



VOLUNTARY ARTS

Case Study

Spirit of 2012

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Resources for Change

inFocus



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This evaluation is of the Spirit of 2012 funded project delivered by Voluntary Arts across the UK and Republic of Ireland (ROI) between 2014 and 2016. The organization received £999,839 in early 2014 to deliver activities across five strands:






-  Extending the reach and raising the profile of Voluntary Arts Week
-  Developing the Epic Awards – an annual awards ceremony
-  Supporting community arts initiatives that are professionally-led to become self-sustaining
-  Offering training opportunities that help to remove barriers to volunteering in the arts
-  Establishing partnerships between local voluntary arts group and local volunteering infrastructure, so that local groups are better placed to attract new and diverse volunteer talent.

Context

Voluntary Arts is located in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the ROI. Its structure is not traditional, in that there is no defined HQ, and staff with management responsibilities for UK wide activities are located across the country offices. It currently has 17 staff, seven of whom are funded to work part-time on the Spirit programme, which also funds ongoing management costs for the project.

Mechanism






Staff provide support across the five strands to community groups seeking to develop creative activity. They do this through:

-  One to one intensive support from a development Officer, usually short term, with a view to enabling the group to become self-sustaining
-  Arms-length support, backed up by briefing papers and other documents
-  Devising and delivering training to participants and those working in the arts
-  Supporting networking and building partnerships at local and national level
-  Small sums of financial support for one off events and items.

Some groups will avail themselves of all the support, others will access one type only, and groups may dip in and out of support, returning as they need to develop, or face challenges.

Outcomes

Voluntary Arts is targeting the following outcomes from the Spirit Outcomes Pathway

-  Improving Wellbeing
-  Challenging Perceptions of Disability
-  Engaging Volunteers
-  Building Partnerships
-  Social Connectedness

Qualitative evidence demonstrates how these outcomes are met, with written and spoken evidence from staff and participants in the project. Many people derive significant benefit from their

participation in Voluntary Arts projects, groups are enabled to recruit and keep additional volunteers, disabled people are included, and a number of new partnerships, some at national, some at local levels have been established.

Conclusion

Voluntary Arts has used the Spirit funding to develop existing services and develop new activity, especially new partnerships with organisations at a national level. Particularly impressive is the increase in numbers participating in Voluntary Arts week, and the Epic awards; and the quality of the activity and transformative nature of the participation for some individuals is exceptional, as evidenced by their own testimony. Strong partnerships have been established, such as with the BBC Get Creative initiative, and between groups participating at grass roots level, enabling learning and ongoing sustainability. The challenge for Voluntary Arts will be sustaining this work when the project funding runs out in 2017.

Recommendations






Voluntary Arts should improve its monitoring and evaluation, especially with a view to measuring the use, and usefulness of its free to use publications, such as the Putting Down Roots Toolkit. It should also consider the current mechanism of offering three separate websites for each of its main activities, as this can be confusing and also loses the key link between Voluntary Arts and one of its principal activities, the Epic Awards.

1. Introduction

Spirit of 2012 (Spirit) is a charitable trust endowed with £47 million from the Big Lottery Fund that aims to use national and local events across the UK as catalysts for social change. With a focus on engaging young people, Spirit encourages participation in sport, art and cultural activities and builds on the positive impact of the London 2012 Paralympic Games to challenge negative perceptions of disability and promote social action.

This case study is part of Spirit's External Evaluation and aims to identify main outcomes and impacts achieved by the Spirit-funded projects between the years of 2014 and 2017, and where it is possible, to determine a grantee's individual contribution towards those goals. It also aims to identify lessons and draw recommendations for Spirit and other grantees on how to improve implementation to increase impact.

This is an evaluation of the activity undertaken by Voluntary Arts funded by Spirit of 2012 between the period 2014 and 2016. Voluntary Arts received funding of £999,839 from Spirit in 2014, and the project has the following five strands:

-  Extending the reach and raising the profile of Voluntary Arts Week – an annual celebration of cultural activity, shining a national spotlight on the wide range of groups that make up the UK's voluntary arts sector
-  Expanding the number of entries, range of categories and support package offered to winners of the Epic Awards – an annual awards ceremony to showcase the achievements of voluntary groups and gather best practice
-  Supporting community arts initiatives that are professionally-led to become self-sustaining
-  Offering training opportunities that help to remove barriers to volunteering in the arts, and that provide existing volunteers with the skills to effectively pass on their arts knowledge
-  Establishing partnerships between local voluntary arts group and local volunteering infrastructure, so that local groups are better placed to attract new and diverse volunteer talent.

1.1 Evaluation Design and Methods

The case study methodology is founded in an evidence-based approach known as 'Context, Mechanisms, Outcomes' (CMO)¹. The approach consists of identifying the context in which an intervention operates, the mechanisms (or different activities) used to implement the intervention and how that configuration (context and mechanisms) worked to contribute to the outcomes. The aim of this case study is to provide a qualitative description of the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes demonstrated by Voluntary Arts, a grantee of Spirit, with a particular focus on Wales. The CMO configuration for Voluntary Arts is illustrated in Figure 1.

