360Giving, found that between 2021-22, 77% of grants given to registered charities were for one year or less [34]. Multi-year funding is generally preferred as it frees up time and resources to deliver activities [35]; provides stability; gives groups time to reflect and improve; and allows groups time to deliver outcomes [36]. All the groups we spoke to agreed that short-term grants resulted in initiatives and activities stopping and starting. For those with additional support needs, who require a level of familiarity and structure, this system is unsuitable.

It was suggested that a large factor in funding issues is due to a lack of valuable recognition by funding bodies, local councils, and national governments. In Creative Lives' report, *Rewilding the Garden*, it was found that a key requisite for creative participation is a need for recognition. An online consultation in Scotland returned comments such as:

“We need better recognition from authorities, that small organisations do not work magic with small pots, they put in hours of in-kind time to make things happen and work.” [37]

The case studies reflected similar sentiments. It was expressed that their activities are often filling gaps left open due to cuts by local services. Yet, these efforts are not recognised or valued through tangible support, viable funding, or genuine recognition. With more support, groups could arguably provide better accessibility, reach wider audiences, offer more benefits, and continue to develop health and wellbeing through creative participation.

[34] 360Giving, 'UK Grant Making 2021-22: Snapshot',

<https://www.threesixtygiving.org/snapshot/method-data/> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

[35] E. Buteau, et al., 'New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multi-Year General Operating Support', (2020), Centre for Effective Philanthropy, https://cep.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Ford_MYGOS_FNL.pdf (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

[36] C. Mills, L. Firth, and B. Cairns, 'Time to End the Dominance of Short-Term Grants: The Evidence for Multi-Year Funding', Institute for Voluntary Action Research, (2023), <https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Time-to-end-the-dominance-of-short-term-grants-the-evidence-for-multi-year-funding-February-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20/06/2024).

[37] Creative Lives, 'Common Ground: Rewilding the Garden' (November 2020), <https://www.creative-lives.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=773a56de-bf10-4a8c-9d80-13af3b57f352> (Accessed: 03/04/2024).

“The council really needs to see the value. They kind of do, but not enough to say, ‘Okay, you’re going to get consistent funding’. I’ve sent out six funding applications for longer funding, but we don’t get anything from the government or the council.”

(Organiser from Uppertunity)

Knowledge and Awareness of Accessibility Issues:

Some groups are concerned that they lack the knowledge and skills to deliver on accessibility. For example, NCG has made many adaptations, however, the organiser is concerned there is more they could do but they don’t have the knowledge to know what. (See Case Study 4)

Larger groups, designed to provide activities for a particular impairment or community, appear to be more confident in terms of knowledge and training. For example, Art Angel provides a range of training opportunities for its volunteers and staff. (See Case Study 6). Uppertunity employed a health and safety consultant to advise them on their space (See Case Study 1). Smaller groups, trying to improve their accessibility, are less likely to have the time or resources to conduct training or employ consultants.

“We need more training as well. You can pay to do a lot of stuff, but free overall charity training would help us work better with people with autism. I’ve seen little bits of it but it would be good if it was somewhere that was accessible to us, wasn’t too timely, and was free.”

(Organiser of Ninewells Community Garden)

Groups such as Uppertunity still express that they are not experts in accessibility and inclusion. There is no way to make a space or an activity 100% accessible. By being observant and incorporating accessibility and inclusion into one’s thinking, you can continually try to improve.

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“I’m still learning but you can never be perfect, or you might not notice something is a problem. So it’s quite nice when you go to other groups and they do something and you think, ‘Oh, I didn’t think of that’. Especially because you can’t stop all the barriers in the world, so it’s about having these conversations and checking in with people with lived experience.”

(Organiser of Uppertunity)


Part 3: Approaches to Incorporating Accessibility and Inclusivity

Each case study expressed approaches they have taken in response to the challenges mentioned above. Through these approaches they try to continue providing benefits to their members and their communities. Some of these responses came up naturally during interviews and others were in response to the question, ‘what advice would you give groups looking to improve their accessibility and inclusion?’.

Listening to lived experiences

Several groups stated that the most helpful approach to improving accessibility and inclusion is by listening to their members and those with lived experiences. This includes being able to accept when you make a mistake and working collaboratively to rectify it. For example, NCG encourages feedback from their attendees. One of which emailed them to say that they found the garden very accessible but as a wheelchair user, the paths leading to the garden were unsuitable. (See Case Study 4)

Some groups viewed this as simply speaking to people on a ‘human level; it should be about getting to know the individual. A large part of creative participation and community groups is about socialisation, after all. Groups found that by knowing people’s likes and dislikes they were better able to accommodate them and create a more comfortable environment. Issues of accessibility can be very wide ranging. Uppertunity, found that various stimuli, such as smells, noise, and temperature, can affect someone’s access and comfort within a space. By being welcoming and getting to know members, accessibility can be achieved in a more comfortable and collaborative way.




“It’s really by speaking to people and understanding their experience that you learn from that. I think it’s vital that we all learn from each other because we can’t all experience everything and know everything all the time.”

(Organiser of Uppertunity)

Adapting Activities

Several groups adapted their activities to make them accessible. For example, DCPB worked alongside the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) to adapt the learning materials, incorporated visual aids, and colour coordinated their activities, for those with learning disabilities. Likewise, NCG constructed raised flower beds for participants with mobility issues (See case studies 2 and 4). Both groups are designed to be open to everyone, disabled and non-disabled alike. By incorporating such adaptations, they can welcome a more diverse group of participants.

However, not all groups will have the capacity to make such adaptations. DCPB has been incorporating adaptations for several years, in collaboration with another organisation. Grassroots groups with limited funding or resources are, understandably, less able to make such adaptations. Incorporating accessibility is about learning, and if there is a way groups can work towards improving their access, then it should be considered.




“We’re working on trying to make the garden more accessible. We’ve just finished building raised beds that a wheelchair can go through and they’re at a good height. Again, lots of time and money but it’s happening.”

(Organiser of Ninewells Community Garden)

Communication and Advertising

A large feature in welcoming people to groups is communicating the levels of accessibility. Creative Dundee highlighted that when access has been clearly communicated, it makes people feel welcome and normalises conversations around access [38]. If somebody has never been to a space or activity before, then concerns around accessibility can be anxiety inducing and may put them off entirely. For example, NCG tries to make it as clear as possible that their garden is open to everyone. It is not uncommon for them to communicate with people before they come to the garden.



