

Creative Place Review Kilmarnock

29 February 2016

Education Scotland in partnership with Creative Scotland undertook three reviews of Creative Place Award winners in late 2015. The Creative Place Awards recognise communities where people work together to celebrate and promote their town, village or area through the arts and culture. Creative Scotland and three Creative Place winners Peebles, Kilmarnock and Helmsdale wished to have an objective evaluation of their impacts and outcomes. Each organisation produced a self-evaluation and engaged in dialogue with HM Inspectors as part of the process. In each of the reviews inspection teams visited a wide range of provision. At the end of the review week HM Inspectors reported the findings to those involved. These reports will publish at the end of February 2016.

In Kilmarnock strengths were noted in terms of being a vibrant, diverse and ambitious cultural community with skilled creative leaders who encourage participation and appreciation of the arts. HM Inspectors noted that culture is valued as a key part of regeneration with investment in a range of high quality cultural venues helping to grow the local economy. HM Inspectors suggested that partners might continue to improve by identifying gaps in provision and address unmet need and enhance progression pathways for participants.

1. Context

The town of Kilmarnock has delivered and supported creative innovation across the arts, sciences and business over the centuries. Kilmarnock today has a population of around 44,000 and lies at the centre of East Ayrshire. During the past eight years, culture has played a significant role in the regeneration of the area. The cultural infrastructure is being developed to support new ways of telling the story of Kilmarnock's past and inform its future. Heritage, the creative arts and partnership working have all played a critical role in promoting the area.

Since July 2013, East Ayrshire Leisure (EAL) has responsibility for the operation and management of cultural, countryside and sports facilities and locations and provides cultural, sports, heritage, arts and countryside development, health and fitness and outdoor learning programmes. Kilmarnock received a Creative Scotland Creative Place Award in 2013 to fund a partnership project between EAL, Centrestage Music Theatre and Town Centre Management to enhance, develop and promote cultural activities.

2. How has this creative place impacted on the lives of residents and visitors?

The Creative Place Award and its positive press coverage has contributed to a growing confidence and belief in Kilmarnock with an increased willingness from people to get involved in improving the infrastructure and projecting a positive image of the town. The *Creative Place Artistic Programme* included 94 events in 14 venues and attracted 58,260 visitors. At least a quarter of those attending Kilmarnock festivals are from outside the local area. This helps to project a positive image of Kilmarnock to the rest of Scotland. During the year of Creative Place tourism figures for East Ayrshire show increased spend of £16.2 million on the previous year and a 21% increase in visits to the area.

Participation and interest in theatre is high, for example *Centrestage Music Theatre* holds around 90 performances each year with total audience figures being over 19,000 in the last year. Awareness raising during the year of Creative Place helped to increase membership at *Centrestage* and attendance at the Palace Theatre and Grand Hall venue recorded an increase in visitor footfall from 192,293 in 2013-14 to 210,317 in 2014-15.

Children, young people and adults enjoy a strong sense of community within cultural provision such as the *East Ayrshire Youth Theatre* and *Centrestage*. As a result they gain in confidence and self-esteem. Young people develop their skills and talents, improve their wellbeing and for a few this is positively life changing. Some youth theatre members are progressing to study musical theatre at various courses throughout Scotland and the rest of the UK. However, partners do not know the full extent of this and how many return to the area. Opportunities for all ages in the community to perform, dance and sing is significantly impacting on the wellbeing, confidence and ambition of those involved. However, there is scope to further recognise people's achievements through an increased use of accredited youth, adult and arts awards within current creative provision.

There is a good gender balance in theatre arts activities with different age groups being catered for such as *Teeny Tappers*, the *Unlikely Lads* and *Gie it L'aldy*. The *Musical Generations* programme provides high quality creative opportunities for older people with dementia, carers and people with learning difficulties to come together to sing, dance and perform musical theatre. The positive, creative and supportive environment provides enjoyment and enhances the lives of participants and reduces social isolation.

Adults with profound additional support needs are increasing their confidence and capacity to interact and communicate with others through East Ayrshire Council (EAC) and EAL's *iDance*.

Group members are improving body awareness and physical health and the pace of learning is both challenging and inclusive. Group sessions and public performances support members to make positive behaviour changes and this has a significant positive impact on the wellbeing of participants, families and carers.

Catalyst Communities uses the arts to support and improve the lives of vulnerable people in and beyond Kilmarnock. For example, prisoners are better prepared to integrate into the community through engagement in a person centred art, music and employability programme. They gain in confidence, develop essential life skills and a few discover hidden talents. As a result, a few ex-offenders have moved into volunteering or paid employment.

Participants report high levels of satisfaction across creative provision although their role in shaping the cultural offer should be further developed. There are some strong examples of creative provision being effectively targeted at equality groups. Partners now need to use and analyse data better to identify and address any barriers to participation in universal cultural programmes and events. The Creative Minds team could share their expertise to support this and help partners to capture the impact of culture on individual participants and groups and evidence how they contribute to closing the attainment gap.

3. How has this creative place impacted on the artistic and local community?

The *Creative Place Award Artistic Programme* included a total of 164 artists, writers, actors and musicians and involved 53 volunteers. A culture of volunteering is a key feature within this creative community. There are high numbers of volunteers, including people with additional support needs, in a range of organisations including the *Kilmarnock Railway Station Heritage Project*, the *Knit and Knot* group and *Centrestage*. Volunteers are nurtured, highly motivated and ambitious for their community. They often progress to paid employment. Staff and volunteers are confident in their roles and are skilled and highly effective at engaging participants. They are proud of the many awards won by their services for cultural and creative projects and this further increases their confidence and motivation.