¹ See Pawson and Tilley (2004) accessed from: http://www.communitymatters.com.au/RE_chapter.pdf



Figure 1: Voluntary Arts, Context, Mechanism, Outcome Configuration

The evaluation is designed to assess how the project is performing against the agreed outcomes in the Spirit Outcomes Pathway. For Voluntary Arts, these include:

- Improving Wellbeing
- Challenging Perceptions of Disability
- Engaging Volunteers
- Building Partnerships
- Social Connectedness

Evidence showed that the project also meets other Spirit outcomes, in particular, both the Epic Awards and the Voluntary Arts week are examples of Inspiring Events, however the inspirational nature of these events was noted but not evaluated.

The evaluation included:

- A data review, both of material provided directly to Spirit in the form of regular reports and also internal reports produced by Voluntary Arts
- A review of relevant literature
- A review of feedback from participants in Voluntary Arts week and the Epic Awards, on formal feedback sheets, blogs, in twitter feeds and vlogs
- Interviews with Voluntary Arts staff
- A visit to an event in Voluntary Arts week, and interviews with participants

The evaluation has a focus on Wales, so the interviews focused on staff, and activities in Wales, but evidence from across the UK was reviewed in terms of reports and feedback.

2. Context

2.1 Background to the Organisation

Voluntary Arts (legal title Voluntary Arts Network) is set up to support the estimated 60,000 plus voluntary arts groups operating across the UK and ROI. For the organisation, the term arts encompasses a wide range of arts and cultural activity including crafts.

The organisation describes itself as follows:

“Voluntary Arts was created in 1991, by Carnegie UK Trust, in response to a need identified by government and the voluntary arts sector, to provide a universal voice for the voluntary arts across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Today Voluntary Arts has 17 staff and more than 60 volunteers working across 5 nations. We provide information and advice services, undertake lobbying and advocacy work and deliver, and support the delivery of, projects to develop participation in creative cultural activities. Voluntary Arts receives funding from all four UK arts councils. We have offices in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Derry, with flexible working across England.

Our support is particularly focused on those creative citizens who - beyond their own participation and beyond any remuneration - give their time to make such activity more available within their communities (of locality and interest) and to improve the quality and range of those opportunities and activities.”






- Voluntary Arts Manager

A total of seven part-time staff are funded through the Spirit grant, which also funds some management costs to support the work. Many of the staff who are employed through this funding are also funded to work on other Voluntary Arts projects which means the Spirit work is embedded within the work of the organisation, as opposed to operating as a stand-alone project.

3. Mechanism

Voluntary Arts uses a combination of approaches to meet the five strands identified within the Spirit funding, and examples of their approaches can be found in the headings below. Groups may receive all or only one of these types of support over the period of their contact with Voluntary Arts, and they may dip in and out of support, returning for support if they begin a new activity or face challenges.

Voluntary Arts supports arts activities at grass roots levels in a number of ways. It offers direct support to groups, in the main through development officers located across the UK. This direct support might include any, or a combination of the following:

-  Assistance with building capacity, for example by suggesting appropriate governance structures, advising on insurance, etc
-  Small scale financial assistance, in the form of a simple grants scheme to which groups are encouraged to apply. This might provide publicity materials, event costs, etc
-  Links to professional artists/craftspeople who can support a project
-  Links and networking with other similar groups across the UK
-  Encouragement and support to participate in both Volunteer Week and the Epic Awards.

The staff typically offer support to groups in their region but also take a lead in one or more of the initiatives on a national level, so, for example, a development officer in the North West of England may be supporting groups in that region, but will also take a key role in delivering the Epic awards, which this year were based in Cardiff. This flexible structure and way of working enables the organisation to share learning effectively across the UK, build the considerable skills and knowledge of its staff, have a better “offer” to groups because of this breadth of knowledge and ensure that the support is available to groups developing any type of arts activity in any location. However, this structure may appear confusing at first glance, and might be an issue, for example, for funders more used to a more traditional operational structure, with one head office, where senior staff are located and satellite offices where regional staff working at a local level reside.

3.1 Individual support to groups

The most typical mechanism for this is direct support from one of the Voluntary Arts Development Officers. This will usually involve a meeting or at least telephone contact, at which the Development Officer will undertake an informal assessment of the groups needs and capacity and tailor an agreed individual package of needs to meet their needs. It may also involve encouragement to participate in Voluntary Arts week, and, where appropriate the Epic Awards; and may also include financial support from a small grants scheme.

Cor Caia was a community choir developed on a large housing estate in Wrexham as part of Welsh National Opera's outreach support to communities. When the support from WNO came to an end, some members of the choir approached Voluntary Arts for support. A new nucleus choir emerged, with a focus on allowing members of all ages to participate in learning and performing in an enjoyable, accessible and local setting. The Development Officer supported the group with a basic structure (they did not want to become a charity or incorporated), advice and information. The choir has continued to meet regularly, participated in Voluntary Arts week, has changed its name to All Aloud, moved its rehearsals to a new affordable venue, and appears to be sustainable. The focus of the choir is about participation, inclusion, learning and confidence building, and the choir has participated in the International eisteddfod at Llangollen which gave the members experience of other cultures and performing on a larger stage. In 2016 the choir received a small grant for publicity materials, to promote its activities and rehearsals.



All Aloud Community Choir performing in Voluntary Arts week 2016

3.2 Providing groups with arms-length support

Voluntary Arts supports groups at arm's length in a number of ways:

- by providing information that groups and individuals can find for themselves on their website,
- by training and providing one off support to those who work in supporting grass roots activity (this may include Community Development staff and also staff employed in specialist fields such as mental health who wish to undertake arts activity)
- through one off advice e.g. via a quick phone call with details of creative professionals who can help a group.

