FINAL REPORT

CREATIVE CAPACITY IN IRELAND

WORKING TOWARDS WELL-BEING

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents research on creativity and well-being in an Irish context. The research was funded by the *Creative Ireland* programme through the *Irish Research Council's New Foundations* scheme.

The research explores the conceptual base of creativity and well-being and particularly their point of intersection. It contains a discussion of how both creativity and well-being are conceptually fluid concepts, which have rich discursive traditions, can be interpreted in myriad ways and necessitate clear contextualisation.

The report contains details of a range of international studies and policy frameworks. These enable creativity and well-being practices in Ireland to be better located within global policy.

The research reports that there is a strong basis in creative work for well-being, both in terms of advancements in contemporary practice, imperatives in modern Irish society, but also a traditional function and perspective of creative practice in Ireland. A taxonomy of well-being in creative contexts is required, incorporating foundational, ameliorative and interventionist perspectives.

In discussing best practice in Ireland, the report considers four themes; intentionality and evaluation; sustainable creative communities; creativity as process and product; and participant and practitioner well-being. It also presents four vignettes of practice which showcase both the range and quality of creativity and well-being work extant in Ireland.

Successful work in creativity and well-being in the research is characterised in the report as being community-based, responsive, longitudinal, sustainable, and involving experienced practitioners.

Finally, the report returns a set of conclusions which contain specific recommendations on evaluation, process, intentionality, partnership, availability of data, further training, and practitioner well-being.

2. Introduction

The word creativity presupposes newness, uniqueness, originality. It implies a fresh take on the world; a bespoke way of seeing things. It suggests invention and ingenuity. Creativity has always been a broad conceptual aim of education, held as a general good and premised on the harnessing of the imagination and given expression to through an original act to realise a new product, perhaps a work of art or a scientific discovery. More recently creativity has conceptually softened and has achieved widespread purchase as a desirable educational and cultural goal. It is also perceived as something which is achievable and desirable as an 'everyday' act (Conner *et al.* 2018), as well being an event that is exceptional in nature. As a concept, it gives rise to diffuse understandings with myriad competing discourses ranging from creative industries (Collins *et al.* 2018), to creative democracy (Dewey 2021), to a creative education (Munday 2016), and creative futures (McWilliam *et al.* 2008).

It is argued that there is a global 'creative turn' (Harris 2014) evident in social life from business to medicine and within the arts and creativity, which parallels the 'social turn' in the arts (Bishop 2006). Such a creative turn is most clearly evidenced in Ireland through the establishment of *Creative Ireland* as an all-of government initiative to place creativity at the centre of public policy. Creativity has a rich and diverse research discourse as well as colloquial popularity as a term. Relatively little attention has been given to the concept of creativity in Ireland and it often takes the form of a catch-all phrase for acts of creative engagement, a desirable educational and outcome or a rights-based discourse seeking equity of cultural and artistic access, particularly for young people.

Well-being[1] was traditionally equated with the absence of problem behaviour and the presence of positive behaviours that reflect academic, interpersonal, athletic, and artistic success in childhood (Moore and Keyes 2003, p.2) and includes 'the domains of cognitive functioning, behavioural functioning, physical health, and mental health' in adulthood (p. 5).

[1] Well-being and wellbeing are used interchangeably throughout literature and discussions of the concept. It is not suggested that any great conceptual divide exists between the two terms. Well-being is used in this report as much to emphasise the active nature of being well as opposed to the more static idea of wellbeing.

In recent years well-being projects and research have turned more to the prevention of problem behaviours, but typically engaged with in a singular manner and in many instances, understood in singular outcomes, for example the prevention of drug abuse. A move away from this has occurred and something of 'a logical progression has occurred from an emphasis on treating problems, to preventing problems, to promoting positive development' (p. 8). As with creativity, well-being has gained widespread traction as a concept, particularly in the context of the unique stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact.

In many ways it is equally diffuse as a concept to creativity, with a range of colloquial understandings as to what it means to engage with well-being ranging from very passive upholding of community and 'everyday' well-being to very active modes of engagement with a perceived deficit of well-being. Susan Oman (2021) charts the historical emergence of the idea and suggests that well-being can be understood in both objective and subjective terms but that interpreting data in a way in which it can be used for policy and strategy development is a challenge, depending on what social policies are prevalent at that moment in time, but also what kinds of things are valued in well-being. Oman stresses that a naturalised belief that progress is about striving for well-being is engrained in society, but that it is not a fixed concept, shifting depending on who is using it, in what context. In order to best understand and engage well-being data, she argues that an understanding needs to be arrived at with regard to definitions, histories and context.

In Ireland there has been a noticeable increase in recent years in work that employs creativity for the purposes of well-being, some but not all of it funded by *Creative Ireland*. This research set out to explore concepts, projects and practice in that emergent space. It takes as a starting premise the assumption that creative activity and engagement is good for well-being and particularly for mental health. It understands well-being in a range of ways and the breadth of those operational definitions are explored throughout in this report. The project marries perspectives garnered from international research with reflections on Ireland to better understand what impact creative activity can have on well-being. This is in keeping with the global trend towards greater understanding in this area whereby there has been a significant increase in policy and research afforded to creativity (predominantly understood as the arts - a matter to be discussed later) and well-being (Fancourt and Finn 2019; Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2020; WHO 2021; UNESCO 2022).

This research report is particularly focussed on the challenges and expectations that surround work in the creativity and well-being space and seeks to draw them out and identify them. It celebrates best practice in this domain in Ireland and showcases aspects of what makes good projects work. Equally it illuminates what impedes best practice in order to recommend structural and policy changes to enable more valuable practice and a greater range of work to emerge in this area.

In order to focus and hone the research a number of orienting principles with regard to creativity and well-being were adopted early in the process. Foremost amongst these is the idea of creativity as a social phenomenon rather than something solely individualistic in nature. This is not to say that individual acts of creativity are not acknowledged but instead that the social dimensions of creativity are fully acknowledged and celebrated (Montuori and Purser 1997).

In order to avoid an endless conceptual journey into the idea of creativity, the research looks instead at the creative act, what drives it on the part of the provider and practitioner (intentionality), the intended outcome of such acts with regard to well-being (affect) and the actual outcomes of creative acts for well-being (effect). This usage resonates nicely with previous Irish research examining creative acts for social change in participation in the arts for young people (Keogh 2009).

Well-being is viewed as both a private and public concept; highly individual to each person but also something of relevance and importance to us collectively as a society. The report understands well-being as a holistic concept – intellectual, physical, spiritual, somatic, mental and emotional – though not to the exclusion of any other domains of human growth. Nor is this to suggest that creativity and well-being projects reach all these areas at once, but it does emphasise clearly that well-being is not simply a medical or psychological condition but one that impacts upon the totality of what it is to be human.

Both well-being and creativity are held here not as deficit concepts (problems to be solved) or areas requiring a quick fix, but instead as concepts which are engaged with as part of a process of accrual (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015) and as developments and expressions of a flourishing self (Benson 2000).

From the outset, the research sought to comprehensively engage with the international research literature concerning creative engagement and well-being, particularly given the deficit of scholarly discussion on the topic in Ireland. It seeks to look in particular at expectations and expressions of creativity in Ireland in order to understand the perceived positive links of creativity to well-being particularly with regarding to intentionality and affect/effect. In those projects, of particular interest is work which critically embraces the contestation and intersectionality of the discursive spaces of creativity and well-being, work which is restless and seeking of new modes of engagement. Finally, the projects seeks to identify and explore sites of best practice in an Ireland that offer creative engagement targeted towards well-being, including projects within the scope of the *Creative Ireland* umbrella including the *National Creativity Fund* but also beyond.

3. Creativity in Context

Creativity is diverse

Creativity for many is a concept that is intangible and amorphous, with an almost ethereal quality. For some it is a vital part of their daily expression of self. For others it is predominantly the preserve of artists and inventors. Creativity promises mess and deliberately plays in the margins and liminal spaces of the human experience in search of newness. The vagueness of creativity can simultaneously provoke both a sense of joy and one of intimidation as can its associated terms of creative acts, creative engagement and 'creatives'. The promise of creativity is in its possibility of a bespoke object, emotion, or idea, entirely unique to its creator. The problem with creativity can be in its inherent risk of placing oneself into a vulnerable position with a possibility of failure. Conceptually the challenge lies in its perceived vagueness, its inaccessibility, and its rhetoric.

Jefferson and Anderson (2017) suggest that it is an 'aerosol concept'; tangible in a container but diffuse once exposed to the air. There is lay confusion around creativity in its association and conflation with ideas of imagination, self-expression, independence, non-conformity – the claims and the rhetorics of creativity (Banaji 2011). There are multiple conceptual bases for the idea of creativity at the beginning of the 21st century (Montuori and Donnelly 2013); debates as to its history (Bocchi *et al.* 2014); standard definitions (Runco and Jaeger 2012) and limits (Craft 2003).

Some broad characteristics can be acribed without entering the definitional. Creativity is generally a unique and individualised affective process though it frequently takes place within a social or collective context. It is enabled by a prior cognitive process (imagination) and finds form through a tangible engagement with the material world, perhaps in artistic, craft, physical or environmental form. It results in something new, perhaps an emotion, insight, object or piece of art.

As noted in the introductory section, rather than working within the limits of a definition for creativity, it is more informative to look instead to the creative act, which both

gives creativity an active orientation but also firmly situates it within a context of creation. In describing the characteristics of the creative act, the tensions and imperatives of creativity outlined by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) give a useful sense of the active nature of creative engagement, suggesting that creativity can be found not by looking to fixed characteristics but instead by seeking out the liminal and ludic spaces across many continuums including between risk and safety, energy and rest, competition and enjoyment, play and discipline and interestingly in the context of this report, suffering and enjoyment.

The popularity of creativity

The increasing purchase of creativity can be traced to a series of popular, academic and policy events. Ken Robinson's best-selling book *Out of our Minds - Learning to be Creative* (Robinson 2001) was quickly followed by his TED talk, which quickly became one of the most viewed of all time (Robinson 2006). They seemed to capture something of a zeitgeist at a moment when societal change and the advent of the digital society were gaining momentum. Robinson's popular works were preceded by a raft of scholarly and educational publications, some discussed further below. The traditional ideas governing definitions of creativity which revolved around newness and uniqueness, value, demonstrable replicability and seriousness (versus 'whacky' or 'crazy' creativity) began to be unsettled. Montuori and Donnelly (2013) suggest that Edward De Bono's idea of lateral thinking did most in prompting this paradigm shift.

A significant raft of scholarly and policy developments began in the UK with the publication of the seminal *All Our Futures* report (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education 1999). Subsequent British reports from the The Warwick Commission (2015) and the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education (2019) examined the place of creativity in contemporary life and education respectively. They also initiated a trend whereby a range of governmental and international organisations begin to pay serious attention to creativity. A significant OCED report on fostering students' creativity and critical thinking in school (Vincent-Lancrin *et al.* 2019) is a marker of increasing international attention with a subsequent and major UNESCO report firmly establishing creativity as matter

of increasing global concern. It addresses culture as a global public good by reshaping policies for creativity (UNESCO 2022). Creativity is firmly front and centre as an important topic for policy conversation and that will continue in the coming years with creativity (creative thinking) now incorporated in such international measures as OECD sponsored PISA test (Programme for International Student Assessment).[2]

Creativity, the arts and culture

It is important in a conversation and report such as this to be clear about language. Creativity, the arts and culture are three distinct ideas and should not be conflated. Simply put, creativity is the affective process, the arts are the form of the creative process and product, and the culture is the prevailing social context within which that activity takes place. They are far from synonymous: the report mined from *Growing up in Ireland* (GUI) data on arts and cultural participation among children and young people (Smyth 2016) makes surprisingly little mention of creativity, for example.

In discussing creativity and well-being, a number of parallel discourses in both the arts and culture are of significance to the conversation. The value of the arts and culture are something which has been long debated and researched in society more broadly (Carey 2005; Crossick and Kaszynska 2013), as well as specifically within the educational system (Bamford 2006; Winner *et al.* 2013; Bamford 2017).

Amongst many reasons why the arts have been valued are because of their ability to generate a social impact (Belfiore and Bennett 2008) and to bring about positive individual change (De Botton and Armstrong 2013). Some of the touchstones debates in this work include the centrality of participation (Matarasso 2019), and the myriad contemporary challenges of socially oriented art work (Jackson 2011) and how it translates into affective (impactful) practice (Shaughnessy 2012). It is not all positive however, and significant concerns exist about the hidden costs of socially engaged arts labour for practitioners, and the moral failure of cultural policy (Belfiore 2021) to value and protect their labour and

[2] PISA 2022 Creative Thinking: https://www.oecd.org/pisa/innovation/creative-thinking/

endeavours. Miriam Haughton discusses the graft and craft of the affective economy of the Irish arts sector (Haughton 2021).

Alongside the complex challenge of worth sits the vexed question of evaluation. Belfiore and Bennett (2010) advocate for a move beyond what they describe as the "Toolkit Approach" in evaluating the impact of arts work in order to ensure that it has an impact upon cultural policy. A previous volume by the lead author of this report looks to challenges around understanding change in applied theatre projects. It contains a memorably titled chapter *No Bullshit* (Snyder Young 2018) which looks at rigour and evaluation of applied theatre projects. In many ways, that title in itself captures much of the challenges and excesses of the evaluative process.

