



SOCIAL INNOVATION FOR ACTIVE INCLUSION

BIRMINGHAM – ARTS CHAMPIONS: A NEW INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ARTS OUTREACH



Arts Champions is a groundbreaking arts initiative in which Birmingham's world class arts organisations work in an integrated way, in partnership with the city council, to address particular issues of social isolation and exclusion among specific groups of people.

In Birmingham, as elsewhere in Europe, people living in disadvantaged areas are often at high risk of social isolation. In 2001, when Birmingham City Council was looking at ways to improve citizens' quality of life in the 21st century, a key conclusion was that the top arts organisations in the city could act as a catalyst for the development of active, engaged and connected communities.

Using the arts to improve social cohesion is not a new idea, and many of Birmingham's major arts organisations were already running their own outreach programmes. However, these were not designed to be integrated with each other, and many people still felt excluded from the arts, and disconnected from the perceived wealth and success of the city's cultural centre.

Since then, it has been recognised that a more co-ordinated approach would be more effective. So, as part of Birmingham's *Culture on Your Doorstep* programme, the Arts Champions scheme was started in 2004. In this exciting integrated outreach scheme, top quality Arts Champions encourage specific groups of people, aged 16 and over, to participate in arts activities, by becoming creators, leaders, participants and audience members.

The Arts Champions include Birmingham Royal Ballet, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Repertory Theatre and the city's South Asian arts organisation Sampad.

The council works closely with the Arts Champions, to ensure that the scheme reaches into all ten parliamentary constituencies in the city, particularly into deprived neighbourhoods. Council officers in each constituency identify the key problems, objectives and target groups for the outreach work, while the Arts Champions determine the arts activities they wish to use.

Cities for Active Inclusion is a dynamic network of nine European cities – Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Krakow, Lille Métropole - Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm – each with a local authority observatory (LAO) within its administration. Their aim is to share information, promote mutual learning and carry out research on the implementation of active inclusion strategies at the local level.

The observatories are co-ordinated by EURO CITIES, the network of major cities in Europe, and supported by a partnership between the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) and EURO CITIES.



Cities for Active Inclusion

Innovation

The Arts Champions scheme includes a number of innovative aspects:

- it brings all the key arts organisations together in a single coordinated initiative, to engage with residents in all parts of the city;
- specialist arts practitioners work with council officers who understand the barriers preventing specific members of the community from engaging with the arts; outreach programmes can therefore be tailor-made to meet local needs.
- the scheme offers people the chance to work with nationally and internationally renowned artists, and to experience top quality artistic events and performances in the city centre: this helps them to overcome their feelings of exclusion and feel more connected to the city's cultural centre;
- by allocating different Arts Champions to different constituencies every three years, citizens who have previously felt excluded can experience a variety of arts and culture.

Success

The Arts Champions scheme has already succeeded in helping large numbers of people become more active in their local communities. Between 2005 and 2010, the scheme involved over 33,000 individuals: as participants, audience members and artists.

The following are some specific examples:

- Ikon Art Gallery worked with people in the Erdington constituency on a variety of contemporary visual arts projects: with encouragement from internationally acclaimed artists, local residents created and exhibited their own work and also set up a local arts workshop in an empty retail store, which is now a focus for wider social and multi-generational interaction in the local community;
- Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Ex Cathedra choral group are among the wide range of Arts Champions that have helped people build relationships with other people in different age groups;
- Birmingham Repertory Theatre has successfully establish a youth theatre in the Northfield constituency: local people have participated in researching and developing the theatre's community productions, which has helped rekindle a sense of identity and self-worth in an area suffering from the collapse of its car manufacturing industry.

Dissemination and sustainability

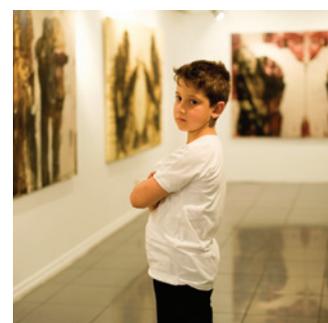
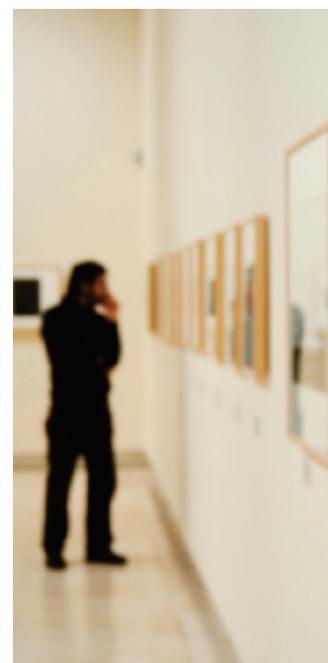
The Arts Champions model has been shared with other local authorities in the UK and Europe, as there is potential for a similar approach to be taken in other cities.

The latest three-year Arts Champions partnerships started in April 2011. The scheme allows for a one year legacy planning in existing constituencies and adequate handover time in the next constituency, to help maximise outputs and ensure sustainability.

The Arts Champions scheme is currently funded by the local constituencies and by the Arts Champions organisations. If further cuts are made to the city's budgets, funding may change. But there is a commitment from all involved to maintain the programme long-term, in order to increase participation and social cohesion.

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For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>.



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