A group of people who had been inpatients at a mental health facility continued to receive support from a voluntary sector group specializing in mental health issues. The group discovered the therapeutic benefit of working on crafts, especially with textiles, and went on, with support from Voluntary Arts, to participate in Voluntary Arts week with an open session, led by a professional textile artist in a town centre setting, where members of the public joined in the session. Members of the public were not aware this had stemmed from a group with mental ill-health, which assisted members of the group with their continued integration and well-being. Because this group is supported by a specialist mental health charity, the Voluntary Arts support is of a specialist arts nature, suggesting textile artists, advising on funding for workshops and materials etc.

3.3 Developing networking and joint working opportunities

The Epic Awards provides an opportunity for members of participating groups not only to compete and be recognized for their achievements, but also to meet one another, share experiences and build ongoing relationships. Not all the groups who enter are exclusively arts / crafts groups, many are community or interest groups who are carrying out a creative arts activity. This can itself involve multi -agency working and networking as in the winners of the 2016 award, Men's Sheds Cymru.

In 2015, Age UK (Wales) supported Men's Sheds Cymru with a project called Pimp my Uke. This project provided kit for men to build a ukulele, decorate it and tuition to learn to play it, and groups across Wales participated. Following an event in the spring of 2016, hosted by Age UK, the project was entered for the Epic Awards where it won the overall award for the best project. Participating in the awards has led to increased networking for the Men's Sheds group, an opportunity for Age UK to demonstrate their commitment to the arts as a vehicle for older people and a spur to develop the project further. The groups now plan to perform at Wales' premier arts event, the National Eisteddfod and have produced a You Tube video, both showing them playing, and sharing their experiences.



Men's Sheds Cymru, winners at the Epic Awards 2016

3.4 Providing training and support materials

The Spirit funding has allowed Voluntary Arts to build on existing work and develop new training courses and materials. The organisation offers a wide range of training courses for voluntary groups and professionals in the field, 33 courses are on offer in the next six months, across England. The Spirit funding developed training that helps groups consider the barriers to inclusive working, and which prevent people from participating in their activity. Because this is about long term attitudinal change, it is not possible to measure its effectiveness, but feedback from the training shows it has been effective in making people consider their own approaches, and understand the barriers facing different groups of people, and anecdotal feedback shows that some groups have made changes to their practice as a result.

There is also a wide range of support materials available via the website, and easily accessed through a helpful wordcloud, that can assist with queries ranging from meeting statutory requirements under Equalities legislation through to insurance, and starting a new group. These are useful for both groups and those supporting arts activity in the community

"I really value the Briefings - it's very useful to find all the background to specific topics. Just today I forwarded the link for your insurance Briefing to a group running their first festival."
- Arts Development Officer Borough Council

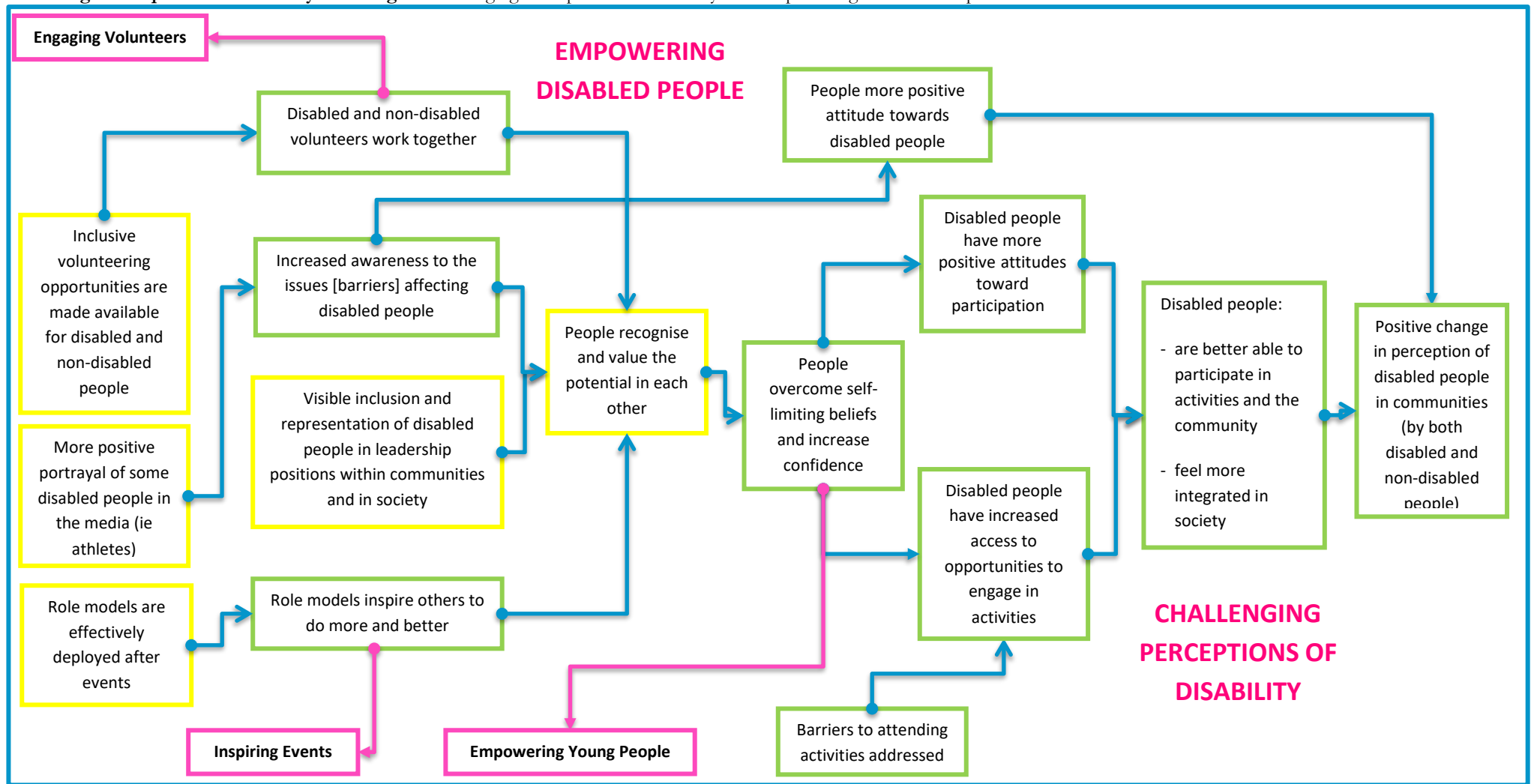
The Putting Down Roots toolkit has been developed with Spirit and Arts Council of Wales funding especially for groups who have begun an activity and want to take it further or, more typically, for those who have been engaged in an activity for which the support and / or funding is time limited and about to cease. It is an easily accessible toolkit, offering exercises, advice and signposting to further avenues of support. It is accessed as free to download from the Voluntary Arts website, but because it is open access, Voluntary Arts would need to commission research to evaluate its use and effectiveness.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Disability