The possibilities of creativity

There are many possibilities in creativity as something that further enables the enhancement of the human condition, specifically our ability to be well in the world. Much can be taken about creativity from other fields beyond the arts, culture and creativity in approaching working definitions of creativity and well-being.

In the world of business for example, significant attention has been given to creativity in organisational behaviour (Hunter *et al.* 2018) including aspects such as creative idea development, the meaningfulness of the work to those carrying it out, affect and extrinsic motivation – areas where one might assume the arts and humanities have more insight and purchase. The intriguing concept of a ‘wicked problem’ (Buchanan 1992) in design thinking theory consisting of design definition and design solution, holds some relevance for many who face equally challenging problems in cultural contexts. A comprehensive EU technical report examines creativity as a transversal (cross-cutting) skill for lifelong learning (Lucas and Venckutė 2020) and offers a weighty examination of relevant literature and concepts.

In the vast educational literature, there are many relevant touchstones. The concept of little c creativity locates the creative in a small act (Craft 2001), as opposed to the more traditional idea of ‘big bang’ creativity, and something which is developed upon in creative

activity as a path to flourishing (Conner *et al.* 2018). In an age of challenging global times, where ethics, communication and the nature of politics and democracy is changing before us, wisdom and trusteeship are good qualities related to creativity to draw upon here as well as they again speak to society more broadly (Craft 2006; Craft 2008). Inherent in the discussion of wisdom and trusteeship is the suggestion that increased interest in creativity has occurred without a strong values framework or cultural framework being in place, and that values derived from Western individualism and the globalised capitalist marketplace have slipped unnoticed and unquestioned into the frame. A return to strong social and communal values (trusteeship) can be enabled through creative good work. Within a changing and diversifying Ireland, and within the context of a global order radically changing and altering previously unquestionable truths, creativity and the arts have a small but vital part to play.

Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) seek to move beyond big and little creativity through offering the 4c module of creativity. It traces creative development from mini-c (personal creativity) to little-c (everyday creativity) to Pro-c (expert creativity) to Big-C (genius creativity). Jefferson and Anderson's version of the 4c model places creativity alongside critical reflection, communication and collaboration as tools for transformation (Jefferson and Anderson 2017). Work such as this is useful in moving beyond blanket usage of creativity, which by its very nature, flattens the broad and constantly evolving conceptual field.

Burnard (2007) offers provocations for future creativity research whilst the case for creativity theory and research and the development of a socio-cultural manifesto is laid out by Glaveanu *et al.* (2020). In terms of the positive efficacy and impact of creativity, some interesting quantitative and mixed-methods work is beginning to emerge, including work based in Australian schools (Ginns *et al.* 2021).

Enigmatic Creativity

Creativity as an idea has something of an altruistic and pleasant feel to it. It is generally perceived as being for the public good, something that is quite pure and un-commodified and indeed something that is accessible to all as we individually possess embryonic quantities and it awaits mining or discovery within us. Craft *et al.* (2001) suggest that this is as a result societal

(and particularly educational) change in the 80s and 90s which resulted in a shift from focussing on individual traits to a more profound interest in organisations, systems and cultures, resulting in a universalisation of creativity; moving it from the realm of the genius and gifted to the everyday and everyone.

A number of points need to be made regarding this shift in perception towards a universalism of creativity. From an ethical perspective, creativity is in an empty vessel waiting to be filled with some meaning. It does not follow that all creative work is good work, quite the contrary in fact, in that it can be argued that some of the most heinous human atrocities were in fact very creative. There is a distinct ethics of creativity (Moran *et al.* 2014). Whilst obviously on a different plane, the point must equally be made that not all creative acts, processes or engagement lead to well-being. In actual fact consideration needs to be given to the possibility that creative acts can potentially damage well-being.

Secondly, creativity has always existed as a human quality, and for a lot of that time it existed in a way in which it was meant for profit (Jones 2011). This is now seen in the connection that is assumed between creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Whilst decried by many who might prefer a purer form of creativity, creative engagement for capitalist and monetary gain is undoubtedly a legitimate expectation on the part of those who fund creative activity. This rationalist and capitalist approach is of course railed strongly against by others (Gingell 2001; Mould 2018).

In terms of accessibility, contemporary thinking is that creativity is a universal human possibility. This is a noble idea and one which most would staunchly defend. However, it also potentially acts to obscure the fact that not all people have equal access to those individuals, companies, places and processes which unleash creativity by harnessing and nourishing the imagination and offer possibilities for creative engagement. Whilst the possibility of creativity might be universal to all, the unequal means by which the world is constructed (socially, geographically, economically) means that the reality is that not everyone has access to the means whereby their creativity can be developed and celebrated.

Finally, a brief thought regarding the context in which we are discussing creativity. In the same way that Craft and her colleagues (2001) observed that a universalisation regarding

creativity had come about as a result of societal change, the observation has to be offered that perhaps we are now at a different point in social change. With the scale of the digital, political, health and climate challenges (to name but a few) facing the world at present, some thought needs to be given to the changing nature of creativity. As the western world and global north promotes individualisation rather than the collective, how does this change the conceptual space in which we place creativity and what impact does it potentially have on how we seek to employ creative methods and processes for many things, well-being included? Further excavation of emergent concepts such as creative agency (Harris 2021) and creative ecologies (Harris 2017; Harris 2018; Harris and de Bruin 2019) are vital in honing a clear and contextual understanding of how, where and when creative engagement is a positive force in promoting well-being.

4. The Creative Turn in Ireland

> *Every culture finds ways of encoding hard-won wisdom, humour and expertise as resources for individuals and communities; every generation finds new ways to understand and use its heritage. Long famous for creative output in the form of books and film, Ireland has adapted quickly and flexibly to new forms of media culture, in rural as well as urban areas. Irish traditional music now has players and audiences across the globe, as the Irish language has speakers and learners. … Diverse forms of national creativity deserve our fullest support. It should be noted, however, that creativity resists codification and commercialisation. (Canning 2018, p.3)*

Creative turns and returns in Ireland

Ireland has seen a turn towards creativity in the past decade in keeping with the growing popularity of the concept globally. Long beloved as an important idea to teachers of the arts and developmental psychologists and marketing specialists, creativity now has popular purchase, with an awareness that it is something for us all, and not just those who are very talented or capable of producing unique work.

The opening quote from President of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) Prof. Mary Canning clearly illustrates the rapidity of evolution in this space but also the scale of the challenge facing us in embracing and endorsing creative work but without reducing it to lists of figures, economic impacts and numbers of participants. Sustained critical engagement with the why and the how of this creative and social turn is essential in order that it be sustained and indeed properly and transparently managed. Canning herself notes that, 'Creative Ireland can only flourish in a democracy if there is widespread understanding and appreciation of its importance' (2018, p.5).

Creativity and the creative turn in the Irish context have a number of unique characteristics. In discussing them the conversation returns to the arts, culture and creativity – and it is acknowledged that for many they are synonymous and interchangeable terms, with many not differentiating between them in practice or concept. Notwithstanding the overlap

they are distinct and a clarity of conceptual language is required to maintain that distinction in order to preserve and uplift each of them.

Cultural practices (which are often creative and artistic) remain key to Irish life, in both their formal and informal modes of expression (Phelan 2017). Irish life is highly ritualised and shows significant degrees of cultural performativity, but this is often not reflected in levels of formal cultural participation or in cultural policy (Benson 1992; Hibernian Consulting *et al.* 2006; Mc Quaid 2020; Cooke 2022). Artistic practice remains a virtual form of expression in Ireland, in both the professional and community settings. The professional arts are somewhat more removed from many of the population and remain a rare or occasional engagement (Arts Audiences 2013; Arts Audiences 2015) whilst the amateur and community arts have always been and remain a vital and vibrant form of community expression (Kennedy 2021).

The cultural and artistic heritage of Ireland is unquestionably ambiguous. From a post-colonial perspective, a rupture and divide can be perceived between the 'imposed' privately received, educated, literary, aural and visual aesthetics and the 'native' communal, inherited, oral traditions which differentiate less in terms of form and place more of an emphasis on function. Since the establishment of the independent state in 1922, a new 'Gaelic' artistic and cultural renaissance has clearly flourished with creative acts emerging as seminal descriptors of Irish identity throughout the last century, from artists as diverse as Lady Gregory to Denise Chaila. It should be emphasised however that this was predominantly an urban, educated (dependent on high levels of cultural knowledge) and adult (as opposed to young or older people) phenomenon (Cooke 2022). The cultural performativity, which is typically codified in creative acts as art, was not the creativity of communities of lower socio-economic status, rural areas, the very young or the very old and more latterly, migrant groups.

The oral, communal, performative tradition has remained very much in place in many ways and as a significant marker of cultural life and identity in Ireland, and as an expression of creativity (Brady and Walsh 2014). From the communal nature of death-rituals to the gathering in pubs and homes to play traditional music, to the public and highly ritualised celebrations surrounding sporting successes, to the gatherings for waltzes, line-dancing and 'Country and Irish' music that takes place in parochial halls around the country, the creative act remains central to Irish life and indeed, the well-being of Irish communities.

It is important, therefore, that the work considered in this research is understood as supplementary to an extant tradition; that it is not isolated, bespoke or indeed pilot (though individual projects may well of course be), but part of a lineage whereby creative engagement is historically and culturally at the very heart of Irish communities. What is unique about much of the work referred to in this report is that it seeks to reach and indeed is targeted at sections of our communities for whom that traditional and historical fabric of creative well-being has changed or failed because of age, health, access or ethnicity.

Research on Ireland and creativity

Some interesting specific pieces of research on creativity and Ireland exists but it is sporadic and specific. It ranges from studies on culture and creativity in specific places – Galway in this instance (Collins and Fahy 2011); to an examination of creativity as a force for societal cohesion in post-conflict Northern Ireland (Clifton and Macaulay 2015). The creative sector is occasionally referenced, though perhaps less formally than in other countries and it is argued that it should be the focus of more attention (Crowley 2017).

With specific relevance to this work, a number of studies stand out. Leahy (2016) writes about creative capacity in the Irish second level system, primarily from a design perspective. She notes that '(t)he Irish education system is unique in its ability to sustain creativity at each level due to the value system upheld in the arts domain' (p. 194), concluding that Ireland stands as a contradiction to Ken Robinson's much-repeated assertion that school's kill creativity. She instead finds growth in creativity across the education system. Walsh's essay (2015) on creativity in Irish childhoods proposes a move away from the broader umbrella term and a focus instead on creative enquiry, creative agency and creative experience as part of every Irish child's life. She also urges more and longitudinal research into the role that creativity plays and a consistent ethos of enquiry about creativity. Commentators such as Howard (2020) urge the fulfilment of children's rights with regard to access to the arts and culture.

Bradley argues that place matters deeply in creativity and this is particularly evident in Ireland. He suggests that:

Ireland's creative potential will only be realised if its strong tradition of metaphor, storytelling and imagination is fostered. Education that emphasises the arts rooted in place, provides the condition for an innovative self-reliant country, unique while cosmopolitan, well positioned to compete in a turbulent global economy. (Bradley 2012, p.145)

Whilst Bradley makes the case for creativity (but essentially the arts) as a driver for creativity in economic development, there is a salient point evident in his analysis with regard to the contextual uniqueness of creative practice in Ireland, which is no less germane in well-being work. Finally, there is also contestation evident with regard to the idea of creativity and the manner in which is perceived as supplanting the arts in the lives of young people in Ireland (Kenny 2017).

Creativity is about trial and error. It is a process and a journey, one that is sometimes unrealised. One of the inherent possible dangers of the current creative turn in Ireland is that the conceptual commodification of creativity runs the risk of foreclosing some of the breadth of possibilities and expressions of identity, culture and context that creativity can enable. In making the assumption that there are positive and productive outcomes as part of every creative process, something can potentially be lost about its ability as a generative force in so many other facets of cultural life.

The arts and education in Ireland

As alluded to in previous sections, creative work for the purpose of engendering well-being is not new phenomenon in Ireland but in actual fact has a track-record and disparate traces of a policy mandate already, much of it to be found in the intersection of the arts and education. With reference to Smyth's studies (2016; 2020) looking to data from *Growing Up in Ireland*, it is noted that:

The study [GUI] measured the impact of arts and cultural participation on the cognitive development and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Ireland. The study found that Irish children who participate in artistic and cultural activities cope

better with schoolwork; have more positive attitudes towards school; have an improved 'academic self-image'; are happier and have reduced anxiety; have better academic skills; have fewer socio-emotional difficulties; have improved cognitive development; have a broader interest in the arts outside of school hours; and, are more likely to read frequently outside school. (Bamford 2017)

It is not within the purpose or indeed necessary for this report to trace the full extent of the **arts/education/creativity** relationship in Ireland and where well-being is occasionally to be found within that, but suffice to say, there is much room there for thought and analysis and many previous studies to consider (Granville 2011; Granville 2012; Dowling Long 2015; Finneran 2016; Fahy 2023).

The work of Ciarán Benson has long been both a driver of change (1979) and a reflection on the state of the nation with regard to arts and cultural policy (1982; 1992; 2021).

Of particular note with regard to relevant policy frameworks are the A*rts in Education Charter* (Dept. of Arts Heritage & Gaeltacht and Dept. of Education & Skills 2012) and the *Points of Alignment* report (Arts Council Ireland 2008) which preceded it. There is also a significant recent report from the National Youth Council of Ireland mapping youth arts provision in youth work settings and which is clearly located within the contemporary creativity frame (Hogan *et al.* 2021)

The Creative Ireland Wave

Creativity is an old habit but a new discussion. The current societal focus on creativity in Ireland is reflective of a creative turn globally but has arguably also emerged from a desire to take advantage of the reputational and material products of artistic and cultural practice and generate capital from them. That is not to say that such a desire is at cross purposes with a general uplifting of the creative sector or of positives outcomes from the individual projects which are sponsored under that banner.