“We can arrange that, if people get in touch. On a case-by-case basis, people just phone me and I explain to them, trying to make it clear it’s for everyone.”

(Organiser of Ninewells Community Garden)

It is also helpful if as much information can be provided without members having to ask. Being honest about an accessibility problem is important. With accessibility advertised, it removes the onus from the participant and helps to mitigate anxieties that they are causing additional work [39]. NCG advertise their wheelchair accessible paths and sensory garden on their website.

Several groups mentioned how they advertise themselves and their activities. As well as communicating levels of accessibility, how you advertise can also be made more accessible. For instance, Scrap Antics avoid overuse of text in posters and social media, using more visual aids instead, as this is more inclusive (See Case Study 5).

Collaborations and Networks

The most common approach is collaborating with other groups and joining networks. A feature that became apparent is that some well-established networks and collaborations already exist throughout Dundee. These include the Change Makers Hub, Grow Dundee Network,

[38] Creative Dundee, ‘Part 3’ (23 Feb 2024).

[39] *Ibid.*

and networks facilitated by Creative Dundee. However, several of the groups that form these networks are larger, more established groups. There is still room to extend the networks and collaborations in Dundee to bring in smaller, grassroots groups. As was discovered from research into creative pathways in Perth and Kinross, certain organisations and individuals act as nodes for facilitating creative networks [40]. These larger creative groups and the current networks could be used to facilitate further collaborations. Thus, allowing smaller and younger groups to benefit from the experiences and resources.

Sharing Knowledge

Frequently mentioned, particularly by Uppertunity, was knowledge sharing through collaborations. When Uppertunity began they visited other groups to see how they implemented accessibility. They discovered several aspects that they hadn't thought of and were able to implement into their activities. (See Case Study 1) With some brilliant groups in Dundee, working specifically with disabled people and those with mental health barriers, there is a wealth of knowledge to be utilised by other groups. For example, DCPB could share how they create accessible music activities.

Sharing Spaces

Sharing spaces provides another resource to be obtained through collaborations. With accessible venues being costly and relatively scarce for small groups, sharing with others is very useful. *Creative Dundee* has provided a resource for some of these spaces, such as Scrap Antic's spaces being available for hire. These larger, more established groups, that work with people with additional support needs, have spaces set-up for accessibility. For example, Uppertunity chose to host their art festival at Scrap Antics because it was suitably accessible. Uppertunity itself, also opens its space in Dudhope castle to the storytelling group, Blether Tay-Gither. With some groups better able to adapt their spaces, sharing with smaller groups helps to improve access to creative participation whilst also addressing issues of availability of venues.

[40] Kirkhill Associates, 'Pathways: Getting Connected in the Voluntary Arts' (July 2015), p.6. <https://www.creative-lives.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=dad3517a-178b-474d-b42b-ad1bb6bb829d> (Accessed: 03/04/2024).

Sharing Activities

Sharing activities with other groups is common. Groups such as Loadsaweeminsingin' have collaborated with other Dundee community choirs. This is a good way to initiate contact with other groups. Similarly, Uppertunity shares its dance activities with another group, who then shares its music groups with them. So, the field of accessible creative participation can be increased.

Being Welcoming and Friendly

Finally, quite a basic approach but frequently mentioned. It is impossible to be 100% accessible but when an issue arises, groups are often proactive in addressing it. Groups often associated this with being 'friendly' or 'human'. If somebody with an accessibility requirement wants to join a group then they should be treated with compassion to try and accommodate them.

“My approach has always been to be quite human and be friendly.”

(Ninewells Community Garden Organiser)

Being inclusive is about being welcoming and making people feel comfortable. Being friendly, approachable and non-judgemental is often a simple but important way to ensure the space is inclusive.

“On a Scrap Thursday, or on any day, there is that lack of judgement and that acceptance that people are who they are. There's something for everyone at a very human level.”

(Scrap Antics Organiser)

Case Study 1: Uppertunity

Founded by Danielle Du Plooy in 2015, Uppertunity is a Dundee based charity, working with adults (16+) with learning disabilities, mental health barriers, and additional support needs. They offer a range of creative activities and workshops, including arts and crafts, sewing, drama, gardening, and cooking. Through this broad variety of creativity, Uppertunity seeks to provide skills development, confidence-building, self-worth, and social change. During our conversation with Danielle, several important themes were highlighted:

- The benefits of creative community groups.
- Challenges of spaces and venues
- Challenges with funding.
- The value of collaborations and networks.

Benefits of Creative Community Groups

One of Uppertunity's core values is commitment to creativity, and they recognise that creativity offers the potential for empowerment. Many of Uppertunity's members have difficulty in expressing emotions and communicating, and arts-based projects offer them an alternative method of expression.

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“This is why I really wanted it to be art-based, you can express yourself without words. Sometimes it's quite intimidating or overwhelming to talk all the time, and with art you don't have to explain it, you just go.”

(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity.)

Uppertunity fosters opportunities for expression and empowerment by creating a safe space. They regularly expressed they were a community where every member was welcomed as a valued and autonomous

For many, the sense of belonging gained from participating in this community has been significant in tackling issues of social isolation and anxiety, which were reportedly exacerbated by Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis. Providing empowerment and expression, Uppertunity plays an important role in addressing mental health barriers and social wellbeing.

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**“You really embed yourself and it gives you a sense of purpose, of ‘this is my community’. It’s a massive thing, the community.”
(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity)**

However, Uppertunity also extend their activity beyond their venue at Dudhope Castle and into the wider community. Danielle said that the motivation for this was because they “want the community to see that everyone can do everything.” This is also apparent in their creative activities, and the group regularly exhibits and shares with the wider community. In May 2024, Uppertunity hosted a week-long art festival. Paintings and artworks were put on display, a drama performance was shared, and upcycled items were for sale. Throughout the week, workshops were offered to the public. While Uppertunity feels it is important to have safe spaces for people “to expand”, they also look to benefit the wider community by challenging perceptions of disability and art.