The diagram shows the Spirit outcomes relating to this heading, boxes highlighted show outcomes which were evidenced during the evaluation. This does not mean the other outcomes were not met, merely that they were not evidenced.

Figure 1: Spirit of 2012 Theory of Change – Challenging Perceptions on Disability and Empowering Disabled People



Mainstreaming disabled people is core to all Voluntary Arts activities. This can be a challenge as groups who wish to participate, for example in Voluntary Arts week, may not have a high level of awareness of the barriers facing disabled people. Staff stated that supporting groups to consider, in particular, any hidden barriers they might be placing was a key part of contact with groups. One staff member stated:

“I know of a dance group which has people from very diverse backgrounds, so at a simple level, there is shared understanding of some of the barriers people face and people become more inclusive in their approach”

In addition, the training run by Voluntary Arts in challenging attitudes and learning about barriers to inclusion supports groups and those working with groups to consider and remove those barriers. The organisation offers a number of briefing papers such as Events checklist, Disability and Access, and Making your Performance accessible to people with Hearing and Sight loss; and these offer practical advice and assistance whilst reinforcing the message of mainstreaming.

Many disabled people reported the difference Voluntary Arts activities had made to them:

“My son has dyspraxia and often struggles with craft projects due to limited fine motor skills meaning he is frustrated that he cannot complete the task to the level he wants to. The simple flowers made at the Framework knitters museum gave him a sense of accomplishment. Thank you”

and also

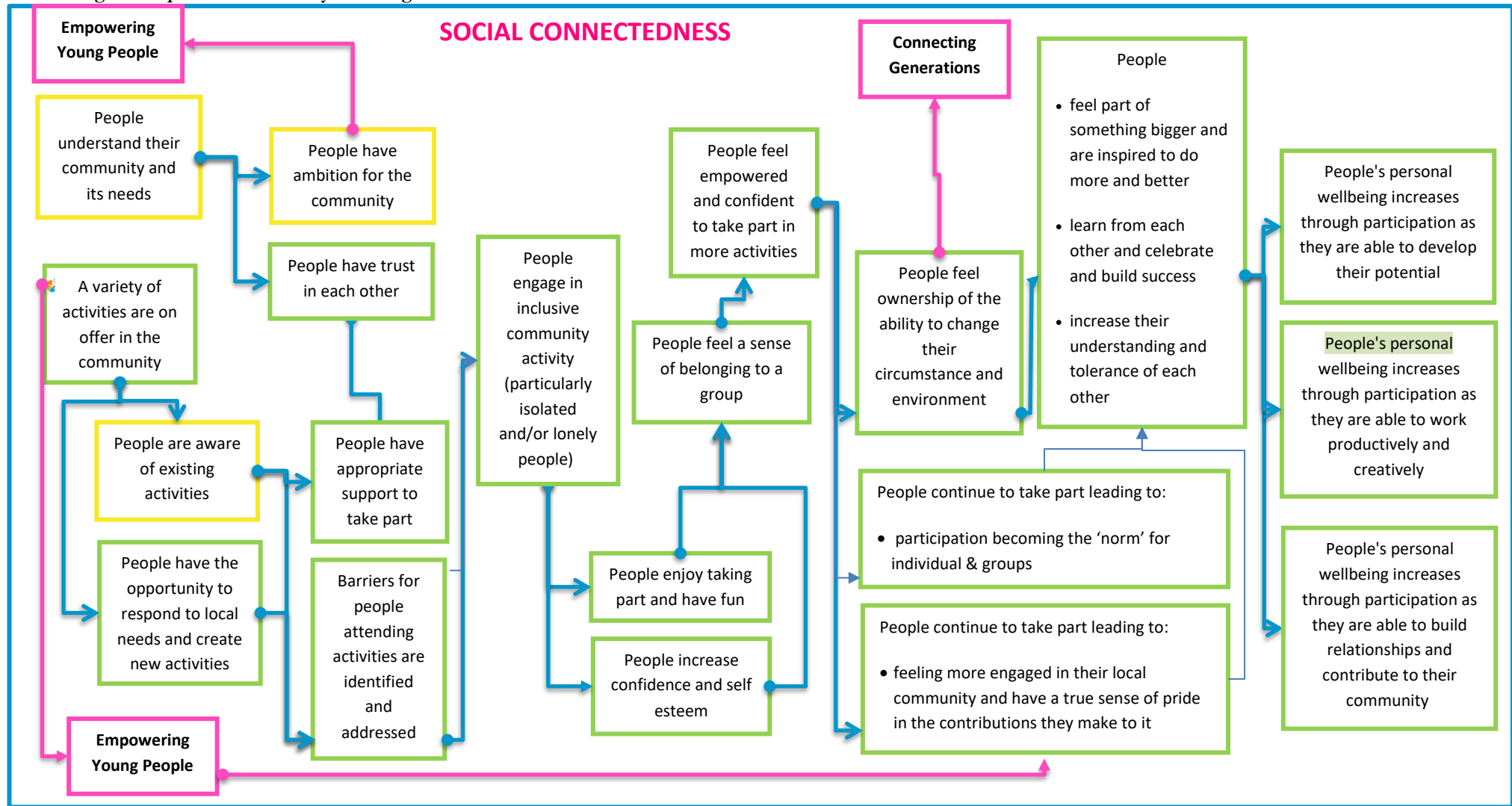
“I am housebound due to a severe chronic illness and am very limited in what I can do and rely on others for care. It's hard to feel part of a community when housebound but participating in the Woollen Woods helps me feel like I'm part of something. I won't be able to get to Talkin Tarn but my parents will go and photograph the exhibits and I'll enjoy looking at them.”