Rush offers an early and somewhat critical review of *Creative Ireland* policy:

> *It also leaves the link between 'creativity' and arts and culture unclear. In the paragraph following the initial definition, the document states that '[c]ulture and creativity are inextricably linked', but it does not satisfactorily specify how (p. 10). Following that, 'culture' (but not necessarily creativity) is further linked to 'enhancing wellbeing' (p. 11). What we see here is a series of tricky buzzwords, loosely connected, that sound good but ultimately say little about what creativity is or what it does. Defining an already difficult term like 'creativity' by referring to words of even more complex and contested meanings, such as 'value', 'culture', and 'wellbeing', is bureaucratic speak at its vaguest and most inscrutable. Perhaps the most concerning part of this introduction, though, appears in the two short paragraphs where the strategy argues a direct link between 'creativity' and the economy (Rush 2019, pp.13-14)*

Notwithstanding the knots which need to unpicked, the advent of *Creative Ireland* and its continuation to a second phase of existence would seem to be part of a rising tide with regard to culture, the arts and creativity in Ireland. This can only be part of a wave which lifts all boats but does not diminish the importance of critical reflectivity in consideration of its backwash. A comprehensive overview of current policy is offered by Hadley *et al.* (2020). The conclusion is that the increased focus on culture and creativity (including the focus on well-being and community in Ireland evident in *Culture 2025*) can only ameliorate the 'socially eviscerating effects of late-state capitalism' (p. 11) and the lack of policy provision elsewhere in Irish life. Such provision is all the more pressing as the country deals with significant ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the impact of global events such as the war in Ukraine.

5. Well-being and Being Well

Well-being as a concept

As 'a highly popularised and aspirational concept', well-being is impossible to define, despite repeated attempts (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015). While well-being is widely accepted as a foundational tenet of societal health, the constituent elements of well-being continue to evolve, as Susan Oman observes: 'well-being is not a fixed concept; it shifts depending on who is using it when, and in what context' (2021, p.59). A recent Google *Ngram* assessment of the frequency of 'well-being' and 'wellbeing' as terms in published books demonstrates the dramatic increase in appearances of the term since 2000, indicating academic, policy and health interest in the concept of wellbeing, as well as the proliferation of the well-being industry[3]. This trend is reflected in a study of the history of well-being in children and adults (Moore and Keyes 2003). There is often a deficit discourse associated with well-being and the discourse is contested with regard to societal versus individual responsibility with regard to well-being (Freebody et al. 2018). The wealth of research on well-being demonstrates the enormity of the topic; however, the specific relationship between arts, or more precisely creativity, and well-being is less thoroughly theorised (McLellan *et al.* 2012).

Global research on well-being and creativity

The new international frameworks adopted regarding well-being and creativity are located within a broader cultural policy frame (UNESCO 2022). The 2021 WHO report on *Intersectoral action between the arts, health and well-being* asserts the potential for well-

[3] Well-being Ngram: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=well-being&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cwell%20-%20being%3B%2Cc0#t1%3B%2Cwell%20-%20being%3B%2Cc0

Wellbeing Ngram: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=wellbeing&year_start=1800&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3; Accessed 04 June 2022.

being through the arts, broadly conceived, as a means of promoting good health, preventing mental and physical health challenges, and reducing age-related decline (WHO 2021). In line with supranational developments, measuring well-being is a core strategic priority for national governments in recent years (Frijters *et al.* 2020). The UK Office for National Statistics has advocated for the use of three broad types of subjective well-being measures: evaluation (global assessments), experience (feelings over short periods of time) and 'eudemonic' (reports of purpose and meaning, and worthwhile things in life) (Dolan *et al.* 2011). An interesting trend is evident in the development of composite indicators focused on measuring well-being, as a complement to standard Global Domestic Product (GDP) or development indicators. The *2020 Human Development Report* exhorts societies to transition from valuing what they measure to measuring what they value (UNDP 2020). However, within education, whilst a systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU is advocated strongly, no particular emphasis is placed on the arts or creativity in achieving that end (European Commission Directorate-General for Education *et al.* 2021).

It has been identified that there is a need for robust critique on research on social and health impact in the arts (Clift *et al.* 2021). The scoping studies associated with the 2021 WHO report provide (Fancourt and Finn 2019; Clift 2020) provide a comprehensive roadmap of the strengths and lacunae. There are a range of allied studies in specific country contexts that are of relevance. *The Baring Foundation* presents an initial mapping of the participatory arts and mental health activity in the UK (Cutler 2020). Findings from a United Kingdom all-party parliamentary group reflect the centrality of the arts as social determinants of health (Gordon-Nesbitt and Howarth 2020)**.** In the United States, a scoping review examines health communication and reveals that the arts can help build knowledge and awareness of health issues and further highlights the need to build an evidence base for arts and public health (Sonke *et al.* 2021).

To give a brief sense of research undertaken in more specific arenas, another *Baring Foundation* report examines a selection of arts and mental health projects with, by and for children and young people (Lowe 2020). Zeilig and her colleagues examine the implications for well-being and agency by looking at the work co-creative arts group for people with dementia (2019). Finally, the phenomenon of loneliness is examined and findings suggest that

arts engagement can support social connectedness among adults in the UK through multiple pathways, providing large-scale evidence of the important role that the arts can play in supporting social public health (Perkins *et al.* 2021).

The range of well-being

A significant emergent theme in this project is as to how can a definition of well-being be written and operationalised in order to differentiate between community building (togetherness/collectivity), personal development and more acute issues of well-being, across areas of mental and physical healthy such as chronic illness, long-term illness, acute illness or terminal illness. A taxonomy of well-being which differentiates between *foundational* (tacit well-being outcomes), *ameliorative* (broadly oriented towards specific need in specific populations and settings), and *interventionist* (based on a deficit model of well-being and engaging directly with vulnerable populations) in creativity practice suggests ways of disaggregating the complexity of well-being as a concept.

Well-being and Ireland

Research into well-being in the Irish context has been ongoing in recent years. In 2009, National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report *Well-being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland* identified the need to account for social progress (or lack thereof) beyond GDP metrics, in line with international developments in well-being analysis. It suggests that 'well-being is a positive physical, social and mental state', and seeks to 'place the individual at the centre of policy development' (p. 30). This foundational research was furthered in 2017 with the publication of a set of 'national wellbeing indicators' by Central Statistics Office (CSO 2018). These indicators attempt to account for individual and societal influences on well-being, through the development of a dashboard-style interface to document changes in wellbeing metrics. The imperative for such work is pressing. A national consultation report on youth, mental health and well-being published during the pandemic shows the extent to

which these issues were a significant concern at that time, but more pressingly in their futures (Department of Children 2020).

In July 2021, the launch of the *Well-being Framework for Ireland* formalised the government's intention to better measure Ireland's progress as a country and better align policy decisions with people's experiences. It outlines a conceptual framework that draws on the OECD template and includes 11 separate elements of well-being that are grounded in concentric circles of person/place/society and in ideas of 'flourishing and languishing' (Government of Ireland 2021).

In the arts and well-being *The Arts Council* published a practical handbook in the arts and health (2003) as well as a later four-year strategy document (2010) which appears not to have an individual successor but instead is mainstreamed into Arts Council strategic policy. As noted elsewhere, *Creative Ireland's* establishment as a whole-of-government initiative in 2017 has been a significant policy and operational game-changer in creativity and well-being, which has been thematically core to the work of CI from the outset.

A growing body of academic research on creativity and well-being in Ireland exists. Sectoral-specific analyses have been undertaken in education in Ireland (O'Brien and O'Shea 2017; Farrell and Mahon 2022; Nohilly and Tynan 2022); in older age groups (Scarlett *et al.* 2021) and in care settings (Leahy 2013). New work indicates an emergent paradox in primary education and teacher education where well-being is of increasing importance but time for the arts is diminishing (McCabe and Flannery 2022). Well-being should be regarded as intersectional and situated in an Irish context. Personal development, creativity and civic responsibility are key educational aspirations leading to well-being, which needs to be thought of in a range of ways – ecological, social, economic, individual & collective.

The onset of COVID-19 and its associated crises of social isolation, deprivation and mental health has accelerated the concept of well-being as a means of addressing wider sociocultural, economic and acute health crises in Ireland (O'Connor *et al.* 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on how people see creativity as a gateway to every-day well-being as opposed to well-being around areas of acute need. Some international voices warn of a 'well-being trap' for the arts and culture post-covid (Klerkx 2020) but they are in a

minority. There is a perception that well-being is a significant priority as Ireland continues to emerge from and deal with the consequences of the pandemic.

Well-being as core to contemporary concerns

Given the societal imperative (Department of Children 2020) and governmental directive (Government of Ireland 2021) regarding well-being, it is clear that it will be front and centre across many domains of Irish life for some time yet. In the arts and creativity, the emergent body of practice and reflection charted elsewhere should show greater awareness of and take greater cognisance of the policy and research work on well-being developed elsewhere.

Robust support exists in research for example with regard to the contribution of the arts for health and well-being across a life course (Chappell *et al.* 2021), and in mental health (Cutler 2020; Lowe 2020). The value of evaluation in the arts and health (Staricoff 2006) is clear as are the challenges in engaging with well-being in cultural advocacy (Oman and Taylor 2018).

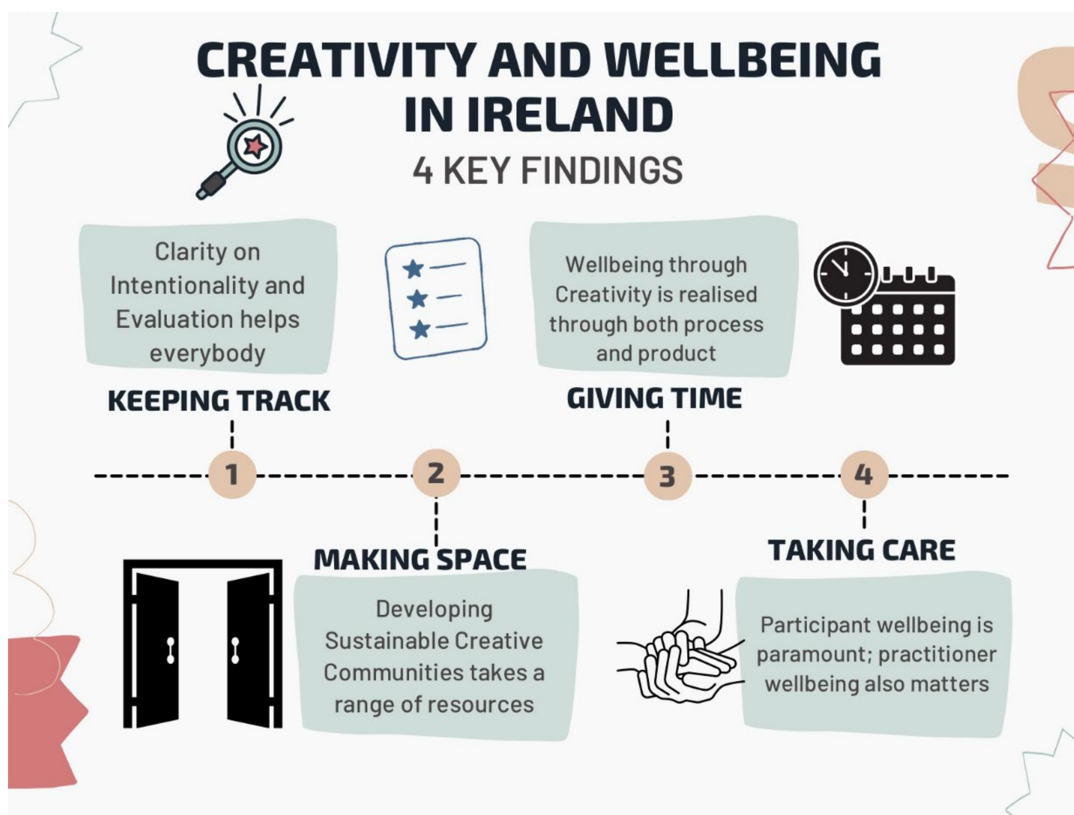
Creativity in an Irish context is highly particular to the specific cultural ecology in which it is to be found. The cultural ecology ties it to well-being, in a communal sense as much as in an individualised or curative sense. The emergent discourse of well-being can at times be dominated by the psycho-medical domain. Very often it is a deficit discourse in that it is oriented around the absence of well-being – mental illness, isolation/loneliness or obesity, for example. Another way to consider well-being is as a habitual way of being in the world; the habit of being well on a daily basis.

This changes the focus of the debate from creativity being implemented as a 'fixer' of the absence of well-being to everyday creative acts being an 'enabler' of well-being. The fixing or curative perspective on well-being is problematic for a number of distinct reasons. It implies judgement on the part of the funder/facilitator with regard to what the problem is. Whilst this may seem straightforward in many instances (e.g. a dance class to enable greater physical activity), such judgement is culturally bound (it is a white assumption based on the

idea that everyone should dance), an enablist assumption (based on the idea that everyone can physically move in order to dance) and a socio-economically bound assumption (based on the idea that everyone has the time and space to dance). It also frames artists and facilitators in a quasi-superhero role, whereby their job is to swoop in and save everyone's well-being through enabling them to dance.