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“What we want to do when we’re showcasing things and going out, is make that interaction more normal and just give people opportunities to learn from each other. The whole community learning from each other is really key and also shows that there are so many different ways of doing things.”

(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity)

The Challenges of Creating an Accessible Space

Uppertunity is based in Dudhope Castle, a late 13th century castle in Dudhope Park. The building was taken over from Dundee City Council in 2022 by The Circle, a community-interest company that operates fair rent, flexible and supportive workspaces in Dundee. This allows Uppertunity to have an affordable, permanent space to host their activities. Having a permanent space allows them to better establish a familiar and safe space for their community.

Prior to this, they worked out of multiple community centres. While a lot of these were set-up to be accessible in terms of ramps and doorways, the practicality of being spread across venues was difficult. The group was often forced to work to the timetable of the community centre, which wasn't always suitable. On one occasion, due to a timetabling conflict, the group was moved from their usual room into a large hall. The last-minute change in location and type of space was unsettling for some participants. A permanent space has many benefits to accessibility.

However, there are still accessibility issues with Dudhope Castle. The venue's category as an A-listed building presents barriers. Several doors are not wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or they are fire safety doors which must remain closed: an impracticality for wheelchair users. Getting permission to make adaptations, such as widening doorways or installing fire alarm linked door closers, involves an application procedure through Historic Environment Scotland and the Local Authority. For a small team, this is a time-consuming and difficult process.

Another major barrier identified by Uppertunity, is travelling to the venue. Some members experience travel anxiety and cannot use buses. Those using buses must still walk to the castle: difficult for those with reduced mobility. This has been made worse by recent local council cuts to the bus services. Some members use taxis, but this has large financial implications. Even when the venue is made accessible, means of travel are often beyond the group's control.

The largest identified barrier is cost, as making adaptations can be expensive and Uppertunity has been faced with difficult decisions. For example, a choice between buying adjustable desks for wheelchair users or being able to pay volunteer expenses so they can run the activity in the first place. The group has been adaptable and found innovative methods, such as building their own wheelchair accessible desk, but it would be better if they could afford the specifically design adaptations.

“I think the biggest barrier to improvements is money, because there’s not a lot of funding.”

(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity)

The Challenges of Funding

Uppertunity charges a membership fee to help cover costs: £8 for a full day of activities. Most members reportedly said they find the costs fair. Core funding comes from the Community Lottery Fund and other “smaller pots”. They do not receive funding from local or national government.

An issue with funding, particularly local council funding, is it is a difficult and time-consuming process, both to apply for and then to complete the evaluation and monitoring required to keep funding. Additionally, most funding is usually short term, so Uppertunity is restricted in what they can do with the funds.



Uppertunity also stated they feel there is a lack of recognition given by the local council. Local services are keen to utilise the benefits of Uppertunity, but they feel little is done to ensure that they can continue their activities on a long-term basis.

“The council needs to really see the value. That’s one of the biggest things that annoys me. They need us but they’re not showing us enough respect to say, ‘you’ve got funding’ or ‘let’s help you get five-year funding’.”

(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity)

Collaborations and Networks

Uppertunity enhances its activities and accessibility through collaborations with other groups. For instance, they are very active in sharing spaces. When planning their art festival, Uppertunity collaborated with Scrap Antics to use their space in the Wellgate shopping centre. Similarly, Uppertunity lends out its space to groups such as Blether Tay-Gither. This allows more groups and creative activity to be delivered across Dundee.

Additionally, Uppertunity recognises they cannot offer all the activities they would like. By collaborating with others, they offer more creative opportunities. For example, Uppertunity does not yet offer music activities, but they do have dance workshops. They share activities with a music group, so that members from each group have access to different creative opportunities.

When asked how groups could improve their accessibility, Uppertunity said to work with and speak to other groups. By sharing knowledge and experiences, smaller groups can learn how to improve their activities to be more inclusive and accessible.

“Visit other groups and see how they’re run, because there are so many different ways of doing it. I’m still learning and you can never be perfect.”

(Danielle Du Plooy, Uppertunity)

To find out more about Uppertunity visit:
<https://uppertunity.org.uk/>

To find out more about the Change Makers Hub:
<https://www.dundee-changemakers.net/about>



Case Study 2: Dundee City Pipe Band (DCPB)

DCPB is an inclusive Highland pipe band offering weekly rehearsals, free tuition, and events. The band's objectives are to promote Highland bagpipes and drums, support Scottish heritage, and to provide an inclusive, supportive and welcoming atmosphere. DCPB prides itself on being unique from other groups of its kind.

The band was developed in 2016 by Ross Inglis, a self-taught piper from Dundee who is autistic. Before DCPB, he joined several bands in the Tayside region, only to be asked to leave after a few weeks. Disillusioned by the lack of inclusion, he set up DCPB with support from the Scottish Commission for Learning Disabilities (SCLD). DCPB welcomes anyone, regardless of age, background, or abilities. Regarded as Scotland's 'first fully inclusive pipe band', Ross was awarded a lifetime Fellowship of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufacturing & Commerce (RSA) for his commitment. It is thought to be the only pipe band in the world with a committee made up of people with learning disabilities, physical impairments, and mental health barriers.

Speaking to Nicola Shirkey, the Volunteer Practitioner for DCPB, funded through Impact Funding Partners, the main themes that were highlighted were:

- Creating a safe space
- Providing accessible activities
- Challenges of venues
- Challenges of funding

Creating a safe space


DCPB has done a lot to establish a safe space for creativity and enjoyment. Nicola mentioned that they think of the band as one big family. Although the band's original initiative was for those with

additional support needs, it has always been open to everyone and so has a diverse membership. To avoid replicating the experiences of their founder, the band prides itself on being non-judgemental. Unlike other bands, DCPB is non-competitive - their focus is learning and enjoyment.

Through this welcoming and fun environment, members have the opportunity to socialise with like-minded individuals. DCPB is advertised on the NHS Inform website as a resource for social isolation. Some members rarely go out in the evening and the weekly practice provides an opportunity to socialise, as do the additional social gatherings. For example, a young man with additional support needs was reacquainted with an old school friend at a DCPB event. An opportunity he likely would not have had without the group.