- Participants in different projects within the Woollen Woods project

4.2 Social Connectedness

The diagram shows the Spirit outcomes relating to this heading, boxes highlighted show outcomes which were evidenced during the evaluation. This does not mean the other outcomes were not met, merely that they were not evidenced.

Figure 2: Spirit of 2012 Theory of Change – Social Connectedness



There is well documented² evidence, much of it relating to older people, that participating regularly in a group activity reduces isolation for individuals. This is true for many people of all ages participating in Voluntary Arts activities, and individuals spontaneously reported this many times.

“I didn’t know anyone when I moved here, and I wasn’t very well, but now I am much healthier and I know other people in the community through taking part.”

- Member of a Community Choir in Voluntary Arts week

“I like coming to the choir, otherwise I’d be sitting at home on my x-box and not talking to anyone.”

- Teenager, Community Choir




Many people also noted the benefit of taking part in an activity which involved working together towards a common goal, which could be performing together, working on a craft project, or working at the same time as other people on similar individual projects,

“Most of us are in our 60s or 70s, but our oldest member is 92. Every few weeks we tackle a particular project, and in between we bring along our own work, be it knitting, crochet, mat-making or patchwork - and some weeks we just sit and natter! The group is a great source of support to its members. It is somewhere they can come and spend a couple of hours amongst friends.”

- Chair of a craft group participating in Voluntary Arts week.

In addition to supporting activities within individual groups which aid social connectedness for participants on an individual level, Voluntary Arts connects both communities of interest and geography, and this is demonstrated explicitly by participants in the Epic Awards. Staff stated that their work in connecting community groups with specialists working in the field also led to ongoing connections between professional practitioners and community groups.

Three examples of typical connections, from the Epic Awards, are given below

-  [alter:nativity](#): ninety performers from four rural villages in Aberdeenshire (Birse, Ballogie, Finzean and Strachan) came together to stage a modern day nativity, and linked this to themes around refugees.
-  The “Unlock The Box” project was initiated by Movema as a way to reach out to young people in Liverpool affected by a number of issues including cultural integration, poor health or economic problems. Movema helped to bring young people from different locations and different backgrounds together to explore dance and cultures from around the world. Over 200 young people have taken part and performed at major events including Liverpool’s 1st Children’s Festival.
-  The Peace Walls Project began as a cross community craft project that was established between communities in Derry-Londonderry using arts and crafts as a way of breaking down barriers and helping to unite people from divided communities. Following an eight-week Winter Festival event in which facilitators taught members from both communities how to make things such as jam, bunting, decorations and cards, tremendous positive feedback

² Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review, AgeUK

convinced the group to stay together as the Crafty Corner. The primary goal of the project remains as engaging people from communities of different backgrounds and giving them shared experiences, including youth clubs and volunteer groups, and raising new leaders up in the group to do the same work in the future.

4.3 Improving Wellbeing

There is a great deal of evidence of how positive taking part in Voluntary Arts activities makes people feel, captured in feedback from events, in blogs and twitter feeds and in short vlogs. Every participant interviewed reported positive feelings, using words such happy, enjoy, love, great etc when asked to describe how they felt about the activity; and there was also some spontaneous reporting of reduction in the use of prescription drugs. Two people in the community choir specifically mentioned this, one a reduction in the use of anti-depressants, and the other in the reduction of the use of medication for high blood pressure.

