

Enhancing health, wellbeing and quality of life for all? A reflection on the role of artistic practices in society by Cindy Brooks



Recognition of the role of artistic and creative practices in enhancing health, wellbeing and quality of life is gaining increasing significance as evident through a number of reports, research and news articles, initiatives and events (1-10).

From the use of art and music to improve healing in the hospital ([Arts in Hospital](#); [Paintings in Hospitals](#)) to the promotion of art and creativity through community based organisations, resources and initiatives ([Arts and Health South West](#); [Arts in Health Forum](#); [Connections Project - Culliford House](#); [City Arts, Clift et al. 2012](#)) artistic and creative practices fulfil a valuable role in promoting health, wellbeing and quality of life.

For example, in their evaluation of the “Good Times: Art for Older People at Dulwich Picture Gallery”, a programme involving a diverse array of artistic and creative activities e.g. creative gallery workshops, outreach workshops and intergenerational workshops, designed to enhance the lives of older people, the [Oxford Institute of Ageing Report](#) presents a number of benefits for programme participants. Amongst these include the alleviation of social isolation by enabling people to establish social networks, but also in terms of transforming how those participating in the programme perceived themselves.

Making works of art provided people with tangible examples of their own accomplishments, positively shaping their self-identity as a creative person and improving their self-worth. The creation of artistic works was also identified as creating a "ripple effect" (p3) shaping staff and coordinators, family and friends perceptions of the person contributing towards challenging wider societal perceptions and representations of ageing. The transformative effect of artistic practices to challenge and improve societal understanding, perception and representations has been recognised

in other areas including e.g. ageing and/or dementia [equal arts](#), [Created Out of Mind](#); or disability [Healthy Living](#).

Yet the transformative potential of the arts and creative practice to enhance health, wellbeing and quality of life is dependent upon their availability and accessibility (e.g. appropriate public transport being available) as well as support and assistance for those who may have difficulty participating otherwise ([Age UK Index of Wellbeing in Later Life, p10](#)).

Another key ingredient shaping the success of artistic initiatives is how they engage and involve individuals and communities to address specific needs and preferences ([Be Creative Be Well, p13; Oxford Institute of Ageing Report](#)), recognising how the interplay of [intersectional factors](#) such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and religion can affect participation and engagement. For example, [Arts Sisterhood UK](#), a community organisation, is founded upon an intersectional ethos to provide affordable art classes to marginalised societal members, with the aim of improving their personal development, health and providing valuable opportunities to meet others and gain support ([Haynes, 2017](#)). Improving availability and access to artistic and creative practices and understanding how these practices can be shaped to individual needs and preferences and the communities in which they are formed and developed, can only help to consolidate their benefit and value to all.



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