Members often experience growth in their abilities. While the band is promoted as fun and sociable, there is a high level of learning. Their skills are not just 'tokenistic', they are all accomplished musicians. The band has been invited to perform at large events (they're the only Highland pipe band to perform at Dundee V&A), challenging perceptions of what a traditional pipe band should be.

Nicola has witnessed a significant development in members' confidence, for example a band member with autism, who volunteers with the running of the group. Over the course of a few years, this member's confidence increased, which also saw them gain access to full-time employment. Involvement in community groups offers potential for development beyond its creative activities.



“The confidence in people from when they come in to now, is incredible.”

(Nicola Shirkey, DCPB)

Providing accessible activities

The band's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere does not come without effort and DCPB works hard to ensure accessibility. For example, they

have made adaptations to the sheet music, making it more visual and colour-coordinated. They have worked with the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association to adapt the learning materials and qualification process, so that anyone can advance their skills. Part of Nicola's role is to constantly review accessibility as "something new will always come up".

Ensuring their communication is accessible has also been considered. They utilise a lot of visuals and easy-read formats in their social media and adverts. They have collaborated with other third-sector organisations and listed their group on various forums such as DVVA, Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership (DHSCP), NHS Inform, and ALISS. Through these platforms, the group's inclusion and accessibility can be clearly signposted and promoted.



Challenges of funding

“Difficulties with funding is a really huge challenge at the moment.”

(Nicola Shirkey, DCPB)

While DCPB offers the most inclusive pipe band in Scotland, it still struggles to receive funding. The band has volunteers but also pays for two sessional workers, as well as coping with the additional costs of running the group and attending events. Nicola explained that funding sources for inclusivity or music activities are highly competitive, and that funding pots specifically targeted at Dundee are quite rare.

It was recognised that the process of finding and applying for funding is time-consuming. Although Nicola works 10 hours a week for DCPB, applying for funding, along with other tasks required to run the band, usually goes beyond 10 hours. Volunteers' personal commitments and roles within the band make it difficult for them to help with funding applications.

DCPB has been fortunate enough to receive six years of Scottish Government funding. However, this funding ends in 2024, with only one-year funding opportunities now available. The uncertainty of funding has caused serious concerns about the future of the group. Nicola is concerned that if her funding is cut then a lot of the background work will not be done, due to a lack of volunteers to take over her role. There is a worry that the group would become like any other traditional Highland pipe band.

For more information on Dundee City Pipe Band:

www.facebook.com/DundeeCityPipeBand/?locale=en_GB

Case Study 3:

Loadsaweeminsingin'

Loadsaweeminsingin' is an all-women community choir, founded in 1994. Practising and performing for 30 years, the group is well-established in Dundee. Alice Marra, the group's choir leader, states their purpose as "to give everybody the chance to sing". With this ethos in mind, the group is made up of women from various backgrounds and ages. In my conversations with Alice Marra and three of the group members, several themes arose:

- The benefits of community choirs for participants
- The use of space and venues
- Adapting to accessibility



The Benefits of Community Choirs

One of the biggest things that both Alice and the choir's group members expressed was the benefit attending the choir had on their mental, physical, and social wellbeing. While most people come to the group simply because they enjoy singing, Alice's motto is, "singing is good for your health". She says the act of singing releases more endorphins than any other type of activity.

Group members experienced improvements to their wellbeing, due to the enormous sense of community created within the choir's safe space. Members discussed the friendships they have made and, importantly, how they support each other. Throughout the choir's history, several members have developed health conditions and some have sadly passed away. They discussed how they have always helped and supported each other through such difficult times.


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“It's more than a singing group - the support that we give each other is just... yeah!”

(Loadsaweeminsingin' member)



For many, the group offers a support network. With members coming from many different situations, having a space in which they can do something creative, enjoyable, have fun with their friends, and support each other, is significant.



“Obviously they all love singing, but singing isn’t the most important part. It’s them being together... and some of them just wouldn’t be able to cope without the support network that they have here.”

(Alice Marra, Loadsaweeminsigin’)

The Venue and Space

Although founded at Dundee Rep Theatre, Loadsaweeminsingin’ has met in various venues. The group moved to the McManus Galleries and Museum, and then spent some time rehearsing in churches, before moving to their present home at Discovery Point. They have been fortunate to rehearse in some of Dundee’s main cultural and creative venues, which has proved to be inspiring for the choir, in particular the McManus’ gothic architecture. Similarly, the group members talked about the fantastic views they get across the Tay from Discovery Point.

Additionally, these spaces are well set up with accessible features, as they are attractions for the general public. Alice described how impressive the staff were at McManus and Discovery Point in planning the space for their use. Another benefit of using large cultural venues is that all, or most of them, will be listed on accessible information guides such as AccessAble or Euan’s Guide. So new members can investigate the level of accessibility before attending, making for a much less stressful experience.

However, there are still issues related to venues. Not owning the venue means that the group cannot always make the necessary adjustments to meet their groups requirements. For example, a common issue in one of the venues was temperature. During the colder months, this became an accessibility issue, particularly for older members of the group.

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“We’ve had some issues in the past with the building not being warm enough. Members of the group can be sitting for a while and if it isn’t warm enough then it’s not comfortable for them, especially if they’re older and have any kind of medical condition.”

(Alice Marra, Loadsaweeminsigin’)


Another accessibility issue has been travelling to venues. The churches that they occupied only had on-street parking. For those with blue badges, they commonly found they could not park outside the venue. Discovery Point addressed this issue by having a dedicated car park. The group members shared that there is an ongoing issue with buses, as anyone based outside the city centre, who doesn’t have access to a car, is reliant on them. They mentioned that bus timetables rarely match up with the group’s schedule and on occasion some women are waiting outside for some time.

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“Buses are not what they used to be, they’re quite unreliable these days.”

(Loadsaweeminsigin’ member)


While Loadsaweeminsigin’ have been fortunate to have venues well suited for accessibility, this is not always the case for venues they are visiting. They recently performed at Dundee’s West Fest at Magdalene Green, and some people could not get up the stairs onto the stage. Similarly, the group will be having its 30th anniversary concert at Dundee’s St Paul’s cathedral, which lacks step free access into the building. While the members said Alice always checks accessibility needs beforehand, it was interesting that members always support one another when it comes to accessibility. This really speaks to the sense of community and support.