Many also recognised the value of working together towards a common goal, and shared how it made them feel, and this comment was typical:

“when we start something new, we think we’ll never do it, but then when we do it’s great and we’re all really happy.”
- Child participant in the choir

Some people with significant health challenges reported positively:

“I’ve had a terrible three years, with depression and then I was diagnosed as bipolar so when this came along and I could use my skills it was brilliant”
- Epic Award participant, Men’s Sheds Cymru

And

“Every member felt that their communication had improved as a result of singing and indeed this was visible with a few members whose speaking had benefited from singing. Some comments were, ‘my voice has improved and the tone of my voice is improving’ and ‘my voice has got louder.’”
- Stroke Association referring to the Strike a Chord Choir

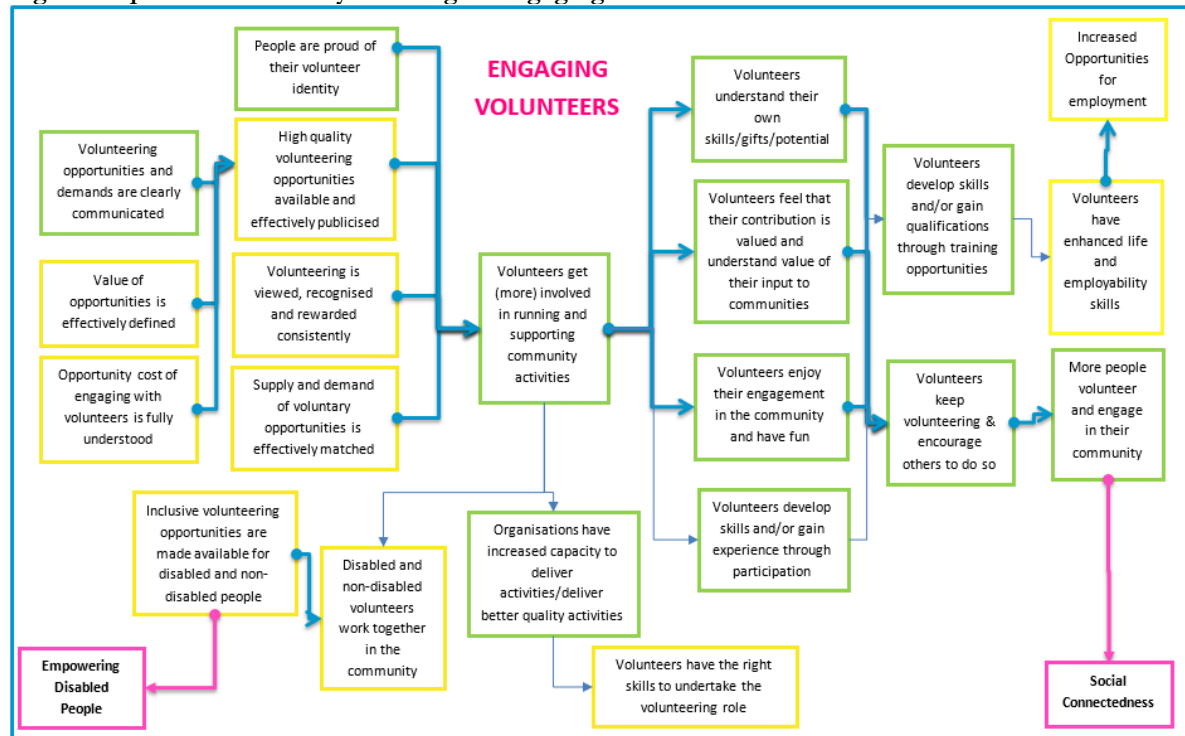
Staff also reported the difference participation had made

“one of the people that I was speaking to at one of the Wrexham events, which was a needle-felting workshop, it was a man who had experienced mental health problems, and he, just prior to the needle-felting workshop, he’d started taking part in painting, and he was moving into the needle-felting. And the reason he wanted to explore more was because he felt that it had completely turned his life around because he wasn’t being sociable prior to that. He’d had a lot of suicidal thoughts, and the fact that he actually did something that people liked and appreciated made him really re-think how much of a worthwhile person he was and that was one of the things he was saying to us all in the needle-felting workshop, very openly, was that it had changed his life.” - Development Manager about event in VAW 2016.

4.4 Engaging Volunteers

The diagram shows the Spirit outcomes relating to this heading, boxes highlighted show outcomes which were evidenced during the evaluation. This does not mean the other outcomes were not met, merely that they were not evidence

Figure 3: Spirit of 2012 Theory of Change - Engaging Volunteers



Voluntary Arts defines volunteers in a broad sense, for them it includes people who participate regularly and run groups, those who attend a group activity regularly, infrequent attendees, as well as those who participate only once, or are an audience for an activity. For them participation is key, and any level is welcome as their experience shows that one positive engagement will often lead to more sustained involvement. This means it is a challenge to count the numbers of volunteers accurately as no clear differentiation is made between the types of volunteers engaged in arts activities and / or receiving their support. Having said that, it is clear that the numbers participating are substantial, for example, in Voluntary Arts week in 2015 they recorded the following:

- 400 registered events across the UK and RoI (up from 200 in 2014)
- Over 50,000 people taking part
- 64% of participants had never tried that cultural activity before
- 68% of attendees planned to join a group or volunteer as a result of taking part

Participants reported overwhelmingly positively on their experiences, at whatever level they participate:

“The outcome of the event was more than expected as our clients achieved so much and have discovered a love for arts. We had more volunteers helping us throughout the week and echoed their enjoyment and willingness to do more arts with the clients.”