One of the challenges in the work ahead is to bring these policy and academic discourses into operational clarity especially regarding clear understandings of well-being, and in order to allow all to powerfully and effectively coalesce with effective practice in creativity and well-being.

6. Framing Best Practice: Voices from the Field



Originally the plan for this set out plans for a sustained period of fieldwork to capture practitioner voices and reflect best practice in Ireland. This plan had to be altered because of issues of access. At the time of the research many projects and practitioners remained under COVID-19 working restrictions or were slowly beginning to return to face-to-face project work, with all the difficulty that contained. In hindsight, it has not been a linear return to 'normality' as might have been envisaged as restrictions on movement, masking etc. were relaxed. Two other factors necessitated a change in methodological approach. On first engaging with colleagues in the field, it was evident to the research team that there was a degree of apprehension in engaging in the research. This was for two intertwined reasons, both of which became clearer and more explicitly expressed as the work unfolded and both to do with the emergent nature and perception of peripherality in the work that is done in this field. There is a precarity of practice in the work, in that very often participants are

amongst those for myriad reasons (age, ability, health status, migrant status, socio-economic status, etc.) are amongst the most marginalised in creative practice and for that reason, practitioners feel and express a significant responsibility of care and protection towards them. As a team of researchers, this immediately posed both an ethical and methodological challenge: was it right to seek access to the people taking part in these projects; and if it were, how might that be achieved? Allied to this (which might be described as a precarity of practice), is as a precarity of funding. Opportunities to have work in this field of practice funded are new for all the reasons described earlier and the main source of current funding is through the sponsor of this research, *Creative Ireland*. Naturally, there was a degree of added apprehension when potential participants became aware of this, leading to concern on the part of the research team as to how that might potentially influence or skew discussions.

A decision was made to pivot the focus of the research-gathering to story and conversation in order to navigate a path between the mythical and scientific rationality (Lévi-Strauss 1962) which characterises much of the work in creativity and the applied arts. This qualitative approach employs a bricolage (Kincheloe and Berry 2004) approach to interrogate the research questions as they find expression in the field. After the initial round of discussions, the research team proceeded to informally engage with a wide number of practitioners and policy makers across the field in a series unstructured engagements. These were conversational encounters, with no fixed questions or recordings and mostly took place via MS Teams and Zoom.

This was done to listen with a view to compiling a series of rich ethnographic stories of challenges and success in working in creativity and well-being, informed by discussion, performances, meetings, encounter, observations and meetings. It is held that such an approach is in fact the only way in which one might tell the story of a complex and emergent area. The bricoleur stiches together pieces of story, gathered orally and in text, in order to re-tell a complex but perhaps more complete story. Our working understanding is that 'the bricoleur researcher … is required to move between the worlds of the intellectual knower, the mythical knower and the imagination' (Fitzpatrick 2017, p.63). After listening to the stories, we journalled and talked, wrote and read and in this process distilled a wide range of engagements across a number of months into four straightforward but potent themes for

discussion, as well as four vignettes of best practice, compiled with the assistance of the colleagues whose work is represented in them.

What this looked like in reality is that we spoke to stakeholders, service providers, arts managers and practitioners in different fields and settings, including arts-in-health, youth work, ageing populations and acute settings. We also spoke policy makers and key figures about things such as the design, delivery, purpose and functionality of existing structures, and possibilities for future initiatives. We listened carefully to the stories they chose to tell us and now offer those stories back, in a woven and distilled story of our telling. Inherent in this approach is the concept of story. Stories are inherently biased and individualised. They do not claim objectivity nor generalisability. Nor do we in this report. What is offered is a narrative that seeks to unpick and distil the challenges, rewards and ramifications of working in a precarious and emergent sector of creative life.

At the core of this research lies the challenge of telling the story of a creative triad – the interactional relationship between policy-maker : practitioner : participant – and the story we tell bears out the wider international literature which states that consultation and responsivity between all parties is essential for the successful delivery of creativity projects with wellbeing outcomes.

Our distillation and analysis of these stories, is discussed under the following headings, each interspersed over the coming pages with a vignette of practice:

1. **Keeping Track: Intentionality and Evaluation**
2. **Making Space: Sustainable Creative Communities**
3. **Giving Time: Creativity as Process and Product**
4. **Taking Care: Participant and Practitioner Wellbeing**

Ultimately, this project has undertaken to return recommendations which allow for sectoral development and maturation in this fast-evolving space in Irish creative life, and within which much practice has been dictated by the strictures of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be stated clearly that we have encountered a lot of noteworthy and innovative practice taking place. The challenge lies in taking the best of this practice and harnessing from it some principles which allow for the sustainable, transparent and comprehensive growth in

the field. The kinds of successful projects we have encountered and stories we have heard share many of the following characteristics:

- ***Community-based*****:** they work with and/or through existing infrastructure;
- ***Responsive*****:** they deliver on participant-articulated needs;
- ***Longitudinal*****:** they build relationships with participants and partners over time;
- ***Sustainable*****:** they outlive the initial event or individual which may have triggered their establishment;
- ***Experienced*****:** they involve practitioners and organisations who have a track-record and contact book from time spent working in social, applied, community or educational creative practice.

7. Practice Vignette: Local Creative Youth Partnership: Limerick Clare Education and Training Board

Background

The Local Creative Youth Partnerships (LCYP) were established by Creative Ireland in 2019[4]. Following a call open to all Education and Training Boards (ETB), three were selected as pilot projects, namely Limerick/Clare, Kerry and Laois/Offaly. The project was expanded in 2021 to continue work in the pilot sites but also to include three new projects at the ETB locations in Cork, Mayo/Sligo/Leitrim and Galway/Roscommon.

The scheme is driven by a network of partners in each ETB region and aims to encourage collaboration in the provision of creative activities for youth at community level, at school level and beyond, to facilitate and develop new creative initiatives and to avoid duplication of effort. Partners include schools, libraries, third level institutions, youth services, etc.

In the Limerick Clare project, the LCYP is run by a co-ordinator, Monica Spencer who is an experienced community arts and professional arts practitioner. She works through the offices of LCETB and is supported in her work by the Director of Schools and a large steering group composed of members from the youth, creativity and education sector across the region.

Range and nature of projects/operations

The work of the LCETB LCYP project is aimed at youth from 0 to 25 years of age. In its strategic plan published in 2020[5], the project identifies four core strategic goals: the voice of the child; partnership and sustainability; a rights-based approach and quality and visibility. These have an associated range of allied priorities and targeted actions.

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[4] https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/creative-youth/creative-youth-partnerships/

[5] LCETB LCYP Strategic plan (2020-2022)
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e4vJR6FzYHMvkPNBNDxy4RKUV1a4hwTU/view

The project covers the counties of Clare and Limerick, encompassing a range of settings from very rural and isolated communities to significant towns such as Kilrush, Ennis, Shannon, Kilmallock and Newcastle-West and the major urban centre of Limerick city.

The project offers a broad and vivid range of targeted inputs many of which are exemplified on the project website[6] and social media streams. These range from establishing Youth Theatre in Kilkee, west County Clare to offering training for future film makers in Limerick city, to the creation of public mosaic murals in Pallasgreen, east County Limerick.

Illustrations of practice

A day in the life of Rathkeale[7] was a photographic project commissioned by the LCYP and Limerick Youth Service (LYS) in 2020 involving *Rathkeale Youth Space* and youth worker Lisa Quirke working with professional photographer Stephen Lappin. 27 girls between the ages of 10-12 years of age took part in the project which sought to help them to capture images of a day in the life of their town. The resultant images were curated into an exhibition which was shown in both Rathkeale as well as later in Limerick city[8]. Rathkeale is a mid-size town in West Limerick which has a significant population of members of the Travelling/Mincéir community.

Young Beoirs Gathering was a summer gathering for teenage girls which took place as part of both *Cruinniú na nÓg* as well as the *Guth na Mincéirí* project[9]. It took place at the *Dance Limerick* cultural space in June 2022 and brought together teenage girls from Limerick and Clare to share their cultural heritage through engaging in workshops in film, drawing, photography, Belly dance, henna tattoo, make-up and through sharing food from Pakistan,

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[6] LCETB LCYP Website: https://sites.google.com/lcetbdrive.com/localcreativeyouthpartnership/home

[7] *A day in the life of Rathkeale* profile on the Arts in Education Charter website: https://artsineducation.ie/project/a-day-in-the-life-of-rathkeale/

[8] Press release from Limerick Youth Service on *A day in the life of Rathkeale*: https://limerickyouthservice.com/a-day-in-the-life-of-rathkeale/

[9] Guth na Mincéirí is a 6-month project promoting Traveller wellbeing through creativity in Limerick which is run through The Gaff community arts organisation in conjunction with a range of local and national partners. It is funded by Creative Ireland is one of five inaugural projects promoting a national programme of Traveller well-being through creativity

Syria and Ukraine. Participants attended from across the two counties and a number of cultural backgrounds and shared their own creativity as well as experiencing a chance to witness that of others.

Creative and wellbeing intersections

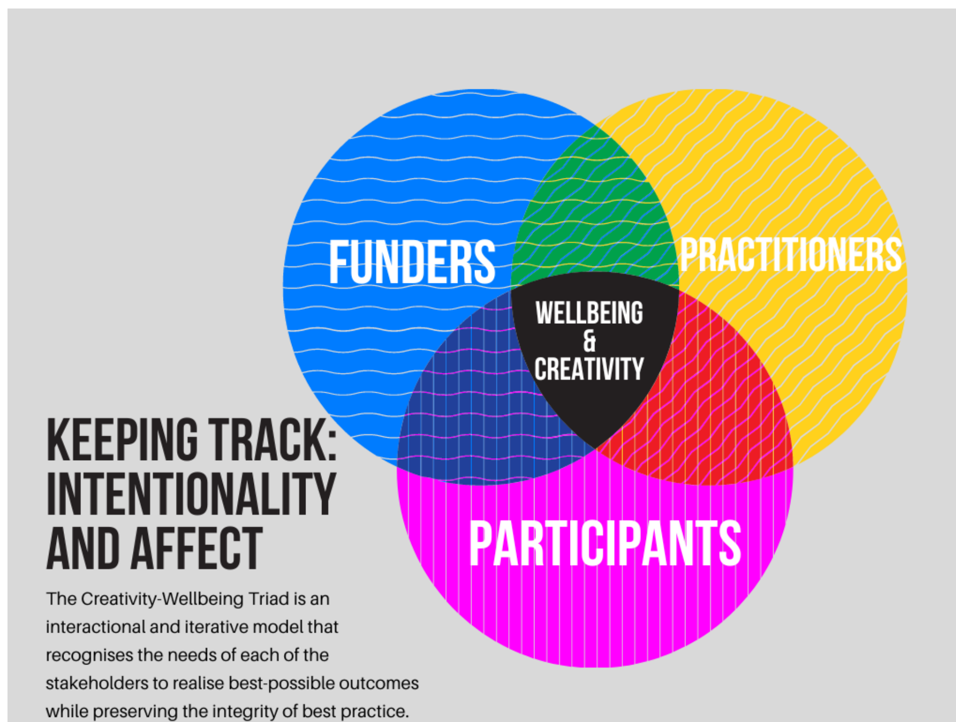
The majority of the projects hosted by the Limerick Clare LCYP are youth-oriented projects which are not established to deal with well-being in any targeted or directed manner. However, the broader well-being of the young people involved in the creative activity is very clearly a high priority and central to many activities of the project. This can be seen in the manner in which the project facilitates work that deals with issues of identity, inclusion and belonging. The everyday well-being and positive self-identity of the participants is a macro-orientation of the work in that through participation in creative opportunities, there is an opportunity for validation of an often-marginalised identity as well as engagement with others from similar and different backgrounds. Many of the smaller projects facilitated through this work are targeted at sections of the community that are identified as especially needing some additional support. Some of the individual projects, such as the *Young Beoirs Gathering* intersect directly with direct well-being outcomes.

Unique Characteristics

The Limerick Clare LCYP is multi-agency by design and this is particularly evident in its modes of engagement and implementation, working with differing partners to best suit the aims and needs of its smaller constituent projects. It has a steering group that reflects a range of youth-oriented agencies across the large geographical area which the project serves. The overall project operates through facilitating a range of small and medium-scale stand-alone projects which act independently of each other. This model of practice allows for both a targeted approach in terms of the nature of the project but also the specific creative form of the work and the individual facilitators used in enabling the work. Many of these projects are one-off or shorter-term initiatives but some are medium and long term. The projects are established through the leadership of the partnership group (particularly the facilitator) but enabled through varying units and agencies and then facilitator/artist led on the ground. They

operate in a variety of contexts: urban, rural, school-based and community-based, and they offer unique accessibility to remote and vulnerable communities because of a willingness and flexibility on the part of the project and its leadership to work with small groups and marginalised youth, as well as reaching a range of diverse geographic and ethnic communities. Well-being is present throughout the work of the project but largely in terms of indirect well-being outcomes which reinforce positive self and communal identity and a sense of broader inclusion. The project has significant engagement with the *Creative Ireland* programme, having been originated through CI, but also draws upon direct and in-kind funding from a range of other local and national sources. The strong practitioner experience and ethos on the part of the overall project coordinator is vital to the project. The current coordinator has an extensive knowledge of and passion for the community arts sector and people working in that field as well as a huge 'contact book' built up over years of practice in the field and a knowledge of working artists. This is vital to the success of the project but also hard to replicate on a mass scale or through a policy mandate. Evaluation and research is held as being central to the LCYP and embedded into one of the action items in the current strategic plan. Equally, the importance of network development is recognised as central to the work of the project in terms of promoting creativity as a central element of non-formal education in the region, thus increasing the sustainability and potential longevity of the work.

