

10 CORE VALUES OF ARTS AND HOMELESSNESS PROJECTS

'Get Creative: arts for all', Homeless Link's arts and homelessness programme and Streetwise Opera have been working together since 2011 to deliver arts training in the homelessness sector in England. Through the Get Creative programme we have witnessed and supported a wealth of homeless arts projects that differ widely in their approach, delivery and content. At the same time we have identified a common thread of core values running throughout most projects. This document sets out to summarise these Core Values.

1. CLEAR AIMS AND EVALUATION
2. INVOLVING EVERYONE
3. THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN
4. CONGRATULATE AND HAVE FUN
5. BEING A CREATIVE PERSON
6. HIGH EXPECTATIONS
7. WHAT PEOPLE WANT, TESTIMONY AND TRYING SOMETHING NEW
8. CREATING A SAFE PLACE AND ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES
9. BUILDING A COMMUNITY
10. REGULARITY AND/OR A PLANNED ENDING

1. CLEAR AIMS AND EVALUATION

- Projects should be well thought through where everyone involved has a clear understanding of what the project is trying to achieve. For instance, is your aim to help participants develop professionally in the arts, personally in their lives or both?
- Evaluation helps you demonstrate that you have achieved your aims but also shows you where you've gone wrong. If you're honest about where things haven't gone well, you can review and make improvements. Evaluation should always involve listening to feedback from your participants.

2. INVOLVING EVERYONE

- Whether an arts project is led by participants themselves, a staff member or an outside artist, it is essential that the ideas and suggestions of the whole group are listened to. Everyone should be involved wherever possible in the planning, delivery and review of the activity. People can often have skills or interests they'd like to share, and if they believe that their ideas will be listened to, it is more likely that they will keep coming back.



- When an activity is led by an artist/staff member, it can still be possible to create freedom and creativity within a structure which allows the ideas and expression of the participants to flourish.
3. THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN
 - Setting up any barrier to attendance should be avoided unless it is for the safety of the group e.g. if someone is being violent or abusive.
 - Auditions can make people feel rejected and having strict attendance criteria is often unrealistic for people leading complex lives.
 4. CONGRATULATE AND HAVE FUN
 - It is well documented in well-being research that instilling positive thoughts and affirmation leads to longer-term positivity and well-being. This is particularly important for a group of people who often feel looked down upon and are rarely congratulated in their daily lives.
 - Whatever the activity, it should be fun (and ideally involve laughter!)
 5. BEING A CREATIVE PERSON
 - One of the great strengths of the arts in this context is that it can help change the way people regard themselves – helping to redefine their identity from a person with needs to a person with talents. All projects should enable participants to be creative whether that is through creating their own work or performing/working on existing material.
 6. HIGH EXPECTATIONS
 - Facing homelessness often results in facing low expectations – from others and from yourself. Immediate benefits can be seen in people’s self-esteem when they realise that a project has been set up with the expectation that they will do well. If you show that you believe in people, it will encourage them to believe in themselves.
 - It is vital that projects hit the right level of ambition and expectation – unrealistically high expectations can lead to disappointment or even stop people from taking part in the fear that they will fail. However having low ambitions for the project can prevent people from challenging themselves and achieving more than they thought or believed.
 - Don’t be afraid to start small or concentrate on one aim first, e.g. raising confidence or self-esteem. These often undervalued outcomes can be fundamental to people moving away from homelessness.
 - At the same time, don’t be afraid to aim high artistically – many arts projects in this field have a strong process, are inclusive and are also regarded as of mainstream artistic quality. This can lead to further participant benefit and can help change public perceptions about homelessness.
 7. WHAT PEOPLE WANT, TESTIMONY AND TRYING SOMETHING NEW
 - Methods used to decide on the content of arts projects can vary widely. There are three main approaches and some projects use all three:
 1. Asking participants what they want to do, and responding to existing interests and talents
 2. Offering a new experience that participants may not have previously known about or considered

3. Responding to participants' personal stories in an artistic context to help them face the challenges they are experiencing

- Each approach clearly has its merits: Asking participants what they want to do will give them the most immediate buy-in and ensure relevance; overcoming the challenge of trying something new can broaden horizons, demystify other new experiences, and give people the courage to try other new things or tackle other problems that they didn't think they could; testimony and issue-based work can directly address participants' needs and issues.
- Taster sessions can be a good way of introducing new activities.
- It is important to be clear about the type of project you are running. Clear communication will ensure that participants know whether they can leave their issues 'at the door' or whether the content will be informed by their personal stories.

8. CREATING A SAFE PLACE AND ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES

- Arts projects need to be in a safe place which could mean a variety of locations but where the members *feel* safe. This feeling of safety can be created in a variety of ways: using a familiar place; having someone present that participants know and trust; ensuring that participants are listened to; having a structured approach to the session; having an atmosphere of acceptance and respect where people know they won't be laughed at and inappropriate behaviour is dealt with; having high quality and well-trained leaders.
- Group agreements can be a good way of establishing a common understanding of behaviour and how the group as a whole is going to look after each other e.g. Streetwise Opera's, '*Attend and participate, respect each other, zero agro, stay clean and sober, have fun!*'
- Effective use of boundaries can often increase the feeling of safety. Many people who have faced homelessness have had relationships that have been damaging which can make social situations, making friends and interacting with strangers potentially confusing. Arts projects can further heighten emotion. Establishing boundaries between leaders/outside artists and participants can be empowering and reassuring for both groups.

9. BUILDING A COMMUNITY

- The chance for participants to meet each other and work together as a team is often one of the most valuable parts of a creative project, partly because homeless and ex-homeless people often feel isolated.
- It can be positive to build opportunities outside the project for participants to meet each other through trips and events.

10. REGULARITY OR A PLANNED ENDING

- Having a regular activity that participants can rely on can be incredibly important for people facing the challenges and uncertainty of homelessness or when people have been re-housed and become isolated in their new accommodation.
- Arts projects often culminate in a performance, event or exhibition and if the project finishes there, the sense of loss can be great, leaving people with nowhere to take their new-found self-belief. The best arts and homelessness

projects schedule events in the context of a regular programme – then you can build on the positivity of the event, support participants afterwards and help them progress e.g. personally, artistically or through progression routes such as volunteering, college courses, work placements etc.

- If projects must end, it is always best to do so with sufficient wind-down after the event/exhibition/performance, a solid exit strategy and by offering clear signposting to other similar activities.

Please visit www.homeless.org.uk/arts for further advice and resources