- Voluntary Arts week participant

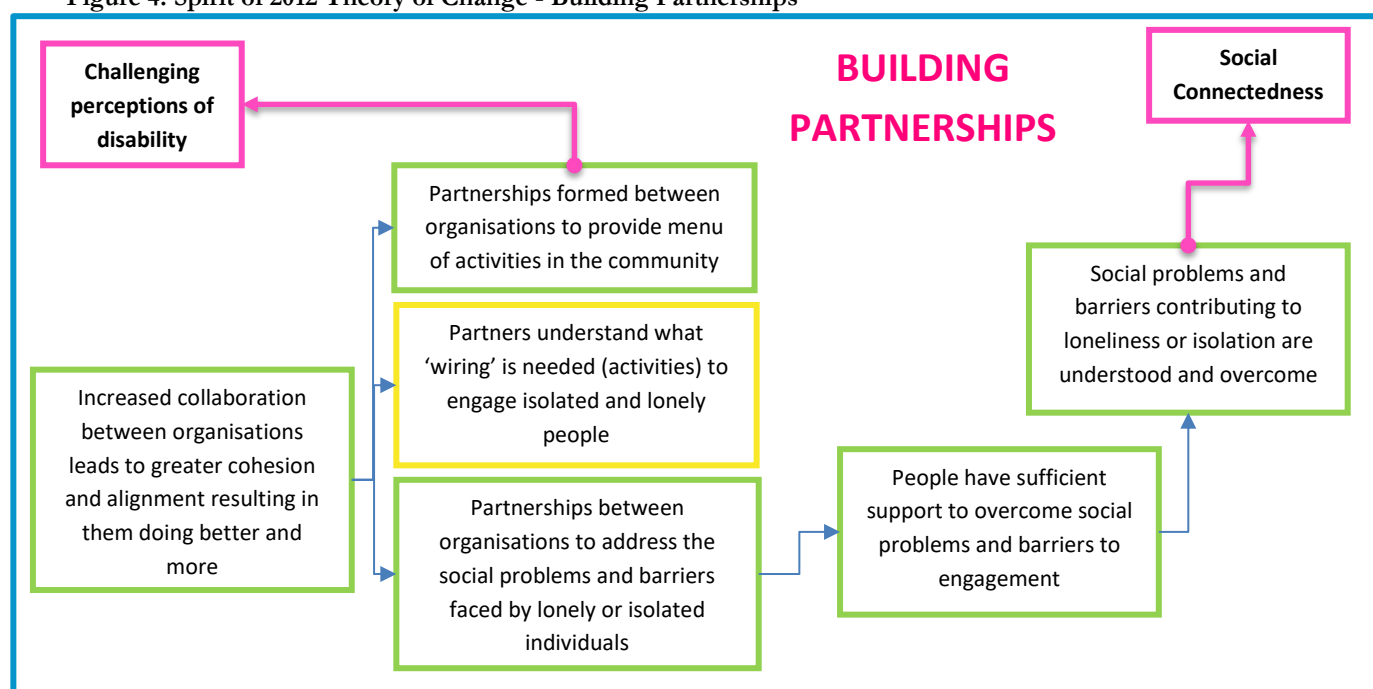
“It was wonderful to have several new volunteers who had not known of the group before my call for volunteers, all of whom really valued being part of it and want to continue helping out”
 - Knit Wild group

4.5 Building partnerships

Voluntary Arts is skilled at building partnerships itself, within its own organisation, to help it achieve its own ends, a key partnership being the Get Creative project with the BBC. However, it has a number of other partnerships e.g. with the National Union of Students (NUS) to support students seeking volunteering activities. This has supported students in volunteering in a range of community arts settings, whereas the previous NUS experience was that arts volunteering was in more formal settings, e.g. stewarding at large scale events etc. In Wales, it is working with Disability Wales to maximize participation in creative arts by people with disabilities.

The diagram shows the Spirit outcomes relating to this heading, boxes highlighted show outcomes which were evidenced during the evaluation. This does not mean the other outcomes were not met, merely that they were not evidenced.

Figure 4: Spirit of 2012 Theory of Change - Building Partnerships



However, it also supports groups at community level to network and to build partnerships to enable them to develop their skills, and become more sustainable. These may be partnerships of like-minded groups or partnerships between community groups and statutory or voluntary bodies who can offer them ongoing advice and support.

This is important for two reasons:

- Firstly, Voluntary Arts simply does not have the capacity to meet the needs of all the groups which might potentially call upon it for support.

- Secondly, by building partnerships, local groups are more likely to remain sustainable in their own right, accessing local support and returning to Voluntary Arts for specialist advice.

Voluntary Arts week offered the opportunity for informal partnerships:

“A lot of different community groups contributed items for the craftbomb. On the day lots of people came to see it and take part in craft activities to make more items. There was a lot of people passing who showed an interest and made positive comments. Everyone thought it was a great idea to get community groups involved and to brighten up an area in an unusual way.”

- Participant in Voluntary Arts week 2015

And for more formal, structured partnerships:

The Epic Awards in 2016 include examples of partnership working between non-arts groups and arts groups. For example, The Stroke Association collaborated with Head4Arts, a community arts organisation in South Wales who had achieved success with choirs for people with dementia, mental ill-health, and palliative care, to explore whether singing could help stroke survivors communicate more clearly and aid their recovery. Strike a Chord, the choir formed under this partnership went on to win the People’s Choice award in the 2016 Epic Awards.