8. Thematic Discussion: Keeping Track – Intentionality and Evaluation



The range of expectations relating to wellbeing and creativity evident in the field indicates some lack of clarity with regard to intentionality and affect. Broadly speaking, intentionality speaks to what it is that funders and practitioners believe they wish to achieve and are setting out to do so; i.e. the effect that they wish to see from their work. Affect is the result – that which has been achieved in the work. These terms are commonly misunderstood.

The well-being expectation associated with funded and participatory creative practice is acknowledged but there is a general lack of certainty as to how to package and document these outcomes in grant applications. There is a perception that more guidance for artists and practitioners with regard to good practice is needed in order to more clearly shape the sorts of well-being outcomes desired and articulated. Some sense of what is reasonably achievable and how it can be achieved is necessary in order to facilitate this. This would be welcomed by those evaluating (both the funding applications and outcomes) such projects. It would also avoid the possibility of creative projects rhetorically setting out to change the world where much creative work inculcating well-being operates in a world of small and perhaps imperceptible changes.

It is interesting also to reflect on the fact that the well-being requirement or stipulation in some funding calls sometimes shapes projects with artists responding by formulating or reshaping an idea in direct response to a funding opportunity. Whilst it may well be a case of the cart driving the horse and potentially drawing some into the work who are perhaps unsuited to it, it is also indicative of how the prominence of language such as well-being can help shape and drive the grown of a field.

The absence of practitioner well-being being acknowledged or accounted for in funding applications is a significant part of the story of intentionality and evaluation, despite the centrality of practitioner well-being to successful practice. Practitioners have to be well in order to enable work that demands inculcating well-being in others and that should be considered. This is discussed in more detail in section fourteen of this report.

Professional standing, participation and consultation are also part of the story of creativity and well-being. Many practitioners are highly trained in specific areas of participatory arts practice, arts for well-being and community-facing creative initiatives. Policy and funding initiatives are emergent however, and the discussion arises as to whether policy always reflect best practice in the field. To this end the nascent field might have increased consultation with practicing artists about policy in order that best practice on the ground is reflected at the tables where decisions are framed and made, for reasons of professional visibility as much as good practice. Embedding artistic voices in important discussions is a key element of ensuring the integrity of the funder : practitioner : participant triad.

Evaluation structures and requirements also feature strongly as a conversation piece, with the strong conviction that good evaluation practice also requires practitioner consultation. Amongst the questions discussed include that of who is evaluation for – is it for funders to see that the project has worked, for artists to reflect on their own practice, or for participants to consolidate their experience? What does evaluation measure – who defines 'success' in these instances? Which methods elucidate the most useful data and how can we integrate qualitative and quantitative data to best document project success and failures? How can we avoid the pathology of evaluation that delivers unused and unusable data while still preserving a productive evaluation process? And how can we design effective evaluation

processes that inform future policy while also serving practitioners and participants? Fundamentally, what are we seeking in measuring and evaluating, set against what criteria and utilising what data?

Many positive consultative experiences exist, mostly with flagship organisations and national funders with bespoke evaluation approaches which value artist perspectives. Instances of consultation of integrity and depth are clearly in evidence which include seeking practitioner opinions on evaluation and allowing people an opportunity to be agentive it their design. The empowering nature of sensitively designed evaluations that reduce the pressure on practitioners is important. Practitioners like funders who are clear about whether they want evaluation and if so, what form of evaluation, set against what criteria.

The stories we gathered on this journey shows a general recognition of the need for evaluation. There is a recognition that if we're going to affect change within projects and bring about change to the policy landscape and attract additional funding money to this kind of work, there must be an evidence base available to substantiate that work. In order for that to be achieved, the utility of the tools being used is a source of discussion. Reliance on traditional well-being scales and measures (such as they are and are known to people) is generally recognised as too limiting to capture the full effect of creativity and well-being. The bespoke nature of the work in this field requires that bespoke tools for evaluation are made available which are suited not just to the specialist nature of the work at hand but also the unique cultural context in which they are employed here in Ireland.

This is particularly vital in order to avoid situations where the evaluation limits and is out-of-sync with both the creative work and its well-being orientation. For many practitioners, the primary focus of the work has to remain on the engagement with their participants and the kinds of form-filling and box-ticking exercises. This perception is at once both true and unhelpful. Lack of insight into the reasoning behind why an evaluation may be in place is an indication of a poorly designed instrument or a poorly explained study or requirement.

Practitioners spoke to us of their own reflective and evaluatory habits with some having a suite of purpose-designed and bespoke evaluation methods that responded to the specific characteristics and needs of individual projects and participants. Metrics and statistics

are clearly of importance but so too are anecdotes, stories, images – artefacts and narratives that illustrate and illuminate the connections which such projects engender, and which can be squeezed out in many reporting mechanisms. The numbers are recognised as being of importance but what it is that the numbers represent are of equal if not greater importance.

Others suggest that some evaluation approaches can in fact be detrimental to the creativity and well-being being cultivated in the space, with the mere mention of evaluation and reflection running contrary to the sort of creative spirit that facilitators may wish to engender. Added to this is the intimate nature of the relationships involved and the significant and sensitive needs and contexts of some of the participants.

Cultivating a rigorous sectoral environmental of open reflective practice reliant on evaluation and research methods such as diaries, interviews, observation, artistic artefacts and auto-ethnographic modes would involve a paradigm shift in terms of what is regarded as valid modes of evaluation and assessment. Many practitioners and policy makers acknowledge that their own individual evaluation approaches are of necessity now evolving and in direct response to ongoing developments at individual, organisational or system level and as an ongoing and sometimes almost unconscious action. Given this, the case can be made that now is a time to grapple with the challenge of evaluation, before a range of disparate practices are further embedded across the system.

There is broad agreement that adequate levels of funding are paramount to delivering deep and reflective evaluations beyond participant numbers and superficial responses. It is a financial and methodological issue rather than people not wanting to engage with it. As is the case in many arts projects, increased and targeted funding would enable better practices: additional bursaries ring-fenced for evaluation would address some of the emergent issues around evaluation.

Changing the focus from open modes of evaluation (which ostensibly seem to offer practitioners more choice) to more structured approaches which exist perhaps at funder or national level and which have been designed with significant practitioner input may help to allay many of the concerns expressed in the conversations that we had. Moreover, having, holding, funding and communicating a clear rationale for evaluation and what is being

evaluated should allay evaluation as an issue of concern for many practitioners and encourage greater and deeper levels of engagement.

9. Practice Vignette: Waterford Healing Arts Trust

Background

Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT)[10] was established in 1993, making it one of the longest-established arts and health organisations in Ireland. It is based in a dedicated Centre for Arts and Health (built in 2008) on the grounds of University Hospital Waterford (UHW) with its history entwined with that organisation and many of its projects offered through the hospital. The main objective of the organisation is to promote wellbeing through the arts and this is further broken down in terms of objectives around access and participation, improvement of patient, staff and visitor experiences through the reduction of stress and anxiety by engagement with the arts, developing capacity in the arts and health sector and facilitating professional development opportunities for artists working in the sector.

The organisation is supported directly and in-kind by the Health Services Executive (HSE), the Arts Council, the Dept. of Social Protection through the Community Employment scheme and Waterford City and Council as well as various smaller grants on a project-by-project basis, as well as philanthropic and voluntary sources. WHAT is a company limited by guarantee (CLG) with an independent board and it is a registered charity. From its focussed origins within a hospital setting it has evolved into a broader arts, creativity and health remit with a diverse number of other projects, most prominently its curation of the www.artsandhealth.ie portal and its national leadership and advocacy role in the arts, health and well-being.

[10] http://www.waterfordhealingarts.com/

Range and nature of projects/operations

The range of projects offered by WHAT is diverse and reaches a range of service-users and community members[11]. It ranges from engagement with individuals to those targeted at group encounters and from the highly specialised and sensitive to ones with the well-being of the broader community as their focus.

Some of WHAT's work is static in nature such as exhibitions and the commissioning of public art, with over 600 original works (as of 2021) being displayed in UHW. Other projects range from those targeted at individuals such *Art at the Kitchen Table* targeted at older people and devised as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to those more accessible to all on an on-demand basis, such as *Artist on Call* and *Open Studio*. WHAT offers programmes aimed at children and young people with specific medical needs, such as *Art Kart* and *Storytelling in Paediatrics*. Equally, there are programmes across art forms directed towards mental health well-being in the *Iontas Arts & Mental Health Programme* and which are delivered in mental health settings. *Open Gallery: Dementia Inclusive Art Viewing Programmes* is a programme modelled on work developed in MoMA in New York which is aimed at people living with dementia but also their family members and carers. A staff creative writing programme is also offered for UHW workers. At the very specialised end of the spectrum of work offered are arts programmes with patients and service users in sensitive medical areas of need such as renal dialysis and palliative care.

Illustrations of practice

The *Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing* is a five-day festival which 'champions and celebrates the health benefits of participation in the arts by everyone'. It is offered by WHAT in collaboration with partners Garter Lane Arts Centre and Waterford City and County Libraries. In many ways it is the embodiment of the work WHAT does in fostering well-being across the continuum ranging from acute intervention to cultivating communal (collective)

[11] See a full and detailed account of projects carried out in the 2021 WHAT Annual Report: http://waterfordhealingarts.com/wp-content/uploads/Final-Annual-Report-2021.docx.pdf

and individual mental, physical, emotional and social health. The festival offers a broad programme of activities available to the public and takes place primarily outside of healthcare settings but with some activities in those settings also. The range of creative and cultural activities is broad[12] with the 2022 festival offering dance, poetry, visual arts, doodling, music, gardening, storytelling, public art and the wonderfully named flagship event, *We haven't had an earthquake lately*. This popular public event celebrates inspirational and positive literature with an open call inviting readers to submit pieces of work (by others) for consideration which are then read aloud for the appreciation of all. With the pandemic, the event has had to be offered online over the past number of years but remains popular and demonstrate the reach WHAT's mission and collaborative focus offers in engaging people creatively in well-being events.

The aptly named *Healing Sounds* is a 'a programme of live music engagement which aims to soften the clinical environment and reduce anxiety for patients and staff'. It was initially conceived as being offered live at the bedsides of patients and based on the work of musicians who have trained with the renowned *Musique et Sante* programme in France. This is a research-based approach which trains musicians to deal with patients with empathy and sensitivity. Forced to adapt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work continued unabated by moving from the bedside to musicians playing outdoor concerts (with specially designed high-vis jackets!). It now operates 'on the wards' and 'in the foyer' lifting the spirits of staff, patients and visitors alike. The programme now also offers musical postcards which are available for all to listen to[13].

Finally, and of direct relevance to some of the themes under discussion in this report, WHAT offered a unique programme to practitioners in the creativity and well-being sector in 2021. *Surviving or thriving?*[14] was offered online in collaboration with the Arts Council and consisted of a series of free podcasts, workshops and panels open to all those working in the

[12] See the 2022 *Well Festival of Arts and Wellbeing* programme here: http://waterfordhealingarts.com/wp-content/uploads/Well_Festival_2022_brochure_v4_interactive.pdf

[13] Healing Sounds Musical Postcards: http://www.waterfordhealingarts.com/healing-sounds-musical-postcards/

[14] Surviving or Thriving?: http://www.waterfordhealingarts.com/surviving-or-thriving/

arts in Ireland, and for whom unique challenges arose during the COVID-19 pandemic with few supports available. It sought to build resilience, inclusion and sustainability in the sector by offerings discipline-specific inputs in addition to others which dealt with cross-cutting themes. It was a unique event in the context of the arts in Ireland and one of the few events designed to address practitioner well-being, thus bridging the gap which somehow can be perceived as existing between mainstream and applied artistic practices.

Creative and wellbeing intersections

WHAT is an organisation whose origins lie in, and which is specifically oriented towards arts and health. The very nature of the project gives voice to the full range of well-being. This is creativity in well-being in its fullest and broadest expression, rooted primarily in the healthcare system but radiating out from there with expansion over time. The work of WHAT is also rooted in intersectoral partnership with health, artistic, creative and local agencies coming together in financial and operational support of the work.

Well-being in the work of WHAT is carefully curated with strong ethical and care principles evident in policy and practice. It is implicitly understood in the project that being well is nothing that someone should or can be taken for granted and therefore needs some creative care. Being well is an active and normal part of life as well as a part of the remedy to being unwell. It is also implicitly understood and explicitly expressed by WHAT that being unwell is a normative part of the human experience, however unfortunate. It is not a deficit condition – it is another way of living but one which requires bespoke creative skills and delivery models in order to cater through creativity for those who are unwell. The WHAT project also tacitly acknowledges the extremes of the continuum of well-being. It works particularly with participants with acute needs in terms of well-being. They are in need of targeted and affective creative care in order to best manage or perhaps in some small way ameliorate the medical or psychological deficit that they are dealing with. In some WHAT projects creativity is a way of fixing, not medically or physically, but in some small creative, aesthetic, social or human way, a tiny component of the multi-faceted challenge which is involved in being unwell.