“I think in that kind of venue it’s hard to make it completely accessible, but for some people who had mobility problems, we were all on hand to make sure they could manage the stairs and have seats in place. So, we look after the people who need help.”
(Loadsaweeminsgin’ member)

Adapting to Accessibility

Whilst several of the venues are set up for accessibility, there are other adaptations that Alice makes to ensure access. She always asks group members for their input when it comes to finding a venue. Additionally, she produces lyric sheets with large fonts for members with sight difficulties. A theme that is present in the group’s organisation, is that when it comes to accessibility, they are not complacent and frequently reflect upon how they can improve their inclusivity.



“The group is supposed to give everybody the chance to sing, and you just don’t know what you’re going to come across at any point, so you have to be ready for anything.”
(Alice Marra, Loadsaweeminsgin’)

This sense of inclusivity is felt amongst the members. Each of them expressed how open they felt the group was, compared to some other choirs. Loadsaweeminsgin’ doesn’t require auditions because it is an inclusive and open group specifically designed for women to enjoy singing but also to make friends and connect with the community.

To find out more about Loadsaweeminsgin’

www.facebook.com/loadsaweemin/?locale=en_GB

Case Study 4: Ninewells Community Garden (NCG)

NCG is a volunteer-led garden with three employed facilitators. The garden's aim is to promote physical activity and health through community gardening. Situated in the arboretum of Ninewells Hospital, the garden is well used by hospital visitors, patients and staff, but also by nearby local communities. The garden sits along a well-used cycle path which encourages visitors.

“There's no restriction on who can use the space and I think it is quite varied.”

(Jek, NCG)

The garden has incorporated accessible features, such as wheelchair accessible paths, raised beds and a sensory garden. The facilitators view gardening as 'inherently creative' but they also offer creative workshops such as an arts and crafts club, mosaic making club, and cooking workshops using produce grown in the garden. In 2016, the garden constructed the Leaf Room, to offer a permanent indoor space.

Speaking with the Community Engagement Facilitator, Jek, several important themes arose concerning the group's mission and its activities. These are:

- Benefits for people with additional support needs
- Barriers to improving accessibility
- The benefits of networks and communities

Benefits for People with Additional Support Needs

Many volunteers who come to the garden have long-term mental health conditions or learning difficulties. For these members, the garden offers several benefits. Firstly, through witnessing the outcomes of their

creative activities and gardening roles, they gain a sense of purpose and ownership. As Jek described, many of these members don't have paid jobs and so the routine that comes through their gardening activities offers them a sense of responsibility. Because there are no expectations or deadlines, volunteers can work to their own terms.

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“It gives them a space to see the impact of what they can do. And because we're not working to deadlines, and we don't need anything to really happen, if we grow vegetables, brilliant. But we're not reliant on it. And again, people can choose what they're interested in.”

(Jek, NCG)

The garden also recognises the link between additional support needs and increased socio-economic challenges. NCG offers all their activities for free and utilises them as a pathway to provide further support. For example, in the past, the facilitators have provided various items of clothing to members that require them. They can also provide vegetables and food from the garden. With the Leaf Room they provide a warm space, in which they can offer cups of tea, coffee and biscuits. Whilst they can't provide solutions, they hope that the garden at least offers a space for respite.

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“You don't need to bring anything at all, and if we see someone's clothes are looking really shabby, we can use that as a kind of undercurrent for giving them gardening gear that can actually help them out in their day-to-day.”

(Jek, NCG)

NCG has partnered with Dundee Green Health Partnership, organised by Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action (DVVA). Through this initiative, people can be referred to NCG as part of a 'green health prescription'. Those with chronic and long-term conditions, mental health difficulties, and those suffering from social isolation, anxiety and loneliness can be

referred to community initiatives in Dundee that could potentially address these issues. NCG is a unique space in which these benefits can be realised. Through gardening, members are encouraged to be outside and partake in physical activity. Such activities offer the chance for social interactions with like-minded people. Through a green health initiative, groups like NCG also help reduce impacts on NHS services.

Barriers to accessibility

During our conversation, Jek mentioned barriers preventing them from opening the garden to as wide a community as possible. One such barrier is the level of knowledge that the facilitators felt they had regarding accessibility issues. Although they ensure the garden has accessible toilets, paths, and raised beds, there is a concern that they could be doing more. For small groups, being experts on accessible requirements is a high expectation. Jek stressed that they encourage an ethos of being human and friendly, and asking people what they need. However, if they could afford accessibility training, they feel they would be better prepared.



This speaks to the common issue of funding. NCG is quite fortunate in that it receives funding from a variety of funders, including the Community Lottery Fund, NHS Charities Together, NHS Tayside Community Innovation Fund, to name a few. They also accept donations from the public. However, if they wanted to do a large project, they would require a lot more funding.

Once again, the biggest challenge of funding is that it is a time-consuming task. For a small group of three people, applying for funding and keeping up with evaluation, on top of the other tasks, can be particularly difficult.

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“If we wanted to do a super overhaul of the whole space then it would be quite a big thing to fundraise for. I think with little funds, if you know exactly what it is you want to do, you can target it. But that is quite time consuming when you’ve got such a small team.”

(Jek, NCG)

It was mentioned that actually getting to the garden can present some accessibility issues. Although it is situated next to the hospital, where there are car parks and bus links, the garden itself is still a long walk from the hospital and there are no dedicated car parks for NCG. Jek suggested that those with physical mobility issues are likely to be put off by this.

A significant issue was the condition of the external paths. They are uneven and have steep inclines. For those in wheelchairs this isn’t ideal, and it is something NCG has received feedback on from its membership. However, for a small charity, adaptations can be a large financial undertaking and collaborating with NHS Tayside has proved unavoidably slow-moving and difficult to navigate. Jek suggested that an external organisation, like Paths for All, might be useful with advising on the complexities that come with working with a larger organisation.



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“We’ve got this amazing thing that we’re running here, that could benefit all the hospital’s patients and staff and yet they’re not willing to invest in the infrastructure to help people to use it. I think working with a massive institution can come with huge challenges.”

(Jek, NCG)

Networks and Collaborations

NCG is strongly involved in Dundee’s network of community gardens, to support their activities and improve their accessibility. With over 25 community gardens spread across the city, in 2020 they came together to share ideas and their knowledge of growing. The network has established itself as ‘Grow Dundee’ and has brought all the gardens into one online space.