Strike a Chord, Epic Awards winners 2016 in the People's Choice Category

5. Conclusion

Voluntary Arts has achieved significant development in the activities it supports with the Spirit grants. In Voluntary Arts week alone, the number of events rose from 200 to 400 between 2014 and 2015 (figures for 2016 are awaiting confirmation). Entries to the Epic Awards in 2016 were up significantly from the previous year, and internet traffic generated to support individual shortlisted groups demonstrates the increasing level of awareness about the awards.

Partnership working, especially with the BBC Get Creative project, has built the organisation's credibility, and this should continue into 2017 over the 12-month period of this initiative.

The level and reach of the engagement with community groups from both urban and rural environments across the UK is impressive, and staff report the reach is more extensive due to the Spirit project.

The high volume of numbers recorded as participating in their supported events, e.g. over 50,000 in Voluntary Arts week in 2015, given the number of staff employed in the organization is impressive, their published materials both written and on line are clear and easily accessible, although the reasoning for the separation of their principal activity into three websites (Voluntary Arts /Voluntary Arts week /Epic awards) is unclear, and means that potentially the Voluntary Arts "branding" can be lost within the latter two.




However, this high number of recorded participants also means it is difficult to capture demographic information about volunteers, and therefore, in seeking to find out whether the project meets the needs of disadvantaged people in particular, the evaluation has to rely on records of locations and names of groups to identify people at disadvantage. This may mean that the levels of work with people at disadvantage is not accurately captured, for example because the name of their group does not reflect the fact that it targets people at disadvantage. It is likely that there is significant under reporting of the number of participants who are disadvantaged because of this challenge. However, in order to capture accurately information about 50,000 participants it would require extensive collection and reporting on information, which many participating groups might not wish to provide, and which might be off-putting to them. The best option would be to take "snapshots" of information about participants from a number of locations, and extrapolate figures from that; however, it is not clear that the effort required to do this would reap any real benefit, either to the organization, or to participants.

The additional Epic Award, named Epic Place, but in reality targeted at areas of recognized deprivation goes some way to recognise both the need to celebrate in particular the achievements of people living in disadvantaged areas, but also to demonstrate publicly the lack of elitism in their activities, a criticism often aimed at mainstream arts.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the light of the fact that the Spirit funding is time limited, the organisation does not currently have the resource to meet all the demands made upon it at present and that success, as evidenced in the work to date, brings additional challenges.

There are no recommendations about the manner in which Voluntary Arts operates, or about the principal activities it undertakes, all of which appear effective, but focus on how it can learn whether other activity is effective, because not all the activities are monitored in a way that demonstrates the effectiveness of its approach. For example, the Putting Down Roots Toolkit is an excellent publication, but it isn't possible to tell how often it is used, by whom, and in what way. This means that should Voluntary Arts seek funding to develop this publication in the future, it is not possible to provide a funder with information about its usefulness. There is clearly a balance to be drawn in both encouraging people to participate at events whilst burdening them with onerous monitoring requirements; however, without some targeted monitoring it is not possible to ascertain key information, much of which should inform their development, and would be of interest to funders.

-  Voluntary Arts should seek to capture information about participants in its principal activities, and use this to prepare brief reports e.g. it asks for postcodes from participants, but then does not appear to analyse these to ascertain e.g. where there is no activity (in order to plan and target activity in the future) or whether it is working in areas of greatest disadvantage.
-  Some effort should be made to research the use and usefulness of the web based materials, in particular Putting Down Roots Toolkit, this could be done by making it accessible through a portal, which required an email address. Doing this would demonstrate numbers of users, and the email address would allow for a regular simple survey using something like SurveyMonkey to analyse the users. A snapshot of users could be sampled to learn more about how the tool kit was being used.
-  Consideration should be given to the three separate websites³, Epic Awards, Voluntary Arts week, and Voluntary Arts. The front page of the Epic Awards makes no mention of Voluntary Arts and it appears a marketing / promotional opportunity is being lost for the organisation. All three websites are of good quality, and it is easy to move between the three, but it is also easy to visit one in isolation, and where there is no apparent link to Voluntary Arts, then there is a missed opportunity, in terms of promotion.




³ www.voluntaryarts.org
www.epicawards.co.uk
www.voluntaryartsweek.org

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees and References

List of Interviewees

Role and Organisation	Name
Voluntary Arts Staff	Fiona Campbell
Voluntary Arts Staff	Janina Kuczys
Voluntary Arts Staff	Cassandra Barron
Voluntary Arts Staff	Gareth Coles
Voluntary Arts Staff	Gwenan Davies
All Aloud Community Choir, Wrexham	Sally, Paul, Glenn, Alec, Cerys, Harrison, Sue
Hafal Cymru staff, Wrexham	-

References

-  Quarterly and other evaluation reports compiled for Spirit by Voluntary Arts staff, for the period 2014 – 2016
-  Voluntary Arts internal evaluation reports
 - Voluntary Arts week project report 2011-2014
 - Project Report 2015
 - Voluntary Arts week Groups survey
 - Voluntary Arts Week Participants Survey
 - Woollen Woods results and stories
-  Loneliness and Isolation Review, Age UK
-  Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation

Websites

www.voluntaryarts.org
www.epicawards.co.uk
www.voluntaryartsweek.org
www.gwanwyn.org.uk
www.mensshedscymru.co.uk
www.agecymru.co.uk
www.stroke.org.uk/finding-support/strike-chord-choir-cwmbran

Video Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfOQr8PkADo>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eM_2-HHiIOo
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH4fry5SC3o&feature=youtu.be>