Unique Characteristics

The work of WHAT deals with well-being in its fullest possible expression from the acute to everyday, the individual to the communal, the targeted to the general. The project is deeply embedded within the health sector and dependent on the health service and hospital system for both its history and continued existence. In its 30 years of existence, it has grown and evolved outwards beyond the physical healthcare settings to increasingly engage with people in community settings. It offers through its work a sophisticated understanding of well-being honed after prolonged engagement with service-users, patients and medical and allied professionals involved in social care, public health, care-giving and acute treatment. WHAT is a medium sized agency which operates a range of small and medium-scale projects, which are run directly through the project. It has an established base of professional staff in leadership, but also a coterie committed and talented artists many of whom are long-serving and experienced practitioners in creativity and well-being settings and many of whom also have the experience and the benefit of specialist training. The leadership of the organisation has been settled for many years and there is consistency in both programme and personnel.

This is visible in the manner in which many of the WHAT programmes were steering through the COVID-19 pandemic and found authentic expression in an online or distanced form. Diversification was driven by public health necessity towards working with individuals in home settings and in open, public spaces whilst larger group encounters were rendered impossible. There was also noticeable diversification during the COVID-19 pandemic to focus on arts practitioner well-being as well as patient care, a move which is resonant with some of the discussion contained in this report.

WHAT has a multi-pronged financial structure with revenue being received directly and in-kind from a number of agencies, in the arts, health and local government sector. This makes its structure and work unique but also somewhat resilient against changing tides in any given individual sector. It has no particular long-term engagement with *Creative Ireland* but collaboration with CI creative communities project is evident as well as occasional pieces of project-based work funded through CI.

10. Thematic Discussion: Making Space – Building Sustainable Creative Communities

Sustainable creative communities grow out of embedded, responsive, interactive and lasting investments of time and resources. Our engagements with the field have shown us that individual creativity actions create temporary communities, and those communities deliver further well-being outcomes, beyond the targeted well-being generated by the creativity activity itself. Without ongoing and well-resourced initiatives that deliver bespoke creativity and well-being programmes, these temporary communities do not survive, and the initial effects of creativity and well-being quickly disappear.

This is a concern, both as an acute priority, as noted elsewhere in the report, with regard to ethical reservations around wrap-around community engagement and also in terms of broader community health. The policy and funding infrastructure that enables sustainable creative communities needs to recognise the key nodes involved in making spaces that outlive individual funding events. Put more pointedly, there needs to be an effort to move beyond a series of one-off initiatives, regardless of how impactful they are perceived to be.

Relationships and people make successful projects, and funding should support and underpin those valuable assets. There can be a certain sense of the tyrannical about novel projects, especially when it comes to funding. There is a perception that successful once-off projects might struggle to secure support for subsequent engagement, for a second iteration or on a more continued basis. Practitioners observe that the substantial time and effort dedicated to building solid relationships with key stakeholders is not always recognised for its potential to continue to generate positive outcomes through ongoing creative engagement. Indeed, upon completion of a successful or high-profile project designed especially for the context in which it has been employed, there can be a sense that the work there is now done and there seems to be no instinctive imperative for continuing that work, as if there may be more urgent work to be done elsewhere and that scarce resource should be put to better use in addressing that new challenge.

Examples of highly-successful projects, as profiled in the vignettes of practice in this report, share a common trait of longevity – whether in sustained individual artistic practice, or embedded community engagement, or through ongoing relationships with acute healthcare settings or other service providers. This is a theme echoed almost universally throughout the stories we encountered in the field, with multiple observations suggesting that where a repeated engagement takes place with a committed artist or facilitator who is familiar with the community, the impact of the work is significantly more efficacious. Practitioners and managers recognise the necessity of scaffolding engagement in communities, and building trust, particularly with disadvantaged community groups, and with those in acute care settings. Qualities such as care, trust, wisdom and empathy come to the fore in building sites and engagements such as these, and there is no short-cut way in which to develop them. The lasting impact of COVID-19 in damaging existing relationships and hindering the development of new engagements with marginalised groups was a recurring theme amongst those that we encountered.

Conducting meaningful participant consultation and delivering responsivity to participant needs underpins successful creativity and well-being initiatives. This is particularly crucial for those working in acute settings or with vulnerable groups, and this responsivity often generates additional well-being outcomes. The debate and discussion regarding participant (often child) voice which takes place in the mainstream discourses of the arts,

education and healthcare is echoed in this context, but with added poignancy and challenge, given that many of those towards whom this work is steered are rendered voiceless in some ways because of challenges of health, age or marginalisation. In an acute paediatric setting, for example, this takes on another layer of meaning not often encountered in creativity projects elsewhere in that the children have literally no choices available to them in their limited (of necessity) context – often around mobility, food, clothing, play, friends, travel, etc. Choice in terms of their creative engagement then takes on a whole additional significance and potentially the greatest well-being that can be engendered in that situation is one whereby the voice and choice of the participant is solicited and celebrated, maybe around something as ostensibly simple as a choice of music or a choice of colour – things that many of us in the world take utterly for granted. This kind of listening to participants underpins the best practice for many in the sector, for whom many also describe the humbling experience of entering into such contexts with ambitious ideas with regard to the sorts of changes they might bring about but for whom the reality of the encounter was much smaller, gentler, more passive and ultimately, more powerful for them and efficacious for the participant.

Delivering on participant-articulated needs and wants when it comes to creative activity is essential for buy-in within communities, as well as ensuring successful engagement and outcomes. Intersectoral approaches linking into existing organisations offer the best model to build sustainable creative communities. That sustainability must turn both ways, that is that the success and challenges of such work must provide benefits and challenges for the sponsoring organisations and policymakers as well as for the community groups involved.

11. Practice Vignette: Music & Health Ireland

Background

Music & Health Ireland (MHI) is a not-for-profit limited company organisation formerly known as *Kids Classics* that provides high quality music workshops in educational, healthcare and community settings[15]. It was established by professional cellist Gráinne Hope in 2008 and she continues to run the organisation. MHI seeks to deliver music workshops by professional artists for schools and families as well as deliver music programmes in healthcare and community settings delivered by artists with appropriate training for that setting. It also facilitates further training and development opportunities for artists who wish to work in healthcare settings. MHI has a mission to provide access to skilled and experienced musicians to the community, and particularly to provide access where provision is limited. It wishes to offer participant-centred live music interactions regardless of the age, culture or circumstances of the participants. It also has a role in advocating for and developing strategic partnerships, networks and collaborations within the sector and the communities it works in as well as nationally and internationally.

Range and nature of projects/operations

The workshops offered by MHI run across a number of areas of differing provision involving music and healthcare. The flagship programme, *Kids Classics* offers music workshops in children's hospitals & hospital schools). *Medical Notes* offers workshops and performances in general hospitals and *Musical Memories* does likewise in nursing homes and day care settings. *Training Notes* is an opportunity for musicians and healthcare staff to undertake training courses and mentoring opportunities. New parts of the MHI portfolio include the *Musicians-On-Call* project undertaken in the Mid-Western region in 2022 and which involves work with older participants as well as professional training opportunities for musicians

[15] See https://musicandhealthireland.ie/ and http://kidsclassics.ie/

interested in music and healthcare. The aptly named *Tea, Chats & Tunes* was a project which began as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. It was based in Co. Meath and through it MHI gave residents of nursing homes and their wider families the opportunity to share music, conversation and memories but also the chance to make new ones. It was initially carried out via the medium of *Zoom* at a time when that was the only contact possible for residents and later continued with in person performances and workshops.

Illustrations of practice

The music in children's hospitals programme brings the MHI musicians to six hospitals and one hospice nation-wide through the *Kids Classics* programme. The programme was established in 2009 as a pilot-project in conjunction with the *National Concert Hall* (NCH) and later *Community Foundation for Ireland* (CFI). It involves a group of musicians visiting healthcare settings and performing for individual patients and/or groups of patients as well as the healthcare workers and parents/carers present with their patients. The decision regarding whether it is an individual or group of patients is very often dictated by the particularly medical/mobility needs of the patient. The project also offers workshops for school-aged children based during the school year. An evaluation report (*The Bare Necessities of Life*) on the reactions to the *Kids Classics* music programme in a children's hospital was published in 2015[16]. It found that 'music helped to distract children from illness, enhanced their relaxation, provided stimulation, [and] learning opportunities' with positive effects including enjoyment happiness and relaxation and enjoyment (p.16). Parents and hospital staff also reported benefits and no distraction from such work. The report points out that whilst music in hospitals is no replacement for medical care, it is a cost-effective way of promoting a sense of well-being all parties.

[16] Kids Classics Evaluation report: http://kidsclassics.ie/index.php/2015/10/21/kids-classics-evaluation-report-2015/ and a YouTube video explainer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isv9tMHfUQE

The *Musicians-On-Call* project was instigated in the Mid-Western region in 2022[17] and involved work with older members of the community engaging with professional musicians playing live in retirement and care settings. This project is led by *Limerick Culture and Arts Office* in collaboration with *Age-Friendly Limerick* and *Healthy Limerick* and delivered by *Music and Health Ireland*. It is delivered in partnership with, the *Health Service Executive* (HSE) and the Arts Offices of Clare and Tipperary and it is funded through *Creative Ireland*. It aims to promote well-being through improving general quality of life and cultural access for people living and working healthcare settings. The visiting musicians tailor their performance set to each context in which they play through engagement with the participants who had an active and responsive role in the performance rather than simply 'consuming' the performance. The project was delivered by experienced MHI musicians and offered local musicians in the Mid-West the chance to work alongside their more experienced colleagues and gain invaluable experience of working in a structured and thoughtful fashion in healthcare settings.

Creative and wellbeing intersections

Music and Health Ireland is an applied arts specific organisation with a mission to broaden access to music and with a special orientation towards and history in music in healthcare. It engages with a large range of healthcare providers as well as local government and community organisations on a nationwide basis. MHI has provided live music performance in both acute health settings and long-term residential care for 15 years. As a result of this, the organisation has developed strong working practices and clear ideas of what constitutes well-being and how it can be creatively enabled. Within this is a clear focus on the individual or group for whom the workshop/performance is being offered, what potential benefit they might derive from it and how it can be a participative event, with a degree of choice being exercised by the participants even if they are not in a position to sing, play an instrument or make a sound.

[17] For more information on Musicians-on-Call see a YouTube video explainer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8ab67VvWEQ and press coverage: https://www.ilovelimerick.ie/musicians-on-call/

The wellness at the heart of the MHI experiences comes from a belief in there being a joy and inherent benefit in having music in a person's life and surroundings, even at the most difficult or stressful moments in life, as opposed to any kind of anticipated effect coming about as a result of the workshop or performance. In order to ensure that comes about consistently, MHI draws upon the services of a coterie of professional artists with proven musicianship skills but also just as importantly, training in music in healthcare settings and significant amounts of experience garnered over the course of their careers. MHI also provides and encourages training opportunities for professional artists as a matter of course with a stated belief in contributing to an improvement of provision within the field arts and health and improving network opportunities for organisations and practitioners. Its work is influenced by leading international practice in the field, such as the *Musique et Santé* model of professional artist development and the organisation continues to be research informed by being involved in the work of the *Global Brain Health Institute* (jointly hosted by University of California, San Francisco and Trinity College Dublin).

Unique Characteristics

Music & Health Ireland (MHI) works alongside and in partnership with the health sector but is funded and organised independently to it. As an organisation, it presents a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of well-being honed through many years of engagement with service-users, patients and medical and allied professionals involved in care-giving and treatment. The work of MHI has broadened out in recent years, no doubt somewhat prompted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and now has a range of sister projects to the original *Kids Classic* initiative, though there is consistency of practice in evidence across the aspects of the organisation's work and all deal with varying aspects of music and well-being.

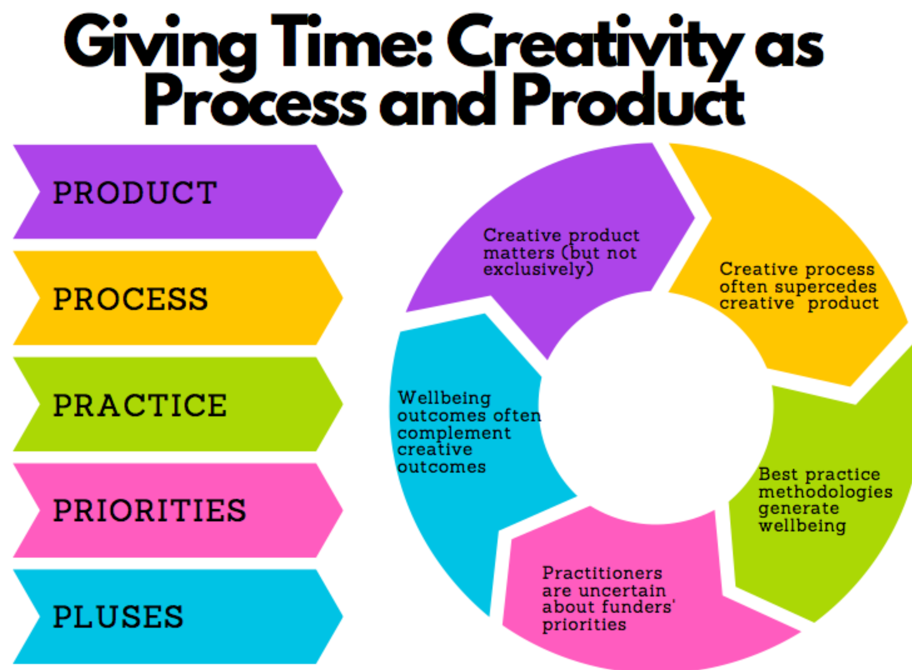
The organisation utilises professional musicians and trains them to become professional facilitators of music and well-being work, often working in the most sensitive of settings. Uniquely, it offers training opportunities to participating artists. There is a sense of MHI being professionally focused and research influenced with a deeply reflective mode of

practice and an openness to new developments and influences in the arts and health sphere. The practice of the organisation is based on a participatory model, even if that participation is as simple as a choice of musical performance. There are multiple understandings of affect in operation based on the context in which each participant finds themselves and the judgement and experience of the facilitator/musician is entrusted with gauging what approach and outcome is best in each individual outcome. The work is not a music therapy offering but instead the emphasis directly on the performance and reception of live music.