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“I think that network has been quite valuable. They were already supporting a lot of gardens but then the network just sort of formalised it into a regular meeting.”

(Jek, NCG)

Through this network, NCG has been able to share resources, activities and, importantly, knowledge of running a community garden. For example, they were recently involved in training workshops, organised by Grow Dundee, on creating effective and accessible posters and how to create social media content. The network was also useful in addressing some of the issues around funding. Larger gardens, such as Campy Growers or Maxwell Centre, help smaller or non-constituted gardens access funds and resources. This helps to ensure Dundee has a wide range of well-connected gardens, offering creative opportunities throughout the city.

For more information of Ninewells Community Garden:

Website: <https://ninewellsgarden.org.uk/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NinewellsGarden/>

For more information on Grow Dundee:

Website: <https://growdundee.blog/home>

Case Study 5: Scrap Antics

Scrap Antics was created in 2016 by Sandy Greene and Siobhan Morrison. The aim of the organisation is to promote the themes of affordability and sustainability, and to encourage creative activities. Scrap Antics is open to everyone, but they prioritise involvement from local people who experience disadvantages. They aim to utilise aspects of imagination, creativity, and play, to bring people together, break down barriers and give a voice to the often unheard.

From their community space in the Wellgate Shopping Centre, they run the weekly group, Scrap Thursdays. It was designed to provide a dedicated time where anyone could come to a safe and relaxed space, be involved in a creative activity, and socialise with others.

Speaking with Scrap Antics founder, Sandy Greene, various themes were highlighted. These included:

- Creating a safe space
- Creativity as a pathway for further support
- Providing accessible venues and activities
- Funding challenges



Creating a safe space

One of the main objectives of Scrap Antics is to establish a safe space for socialisation and confidence building. Sandy discussed that for a lot of people facing additional challenges, Scrap Thursdays offer a short respite from their day-to-day hardships. People are welcomed in, offered a cup of tea and a chat without any judgement. By offering a creative activity, the hope is that people will be relaxed and more willing to socialise as they take part in shared activities. It is not about producing a creative output, but the opportunities that the creative process provides. For many, Sandy says this offers them an opportunity to “recognise the power they have within them.”

Sandy shared that through groups like Scrap Thursdays, people develop confidence and find a voice. For example, she recalled that some participants with additional support needs, who initially came with support workers, now attend Scrap Thursdays independently. Now that they are comfortable within the space and more confident in their abilities.

“

“I hope that our sessions just bring a bit of respite to their lives. That you can come here and for a bit of time, you’re warm, surrounded by people, you’ve got food, someone is smiling at you, and asking if you want a cup of tea and it just gives you that break.”

(Sandy Greene, Scrap Antics)

A pathway for additional support

Although creativity, respite, and socialisation are some of the main objectives of Scrap Thursdays, it also offers tangible support. They host benefit advisors during sessions, and an NHS community nurse has run drop-in sessions during the group.



The motivation to introduce a community nurse drop-in session came from witnessing many people unable to attend or make a doctor's appointment. This was partially due to the current situation of NHS waiting times, but more apparent was the inaccessible nature of healthcare appointments. For some people, the institutional settings of hospitals or clinics are intimidating or anxiety inducing. By offering these services within a comfortable and familiar space, some of these anxieties and barriers can be reduced.

“

It just makes it really accessible for people who might find it difficult to get to their doctors or struggle to feel comfortable there.”

(Sandy Greene, Scrap Antics)

Providing accessible venues and activities

Scrap Antics have put a lot of thought into the accessibility of their venue. They are fortunate to have a permanent location in a unit at the Wellgate Shopping Centre. Sandy discussed how being in a shopping centre naturally addresses many accessibility issues. The venue has working lifts to all floors, accessible ramps in and out of the building, automatic doors, and centre staff, who are given disability training.

Another reason they chose this space was because of its central location in the city and proximity to the communities they work with. It is very close to the city's bus station. As well as improving accessibility and travel to their venue, they are central to the community.

Scrap Antics is part of networks and hires its venue out to other groups. The space is very adaptable for different groups, is well set up for creative activities, and suitably accessible. Scrap Antics demonstrates how collaborations are important to sustaining creative community activities in a region, as well as ensuring accessibility.

When conducting their activities, Sandy discussed how they are always thoughtful in planning out access to their spaces. Sandy mentioned that they use visual and easy-to-read language in their posters and social media content. They also ensure they are promoting within the communities they prioritise. For example, they don't exclusively use social media as this may exclude those without access to online resources.

“

“We’re making sure that it is welcoming and judgement free. We use accessible language and an accessible physical space, so people feel welcome, and the communities that use us know and trust us for being inclusive and accessible.”

(Sandy Greene, Scrap Antics)

Funding

One of the biggest challenges Scrap Antics experiences in delivering its groups is funding. The benefits that Scrap Antics offers requires a level of consistency and longevity. However, funding is often short-term, and funders frequently ask for new projects. Sandy mentioned that to get the most value out of their group you need time to allow them to flourish. It was felt that funding rarely provided enough time to properly reflect on their activities, learn from their mistakes, implement the necessary changes, or conduct the required funding reports and evaluations. Sandy suggested that the relationship between funders and applicants requires more trust and better collegiality.

“

“In order to make things accessible, you need time to have those conversations.”

(Sandy Greene, Scrap Antics)

Scrap Antics, however, ensures that it is not fully dependent on funding. As a larger organisation, they raise funds through their Scrap Store, membership fees, and hiring out their space to other groups. Sandy expressed that this revenue was not about making a profit but to be able to deliver accessible activities. By having income, unrestricted by funding commitments, they can do more. It also allows them to fill the gaps in-between funding applications.

Of course, for smaller, community groups, this isn't always a realistic option. Through collaborations with larger groups like Scrap Antics, they can access their accessible spaces and share in their knowledge and expertise. As Scrap Antics focuses on delivering for the local community, collaborations between smaller and larger community groups can help to establish an environment in which creativity can flourish and be as accessible as possible.

“

“We're a community, so we're all in this together.”