Creative programmes and events contribute effectively to improving local community cohesion and safety. For example, musical and theatrical performances incorporated into the *Global Market* and summer and Christmas activities have supported the reclaiming of the town centre as a civic space that is valued and enjoyed by the community. This is positively impacting on how people see and value Kilmarnock as a community to live in and is helping to break down a negative and unsafe impression of the town.

The cultural offer in Kilmarnock is diverse with community, third sector organisations, public services and artists all contributing to the rich mix which includes opera, visual arts, musical theatre, choirs, dance, drama and crafts. A network of inspiring creative leaders identify, encourage and support individuals to participate in the arts. There is also a growing network of teachers, artists and cultural volunteers through the *Creative Minds Learning Network*. This enables teachers and young people to communicate directly with artists and with EAC's cultural and education teams. The wide range of creative learning professional development opportunities for teachers, artists and parents are well attended enjoyed and valued. There is scope to extend existing opportunities for creative practitioners to network and shape the wider cultural offer.

The quality of cultural provision in the area has been recognised through several high profile awards including a Saltire Award for artists work in public places and four Major Trophy awards from the National Music Council of Great Britain in the last ten years. Nationally and internationally renowned artists from East Ayrshire provide leadership and work with the

Creative Minds team to create unique opportunities for young people which motivate and increase ambition. For example, pupils from the music service performed at the House of Lords in Westminster with Sir James MacMillan.

Significant investment in the development of public spaces over the last few years, including the regeneration of historic buildings and a range of public art such as the town murals is contributing to the growing sense of community pride in Kilmarnock. The investment in culture and heritage sites such as the Palace Theatre, Dick Institute and currently Dean Castle encourages people from both the local and regional area to visit. Existing buildings which have been converted into community and culture spaces, such as WG13 and the railway station also enhance the growing cultural community.

Creative Place and cultural activities contribute to the economy of Kilmarnock by attracting visitors and local audiences. The town centre is improving through investment in cultural and other venues and attracting new businesses including coffee shops and restaurants. This has also contributed to an increased night-time economy. Events such as *Santa's Grotto* and the *Secret Garden* and the growth in individual craft shops in the Railway Station is increasing local pride and contributing to the local economy.

4. How has this creative place improved partnership working and informed the wider creative community?

Kilmarnock is increasingly recognised as a creative place through its partnerships with national organisations. For example, EAL's Dick Institute works effectively with National Galleries Scotland, National Museums Scotland, Tate Modern, authors and local cultural organisations to ensure an exhibition and cultural programme that is well balanced. This results in high visitor figures for popular and contemporary exhibitions and helps to broaden interest in more challenging art work. Skills, knowledge and experience in youth engagement in the arts have been shared at both national networks and conferences. Tate Modern asked for a paper to be presented at their Bankside London gallery and at their *Engage Conference* in Cardiff. Recognition and reputation at this level is helping to sustain success and attract additional investment through public grants and private sponsorship.

Culture is highly valued as an integral part of the regeneration of Kilmarnock by a range of stakeholders. Senior officers in EAL and EAC have demonstrated this through sustained investment and ambitious programming. A new partnership between EAC, STAR Development Group and the New Laigh Kirk worked together effectively to host a series of community engagements which supported stakeholders, including creative workers and cultural organisations, to jointly develop the *Kilmarnock Town Centre Working Together Action Plan*. Although at an early stage, the five year plan has culture and creativity threaded throughout its priorities for action.

Partners often work together effectively to showcase talent across venues and this supports audiences to access a wide range of culture. For example, the *iDance* group performed at the opening of the Sir Alexander Fleming Centre, as part of the *Imprint Festival* and through *Artists Rooms* at the Dick Institute. This introduced group members to a wider range of venues and supported a broader cross-section of the Kilmarnock population to see contemporary dance.

Emerging artists are held in high regard and help to inspire others. A strong partnership fostered between art students and the Dick Institute includes exhibitions in the Young People's Gallery and raises awareness of local creative talent. Students from Ayrshire College annually host their graduate show at the Dick Institute and art graduates from other institutions who have

a connection to Kilmarnock also benefit from exhibiting and showcasing their work in the town. The recent *Bill Viola* and *Gerhard Richter* exhibitions have engaged Higher National Certificate art students in learning programmes with professional artists. For example, local artist *Scott Coubrough's* exhibition brought film and painting together to celebrate local film critic, *Gilbert Adair*. However, individual artists, creative workers, cultural organisations and networks would benefit from more opportunities to share their knowledge and skills, learn from each other and discover new potential partners.

Individual projects and programmes are well planned although there is a need to share and use data and intelligence between partners to focus programming and marketing and to maximise the collective cultural offer aligned to local priorities. East Ayrshire Leisure Cultural team could support and assist partners to develop a clear collective vision for the arts and their contribution to other priorities such as regeneration and economic development.

The review of Kilmarnock Creative Place found the following key strengths.

- Kilmarnock is a creative place and a vibrant, diverse and ambitious cultural community with skilled creative leaders who encourage participation and appreciation of the arts.
- Culture is valued as a key part of regeneration with investment in a range of high quality cultural venues helping to grow the local economy.
- Cultural activities are increasing residents' sense of belonging, improving community pride, wellbeing and helping to transform the lives of people facing challenges.
- Events and programmes attract local and regional participation and visitors from farther afield.
- A wide range of organisations and venues support a rich cultural community with opportunities to progress from participation to volunteering and employment within the arts.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

Further strengthen cultural partnership working to:

- Identify any gaps in provision and address unmet need;
- Enhance progression pathways;
- Better capture the contribution culture makes to the wider community;
- Collectively celebrate the wealth of talent; and
- Enable a wider range of local residents and creative practitioners to inform and shape this creative place.

5. What happens at the end of the review?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that East Ayrshire Leisure and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

Simon Ross
HM Inspector
29 February 2016

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