Funding for MHI comes from partnership initiatives with healthcare providers, and there has been significant engagement with *Creative Ireland* funding streams, particularly during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. A partnership model in evidence across all the projects of the organisation with different sectoral and geographical partners depending on project design and delivery. MHI has a small core team which diversifies into a range of contexts for delivery, and it is clearly driven by the vision and ability of its founder who has a clear passion for and insight into the work and the role of music in the lives of those who perhaps need it most. There has been some national profile and awareness of the work of the MHI[18].

[18] https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/music-team-strikes-a-chord-with-sick-children-in-hospital-1.1491827

12.Thematic Discussion: Giving Time – Creativity as Process and Product



Creative activity takes different forms, and conversations around product-centred and process-centred creativity are central to understanding the relationship of creativity to well-being. It is clear that an exclusive focus on a product (e.g. performance, artefact, exhibition) could detract from creative engagement as an experiential undertaking. For many in their recounting of community-based creative activities, there is a continual tension and negotiation between product and process. For some, they are read as binaries, polarities to which one subscribes to one or the other. For the majority they are different points on the same creative continuum, with product representing a destination which may or may not be reached and process the nature of the journey that will take you along that path. The importance lies in one not overshadowing the other, nor indeed a sense of failure or incompleteness should one overshadow the other or indeed be absent. Creativity is permissible and achievable in all instances and at all points along the continuum.

Developments in the Irish funding landscape around creative activity and well-being have brought about changes to the kinds of projects that are funded, as explored in the earlier part of this report. There is perceived to be a new sense of tolerance and encouragement

towards a process—oriented journey, with perhaps less pressure to have a grand opening, performance or recording available as evident for funders and partners that good work has indeed taken place. Time and space to play and explore as part of the creative process are felt to be systemically more acceptable than may have been the case in the past, and the perception is that the system is open to a greater processual orientation.

The challenge for practitioners is twofold. It lies in moving away from perhaps more traditional practices where great value and stock was placed on a 'showing' of some kind; and, in articulating the nature and value of a greater process orientation in grant applications and project evaluations. This change of emphasis and practice vocabulary will take greater professional confidence, increased levels of experience in the field of practice and naturally, some time, to achieve. It represents a paradigm shift away from a materialist orientation characteristic of traditional arts practice to the creative, play and experiential orientation at the heart of much social and applied arts praxis.

Even given this necessary evolution, there remains challenges in navigating this continuum. It is sometimes felt that the product which emerges from a project does not necessarily represent the range and depth of creativity activity and well-being generated through the engagement on the project. That is, that it portrays a much less than complete picture of the work undertaken and there is an inherent danger of the work being judged on the (necessarily incomplete) basis of what is visible or heard. It is also recognised amongst practitioners that producing an artefact ties the creative process to a pre-defined objective, which can run counter to the purposes of the well-being objective also present in a particular project. There is a kind of creative chicken and egg phenomenon evident to many in work of this nature: in explicitly setting out to work towards a final creative product of some kind, such an intention may preclude more focus on well-being which could potentially be achieved by lengthening of changing the process which participants are undertaking. At the back of it all is the recognition by practitioners that they will have to go back looking for funding again, more than likely to the same agency, and that application may be better served by ensuring that the project they are currently working on is finished out as planned and applied for.

It is also recognised in the field that different projects require different kinds of outcomes, and that in some creativity and well-being projects, the product can be an

absolutely integral and natural culmination of the processual journey. The well-being value may lie hugely in the artefact produced, be it a mosaic, recording, puppet or performance. For individual constrained by health circumstances, be it age, illness, disability or those at an end-of-life stage, it is worth remembering that such an artefact can have a potent value and significance of creation at a time when it may be possible to physically achieve little else in a hospital, care or hospice setting.

The quality of the work undertaken, whether product- or process-oriented, is crucial to all practitioners and to their understanding of participant needs. This maxim is as true with regard to the quality of the practice facilitation as it is with regard to the nature of the work undertake. Quality creative activity generates well-being, and valuing participant input and best practice recognises and respects participant input within their own creative abilities. Through creating a happy, safe, comfortable, participative, and creatively rewarding environment where participants feel that their presence and efforts are valued, it is arguable that facilitators and practitioner fulfil their most important task. It may well be that the sculptures created, or the songs sung may have a varied standard, and indeed, may not be deemed fit for 'external consumption' but should the participants leave feeling validated, recognised, and happy, it is arguable that the creative well-being journey is as valid and fulfilled as possible.

The consensus that we have heard in all the conversations we have undertaken is that that creative activity regularly generates incidental well-being outcomes. This resonates deeply with people who work in creativity and well-being. The essence of best practice in creative engagement for many practitioners is of enablement, in that your presence should be a selfless one and your voice should not the strongest voice in the room. That simple maxim in itself fosters well-being through creating the right environment of stimulation and generosity. Informed creative methodologies generate well-being by virtue of their integrity and best practice.

13. Practice Vignette: Anna Newell

Background

Anna Newell is an independent theatre artist who specialises in making work for young and very young audiences and for young people with complex needs. Her work for children with complex needs creates immersive, sensory and responsive theatre adventures for the participants, and it is unique in an Irish setting.

Anna was formerly Artistic Director of *Replay Theatre Co.* in Belfast and held roles at Queen's University Belfast and in Scotland with *Dundee Repertory Theatre* prior to that. Now based in Bray, Co. Wicklow she runs an independent production company, which makes 'shows [which] are informed and inspired by their audiences at every stage of their creation and have human connection at their very heart.'[19]

The work is driven by the vision of human connection and the right of all children to enjoy the arts ability to create and enable that connection. Anna is committed to making high quality theatre adventures which are made in creative consultation with the under-served audiences she makes the work for and those who live and work with them. Anna is also fully committed to advocating for work of this nature and the audiences it serves, as well as building networks and partnerships that 'extend, enrich and embed' this work and establish it as a norm in our society.

Range and nature of projects/operations

Anna Newell's production company produces myriad projects, all of which are newly devised and created and typically run individually (non-concurrently), though some are revived and re-staged. As well as sharing the common characteristic of being made for early years audiences, babies and children with complex needs, they are each bespoke and start

[19] About Anna Newell: https://www.annanewell.ie/about/

with a differing stimulus or pre-text, very often driven by a sensory input such as light, pattern, movement or music. Her comprehensive web archive[20] shows nearly 30 shows/productions created since beginning work independently with a balance of output across the three intended specialist audiences.

Newell's work has ranged from the innovative *BabyDay* which was a year-long engagement programme in Belfast nurturing an arts approach at the very start of a baby's life, to productions such as *Reassembled, Slightly Askew* which was an immersive sonic experience which audience members experience lying in a hospital bed. Anna's first fully home-grown piece in Ireland was *Bliss* and her repertoire extends from *Hush-a-Bye* involving puppets and an immersive environment and live music for the very young, to *Adventures in My Ears,* an immersive sonic adventure for children aged 6-10 years experienced individually through headphones.

Illustrations of practice

Sing me to the Sea is an immersive multi-sensory adventure for children and young people with complex needs. Three performers performed the piece in a hydropool with three audience members per show, each with an adult companion, all fully immersed in the water. Each of the performers take the audience 'on a magical journey of exquisite harmony singing and gentle water play with the sessions designed so that they can respond to each individual child'[21]. The performance is designed to soothe and stimulate and to offer aural, tactile, kinaesthetic and visual stimuli. Originally created in 2018 with funding from *Wicklow Arts Office* and in conjunction with *Enable Ireland* and *St Catherine's School*, it was to be restaged and tour nationally in 2020 but was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and had to be re-oriented for 'dry' performances on land. One water-based performance did take place in *St Gabriel's School* in Limerick (produced in conjunction with *Lime Tree Theatre*).

[20] Anna Newell Archive: https://www.annanewell.ie/archive-work/

[21] Sing Me to the Sea: https://www.annanewell.ie/work/sing-me-to-the-sea/

babyGROOVE is described as 'a chilled out 70's-inspired adventure for babies under 12 months and their adults, full of gorgeous harmony singing'. The 20-minute immersive performance involves 4 performers with up to 8 babies each with an accompanying adult sitting in a tent-like structure which is filled with moving projections reminiscent of the 1970s and accompanied by a bespoke soundtrack with which the four performers vocally harmonise. The performers engage through facial expression, gesture and gentle touch with the babies to either side of them. The performance is a journey without destination and the aim is to encourage reaction and participation from the babies. The creative consultation sessions during rehearsal were hosted by *Trinity College Dublin* in collaboration with the *Foundations of Cognition (FOUNDCOG)* project and *The Global Brain Health Institute's Creative Brain Week*. The piece then toured nationally to venues involved in the *Network for Extraordinary Audiences,* which Anna hosts though her company.

Creative and wellbeing intersections

Of all the vignettes of practice included in this research, this work is perhaps least explicitly oriented towards well-being outcomes and Newell would not describe her work as intentioned in that manner, with her intended affects being clearly in the realm of the artistic and connective. However, given the orientation of the work, particularly given that it is aimed towards the babies, the very young and those with complex needs, it must be considered as having well-being at the heart of what it does, in the context of how that term is understood in this report. It is included here to exemplify the manner in which some well-being ends are achieved through creative modes of engagement without explicitly trying to fix or address or engage those issues directly – but just provides opportunities for people to take part in the work in the hope and knowledge that they benefit as a result of that participation. It is broadly ameliorative in the context of the nascent taxonomy of well-being proposed in section five of this report.

Newell's work clearly (and ones assumes, deliberately) eschews the language of well-being, avoiding any sense of this work being effect-oriented in any kind of fixative manner,

with its focus firmly instead on the creation of artistic effect and wondrous journeys of adventure.

Unique Characteristics

Newell's work is clearly and uncompromisingly framed – the why of it, she tells us, is towards making beautiful connections with extraordinary audiences. This is achieved through utilising scientific perspectives to frame her practice, by engaging with politics in order to drive her approach, and by seeking beauty as the alchemy which binds it all together[22].

The work is very much characterised as arts (theatre) practice, developed for and in the arts sector and funded primarily through the Arts Council and venue networks. It brings the young, very young and those with complex needs into formal performance and arts spaces, arenas from which they have traditionally experienced a degree of exclusion. Newell's track-record of work demonstrates widespread collaboration with other artists, venues, centres and academics, the latter as evidenced in the unique collaboration in recent works and in the unique way in which the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic were navigated. The importance of this community, both in terms of participation in it and in leading it to establishing new and more inclusive norms of participation are exemplified in Anna's leadership in the establishment of a network for extraordinary audiences.

The work is driven by an individual with lots of experience and a demonstrable passion and vision for the work, but who also collaborates with and employs a diverse range of professional theatre performers and collaborating artists who have a commitment to work in this space. It is influenced by ongoing scientific research, particularly in the area of neuroscience, and it is highly informed by a rights agenda for children and the arts. At the heart of the practice is a strong, advocative practitioner voice who uses a prominent national profile to leverage greater awareness of the work for the young, very young and those with complex needs.

[22] The Why of It: https://www.annanewell.ie/about/why/

Newell's practice based on a participatory and responsive model, with participation understood in the gentlest possible way. There is no sense of the practice being therapeutic in any way, instead being based around a model of inclusion and access to the arts being a right and entitlement of all children and young people, especially those for whom their complex needs places them at the edge of formal provision in our cultural landscape. Their being well involves them coming to arts centres and venues to see beautiful work that transports them to another, imaginative, domain.

14. Thematic Discussion: Taking Care – Participant and Practitioner Wellbeing

As previously discussed, those we encountered in our journey through the field expressed a range of understandings about well-being and its role in their delivery of creativity initiatives. Well-being is broadly understood as a holistic phenomenon that is both collectively and individually experienced, and that needs to be cultivated for each person, community and/or organisation involved in creative activity.

For some, there is a physical dimension to well-being characterised perhaps in a physical reaction or an uplift in mood. Others reject the terminology of well-being but embraced the underpinning characteristics in that creating the optimal conditions for connection is though creating spaces where people feel safe and where they feel comfortable and where they feel welcome. This is at the heart of being well. For yet others, providing a social and community engagement through creative means leads to enjoyment, participation and participants feeling well, though it is not expressed as well-being. Such communal creative activity demonstrates the huge need for connection, with the intergenerational connection between facilitator and participants of an older age also of striking importance.

The synchronicity between communality and creativity in delivering well-being is clear: being together leads to being well.