(Sandy Greene, Scrap Antics)

For more information on Scrap Antics:
www.scrapantics.co.uk

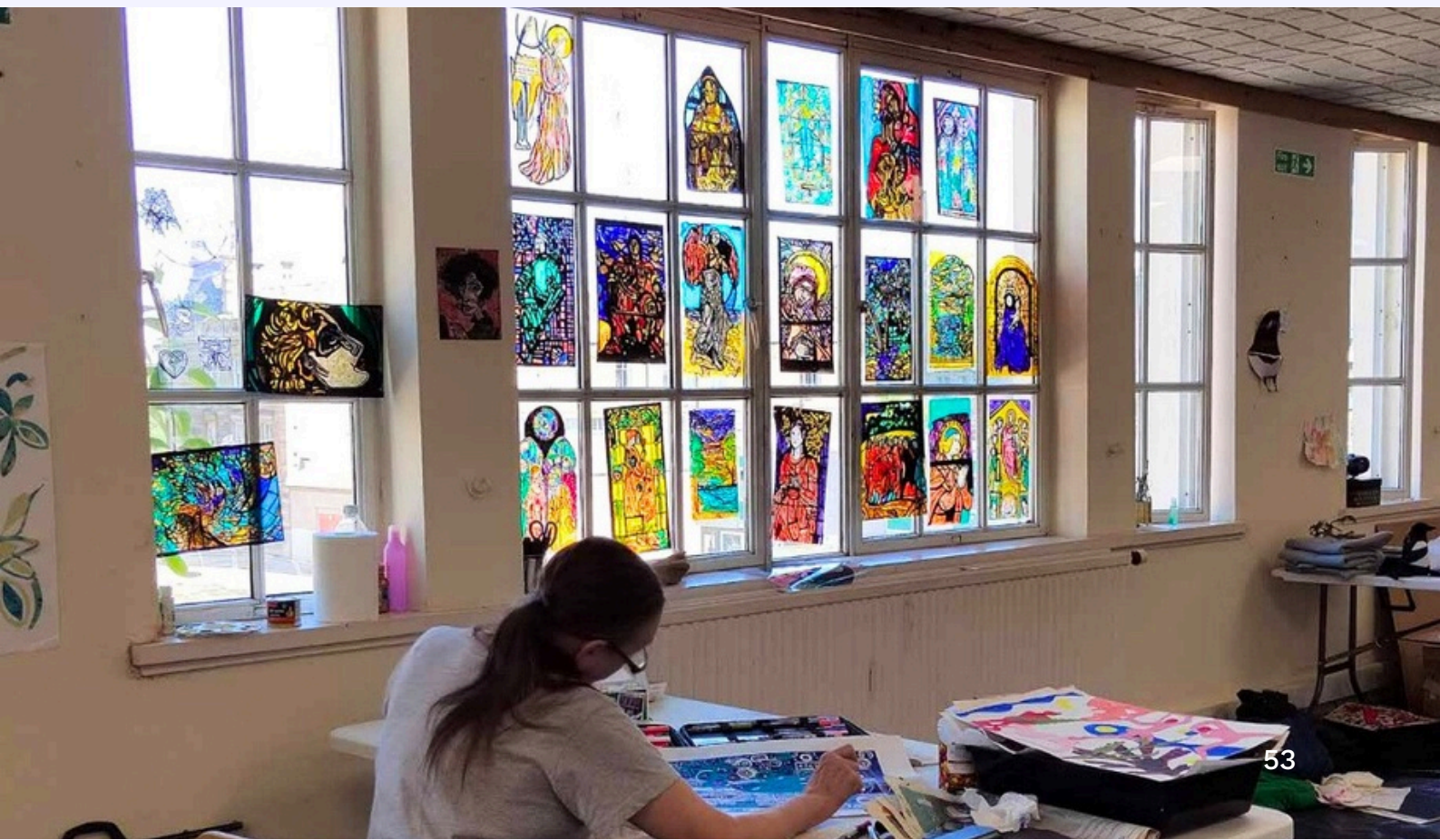
Case Study 6: Art Angel

Art Angel was founded in 1996 to act as a counter to the disempowering nature of psychiatric wards, which they perceived as dysfunctional. They encourage participation in the arts to support people living with mental ill-health. A main building block of Art Angel is they listen to their members. Their three main creative groups, art, photography, and creative writing were created because that's what their members wanted to do.

Through my conversation with Art Angel organisers, Rosie, Derek, and Guen, it was made clear that Art Angel is not a service for 'clients' or 'patients' but that they consider themselves a grassroots organisation run by and for their members.

From our conversation, several important themes were highlighted:

- The benefits of creativity
- Creating a safe space
- Challenges of funding



The benefits of creativity

Art Angel uses art and creative activities as a method for supporting people with mental health barriers. They described the act of creating as something you are passionate about, as a meditative experience that provides a sense of ease and respite from people's everyday struggles.

“

I can't describe it, but there is a feeling about art, people need art, especially people in the situation I'm in.”

(Art Angel Member)



Art gives attendees an opportunity for expression, to learn new skills, or develop their interests. But as the organisers discussed, the benefits Art Angel provides aren't just about the art. The group seeks to provide a growth in participants' confidence. By listening to their members, giving them space to make their own choices, and treating them as more than a diagnosis, they witness developments in self-esteem. In some instances, this might see them branching out in other areas of their life, such as participating in their community, or being more open about their mental health.

“

“It’s the only time in my week when I mix with other people with similar problems. It’s a great atmosphere and I love to paint.”

(Art Angel Member)

For many, Art Angel also provides a source of socialisation. A lot of participants may have few friends and are often isolated. Coming to Art Angel, participants can meet people with shared experiences. Additionally, Art Angel offers people a sense of purpose. Members enjoy and recognise the benefits of coming to their weekly group and so, as one organiser mentioned, people may be less likely to stay up late the night before, or have an extra drink, or take drugs, if they know they're going to Art Angel the following day. The tangible benefits that Art Angel brings to people's mental and social wellbeing are very significant.

“

“I don’t have many friends now. Friends don’t understand why I cancel things at the last moment or won’t go out. People here understand. This is my happy place. Art makes me happy and I love doing it”

(Art Angel Member)

Creating a safe space

A large part of Art Angels' ability to establish such benefits is the provision of a safe space. Situated on the first floor of Enterprise House, it is immediately apparent how welcoming, inspiring and creative, Art Angels' space is.

In the past, mental health projects were often run in rundown and uninspiring venues, which offered little encouragement for self-worth. Offering something completely new, Art Angel provides high quality art supplies and a welcoming venue. How people in the venue behave is also vital to the creation of a safe space. Art Angel makes sure that all their volunteers and facilitators have access to various training opportunities, such as mental health first aid, suicide awareness, dementia and autism training. They are frequently thinking about these aspects and collaborating with other groups to share knowledge and training.

The physical space and location of the venue is important. Their venue has a lift and disabled toilets, so that it is accessible for members with physical and mobility impairments. The city centre location provides good access via buses, and being in the city centre allows for more opportunities to get involved in Dundee's community and culture. The organisers state that many of their participants are often isolated in lower deprivation areas. As their self-confidence increases, they are more likely to participate in activities in the city.

“

“By being down here, we have people going to projects, volunteering, games afternoons, socialising, going to the library, going to the shops, doing whatever they do when they're downtown, which is great.”

(Rosie, Art Angel Organiser)

It was stated that to be able to establish a safe and welcoming environment, it must be a permanent space. Without it, it is harder to ensure the level of accessibility. But importantly, they need to provide somewhere that is familiar and members can think of as theirs.

“

“People will argue, ‘Do you really need a space? Could you not just do this by hiring a room when you need one?’. But you do need a permanent base because you need to be able to foster a safe space.”

(Rosie, Art Angel Organiser)

Challenge of funding

The largest challenge Art Angel faces is the cost of the venue and the challenges of funding. Although having a permanent space is vital for Art Angels' activities, it comes with additional costs. Rents are high, but they find that a large amount of their budget goes towards necessary additional expenditures such as gas and heating. Creating a space that is warm, comfortable, and safe is vital to Art Angel's project. If they were unable to afford the costs of providing this, then it is likely people would not get the same level of benefit.

“The place is amazing but if it was cold in the winter, then people wouldn't come.”

(Guen, Art Angel Organiser)

As a well-established community group in Dundee, they appreciate that they do have good funders. However, they find that they are still struggling to raise enough funds to cover everything. Not to mention the task of finding and applying for funding is a time-consuming task, on top of organising and facilitating their creative groups.

“It is a real, real struggle and I see a lot more projects shutting down. And unless somebody comes up with some good ideas about this then it's going to be very hard.”

(Rosie, Art Angel Organiser)

It was recognised that groups such as Art Angel are vital to society and Dundee's community. Without them local services would struggle. It was suggested that such groups require more recognition for the benefits their inclusive, accessible, and valuable activities offer the most vulnerable people in our communities.

“Without us there would be an enormous gap. The folk that come here - a large amount of them would be back in hospital.”

(Rosie, Art Angel Organiser)

For more information on Art Angel:
artangeldundee.org.uk/index.html

Conclusion

In exploring the landscape of community creative participation in Dundee, it was found that there are several groups with a passion for providing accessible and inclusive creative activities. While this report has focused on Dundee, it is hoped that the findings of this report may be a case study for considering accessibility and inclusion on a larger geographical scale.

The use of creativity and community participation has been shown to have several benefits for disabled people and people with mental health barriers. This is seen both in improving the lives of individuals and for improving society and communities. This has been particularly relevant during the cost of living crisis and in the aftermath of Covid-19, in which people's financial, physical, and mental wellbeing has been dramatically affected. Even more so for disabled people and people with additional support needs.

With more creative community groups being able to offer accessibility and inclusion in their spaces and activities, the resulting benefits create more cohesive communities and places in which barriers to creativity, learning, and enjoyment are diminished. It is hoped that the benefits highlighted in this report will demonstrate the value of such groups and enhance their recognition.

More recognition from funding bodies, and local and national governments, could limit some of the challenges that groups face in providing their activities and offering accessibility. The barriers facing groups are numerous and range from physical barriers, such as lack of knowledge, skills, physically accessible spaces, and inaccessible transport links. But there are also broader challenges which affect many groups across Britain, such as increased costs, funding difficulties, and cuts to local services. Without addressing these challenges, groups are concerned about their longevity, let alone their levels of accessibility.

However, from the groups spoken to in Dundee, it appears they all reflect a level of resilience. Each of them utilises approaches that allow them to continue functioning in the face of such challenges and open their activities in an accessible and inclusive way. But each group mentioned that, in the right conditions, they could do more. With some assistance, such groups could enhance and continue their levels of accessibility and inclusion. With a strong landscape of creativity and community in Dundee, there is potential for collaborations to promote self-sustainability but also collectively campaign for assistance and recognition.

With more groups incorporating accessibility into their thinking and activities, the landscape of creative and community participation in Dundee, or any location, can become more diverse, inclusive, and enjoyable.



Recommendations

From the testimonies of groups in Dundee, this report recommends that inclusivity and accessibility can be supported and enhanced in the following ways:

1. Networks and collaborations between creative community groups should be encouraged and facilitated by established community groups, relevant organisations and local authorities. This will promote the sharing of knowledge, spaces, and activities.
2. Creative community groups should be signposted by relevant organisations and local councils to resources for funding guidance. Groups should also seek additional methods of funding such as crowdfunding, donations, fundraising, and selling creative outputs.
3. Networks of creative community groups should work together and be supported by relevant organisations to lobby local authorities to address issues of accessibility in their communities. This includes features such as public transport services.
4. Collaborations between diverse creative community groups should be encouraged to host creative festivals and events that challenge misconceptions about disability, mental health barriers, additional support needs, and art.
5. Relevant organisations should celebrate the creative community groups that are filling gaps in local services and lobby national and local governments to afford greater recognition for their efforts.
6. Creative community groups should be signposted to relevant organisations and resources for consultancy, training and guidance on improving accessibility. Relevant organisations that can help mediate accessibility issues and planning issues should also be provided.

7. Groups should ensure that their promotions and advertisements are produced in an accessible format and are honest about accessibility issues.

8. Groups should ensure they are welcoming, open and friendly, and that they listen to lived experiences. Accessibility and inclusion should be incorporated into the group's thinking and be frequently reviewed.



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