A notable emergent theme relates to appropriate well-being objectives. Practitioners are acutely aware of the limitations of their own capacity to generate well-being. Whilst and without exception, everyone that we encountered demonstrated sensitivity and alertness to the ethics of care in creativity practice, practitioners with advanced training were notably attuned to the dynamics of protecting, as well as promoting, well-being in the shared creative space. Whilst there is a willingness to engage with well-being, the boundaries of engagement are a matter of concern. Put simply, the point at which a creative engagement is a useful journey of exploration or moment of catharsis is finely balanced against the possibility of potentially triggering or retraumatising a participant, or entering a context where the damage done is accentuated rather than alleviated. The fear of well-being work going wrong is a real one, particularly those without any specialist training. Whilst creative spaces can deliver a forum for collectivity and resilience, they must also of necessity be gentle and slow-paced spaces, driven by both the needs and unique context of each of the participants, if they even exist. Whilst one person in a choir may be dealing with the grief of the loss of a partner, the next person individual, of the same age and state of health, is joyous at the recent birth of grandchild. Sometimes the well-being is about the singing and the ability of individual participants to turn up and be present in that space. By definition, such wildly differing encounters makes planning for well-being complex.

Ethical questions around engaging with vulnerable populations are also a frequent point of discussion. This is a point intimately related to the nature of short-term creativity and well-being projects, under or restricted funding for projects, precarity for the artists involved, and a lack of follow-on services for participants. There is understandable concern about engaging in work of a specific intent, building a relationship with a particular group of participants and then never turning up again, because the project has run its course. Expectations and possibly hopes are raised and then potentially dashed, which would seem to run contrary to an expressed well-being intent on the part of the funders and participants. For leaders and facilitators of such work, there is a real conundrum at play here, with projects caught between the need for this kind of work, their desire to provide it, and the realisation that it may never continue or happen again. For them, there is a serious issue of well-being in

walking away from such work with the sense that a rich tapestry of creative engagement has been reduced to something akin to a sense of being a box-ticked at the end of a job done.

Relatedly, artist wellbeing while delivering creativity work is a key theme. The intensity of creatively working towards well-being, particularly in acute settings, came up in many conversations. Examples of different approaches by funders, both good and bad, illustrate the scope for poor practice in the field. Some schemes allow for artist/practitioner care with mentorship and debriefing possibilities inbuilt into projects, particularly for those working in acute care, end-of-life situations or in paediatric contexts. The emotional labour undertaken, and burden carried by the practitioner is acknowledged. Unfortunately, there is also a lack of consultation and care for artist/practitioner well-being within a creative contexts. Often, emotional or dialogic supports are not provided in order that facilitators can do the best work possible, something regarded as an absolute essential for many. Ultimately, there needs to be a sector-wide realisation that best practice means that practitioner well-being needs to be supported in order to best support that of others.

Finally, from a practitioner point of view, successful initiatives involve respecting the well-being of all stakeholders, including those beyond the participant-practitioner dyad. Funded initiatives which allow for engagement with a broader range of community stakeholders in hospitals, care centres, schools, community organisations and other relevant bodies deliver better outcomes. Within institutional contexts, cultivating staff buy-in is essential to success. Having them briefed and on-side with regard to the nature and purpose of the work is one expression of this. The next level involves fostering their participation in aspects of the work. Achieving both of these ends leads true contexts of equitable partnership, which can be a unified and powerful force for well-being. Unfortunately, it can also be the opposite in cases where this is not achieved, with potential negative implications for creativity and well-being projects in contexts where the leadership of an organisation do not comes on board with initiatives, which can then become a real source of stress, tension and frustration.

The most crucial element of a successful creativity and well-being project is very simple: responsive consultation. This may be simple, but it is hard-won, demanding a true exercise in dialogue; speaking frankly and listening carefully. It also demands a level of

versatility, flexibility and humility on the part of the practitioner/facilitator, which has to be matched by a keen and open focus on everyone's well-being on the part of the partners and hosts.

15. Conclusions and Recommendations

A moment of unique opportunity

Well-being and creativity have significant purchase in Irish society and abroad at present. It is clear from research literature and from engaging with the field that they are concepts of relevance and importance amongst artists, facilitators, audiences, service-users, and stakeholders. There are enhanced levels of funding available for creative work through multiple state and local agencies, some of it resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which also precipitated unique demand and response from practitioners. There is also evidence of a 'social turn' in the arts more generally in Ireland. This cumulatively results in a unique space in the history of artistic and creative activity in this country in which affective creative practice that holds well-being to the fore as a purpose and intent can flourish. The possibility of this space should be maximised, and structures put in place that ensure that socially engaged creative practice is valued as part of permanent creative and artistic structures and policy.

Conceptual confusion

Creativity and well-being are enigmatic concepts in that they tend to have a firm 'lived' understanding but little shared or common understanding either within the sector or in society more broadly. This is not particularly problematic within projects as each have their own working definitions: often these are implicit rather than explicitly described. It is important to acknowledge the lack of conceptual clarity with regard to what both terms mean, and particularly at the point of their intersection.

In order to avoid a repeated process of definition and redefinition taking place within individual projects and funding calls, the development of a conceptual continuum is recommended in describing creativity and well-being practice. Such a matrix of creativity and well-being should differentiate between foundational, ameliorative and interventionist aspirations in well-being practice and allow for both process and product orientations as well

as outcomes ranging from the affective to the aesthetic. A matrix of creative and well-being practice such as this will inevitably have its limitations but will also allow for a base model whereby practitioners can locate, hone and enhance their practice, and indeed innovate away from.

Well-being within a cultural context

It should be clearly established that the well-being of participants has always been central to creative practice in Ireland and as a characteristic of a unique aesthetic heritage. Recognising this allows a move away from an undue or unique focus on interventionist and effect-driven ('fixative') models of well-being practice and makes space for communal ('being together') and celebratory modes of well-being creative practice. It also alleviates some of the perceived tensions between product and process and discussed more extensively in the next section. There is no specific recommendation here that impacts upon practice, but in policy the challenge is to envisage the parameters of well-being as framed in such a manner that they actively encourage 'small-bang' type projects, and not always in creative work that is designed to ameliorate a particular area of disadvantage or perceived need. They do not and should not require that each artist perform 'heroic acts' in saving others through creative engagement. Creative acts of well-being are normative and every day in many parts of Irish society and should be promoted and celebrated as such.

Creativity is a journey as well as a destination

The practices and practitioners represented in this work see their work as contextually situated and multi-faceted in terms of how it operates. They also see the outcomes of their work as more than a performance or artefacts; often it can be as momentary as a glance or a touching of hands. Creative work in the well-being domain is defined by ongoing acts of care, trust, collectivity, and contemplation. These are deeply subjective to each of the participants in the project. It is important that the idea of creativity at the heart of *Creative Ireland* (CI)

policy allows for such subjectivity and individualised meaning, and for a creativity that is ongoing rather than momentary, communal but also individual.

Evaluation of creativity and well-being projects

Impact and evaluation are concepts to the fore in this research. Very often that discussion is tied to the importance of proving impact and ensure continued or new funding. Some in the field feel pressure to prove efficacy of effect (a 'change'), but our perception is that a sense of impact from their work which is transparent and communicable to stakeholders is held to be vitally important. There is some frustration expressed at the lack of guidance offered by funders in terms of what evaluations should consist of, and issues of confidence and competence amongst practitioners about not having the requisite skills required to undertake an evaluation process.

Time and energy are devoted to evaluation of projects, sometimes with limited impact for both the external audience (stakeholders) and for the practitioner /company /organisation itself. If evaluation work is to be carried out within a project, it should have a clear formative and reflective function and bring value to the practitioner both in making sense of the project that has just taken place, but also in taking their work forward. This report wishes to offer two considerations regarding evaluation, in this section and the next.

Firstly, it is recommended that it be made clear in the awarding of funding that evaluation of work is not mandatory as part of the funding award. Practitioners should be allowed to practice, and consideration should be given to removing the need for any kind of evaluation mechanism from projects in order to allow best possible use of funds awarded to projects for creativity and well-being work.

Intentionality and evaluation

It is evident in this report that a discussion needs to take place with regard to the relationship between intent and impact (affect and effect); between that which is desired as

an outcome from creativity and well-being work and that which is evaluated and reported. It is important that this is research-informed in order to best influence both policy and practice.

Should funded individuals or organisations wish to evaluate their work, it is recommended that such evaluations include five elements, which are of equal standing in any report: (i) a statement of initial project intent against which outcomes are referenced; (ii) voices of participants which have been appropriately gathered; (iii) a critical reflection on the part of the funded individual/organisation offering a brief narrative around the extent to which the intent of the work was achieved, but also a statement as to successes and challenges encountered in making the work; (iv) the metrics of engagement – who, where, and when; (v) the cost basis of the work – a transparent financial statement of how the funds awarded were utilised. It is recommended that CI develop a template for such reporting which is made available to funded parties should they wish to incorporate it in their reporting. It is further recommended that additional bursaries/awards which are ring-fenced for evaluation be offered by CI.

Sectoral evaluation of projects

Along with evaluation templates, consideration should be given to moving evaluation to a national basis in the form of a national project, participation in which can be made available to funded projects.

In conjunction with this it is recommended that CI begin to consider how sectoral evaluation can best take place of work in creativity and well-being with a view to designing and implementing an arm's length evaluation of funded work in a particular calendar period or fund.

The second phase of *Creative Ireland* (CI)

Creative Ireland has brought a level of focus, support, and visibility to practice in creativity and well-being. It has brought a lot of funding possibilities. It has also engendered

the involvement of multiple government and state agencies and brought a clarity of focus to their participation. Over the first period of CI, this work was of necessity expansive and exploratory. With the advent of the second period of CI, greater clarity is called for in some facets of its operation.

This is particularly the case regarding the issuance of funding calls, the criteria for selection of successful work, and the transparency of evaluation methods used in selection processes.

Greater promotion of available funding opportunities could be achieved through the creation of a specific page containing such calls on the CI website. Clear rounds of funding calls should be established on a semi-annual or quarterly basis, with clearly identified and targeted recipient groups or project types in mind and with adequate lead time to ensure that practitioners have appropriate time in which to complete applications.

It is recommended that a transparent process for the evaluation of award applications be shared, with appropriate scoring matrices and applicant feedback put in places as facets of best practice.

National database of funded creativity and well-being projects

To promote greater insight into the hugely positive work taking place in creativity and well-being, it is suggested that a detailed and publicly accessible database be created that records projects funded by *Creative Ireland* and including details of projects, artists and organisations funded, for what amount and to what end. This is to improve transparency and accessibility to publicly funded work and to allow practitioners access to data in order to both create networks to support their practice and to build upon work and projects previously delivered. In time, such a database should be expanded beyond the parameters of the CI project to encompass projects which pre-dated CI or emergent or unfunded work, with a view to enhancing sectoral development and growth.

Centrality of partnership

A clear theme running throughout this project is that partnership is central to the applied arts, which is the umbrella term for the majority of creativity and well-being projects. This research indicates that such partnerships are unique and constructed over time and on a project-by-project basis. In a traditional arts or creative engagement, a host, room or venue is solicited or a slot on a curated programme procured. Creative engagement projects are of their nature, targeted and typically involve participants who may be in a precarious situation, and for whom additional needs may pertain or there may be specific communicative requirements. These projects require, in order to be the best that they can be, multi-partner and multi-agency participation. The centrality but also the uniqueness and the precarity of such partnerships should be embedded in the framing of policy and funding awards.

National centre for training and research

Continuing with the theme of partnership it is recommended that consideration be given in time to the establishment of a national centre for training and research in the applied arts and creativity. Such a centre should be established to offer bespoke training to artists, educators and community workers who wish to work in social, applied and interventionist areas of artistic engagement, in this case creativity and well-being. Such a centre should focus primarily on the unique skills and facilitation training necessary to enable such work, supplementing rather than supplanting the bespoke nature of the artistic models in hand. The centre would provide specific training in ethics, evaluation and partnership. A centre could be developed in association with a third-level institution and should actively involve a lead agency in the field, for example an ETB body currently delivering a Local Creative Youth Partnership project.

Artist and facilitator well-being

Finally, and perhaps most importantly comes consideration of and reflection on the roles of the people who do the work. Artists and facilitators working in creativity and well-

being are precariously employed and this precarity has been accentuated in many cases because of the COVID-19 pandemic, notwithstanding the additional funding opportunities which have been made available. In addition, what comes through clearly in this study are that the onerous demands of them in undertaking work in this area and the extent to which they draw upon their own well-being to do so.

Ireland has an uneven record in establishing projects in social and community arts. Historically, projects in these field are often established on a pilot or trial basis. There is a historical legacy however, of the State not following though and committing sustainable funding to such work. In order to ensure continued good practice in creativity and well-being, to ensure the development of work in the field and to attract successful practitioner to this work, provision should be made that it is a core part of arts/ creativity/ health /well-being provision in Ireland.

Given: the (i) unique training and experience requirements demanded of practitioners and facilitators; (ii) the centrality of partnership to models of best practice; and (iii) the need to retain experienced practitioners in this arena and to help them avoid precarious employment situations, the recommendation is that consideration be given to funding projects in a strategic and medium-term manner. What this looks like in reality is that CI and sister agencies adopt a 5-year strategy embracing a number of strands of creativity and well-being work, and that a commitment be made to fund projects for the period of the strategy.

To further enhance and develop professional well-being, the voices and experiences of practitioners and facilitators should be sought and engaged with in the development of policy and implementation of strategy. This can be achieved by putting in place professional peer panels and standing consultative groups, participation in which is paid for self-employed practitioners, and who meet regularly and have input of consequence into policy discussions.

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