



Action for Children's Arts
Safeguarding and Enhancing Arts
for Children

Hawkswood House, 13/14 November 2018
kindly supported by the Potential Trust

Attendees

Gemma Bhagalia – Project Manager at the Spark Arts

Krystyna Budzynska – Associate Director of the Junior Royal Academy of Music

Anna Comino-James – The Potential Trust

Matthew Crowfoot – Access Manager at Polka Theatre

Pete Dowse – Project Manager at Chickenshed

Jamila Gavin – Patron of Action for Children's Arts

Elizabeth Greaves – Honorary member of Action for Children's Arts

Vicky Ireland – Chair of Action for Children's Arts

Penny Hay – Senior Lecturer in Adult Education at Bath Spa University

Jude Merrill – Retired Director of Travelling Light Theatre Company

Lucy Nicholls – ACE Theatre Change Maker

Janet Robertson – Trustee of Action for Children's Arts

Hawkswood House is an educational charity. A delightful house, with delicious homemade food and organic wine, delightful company and insightful conversations. Thank you to the Potential Trust for gifting us with our stay there. We all enjoyed it hugely.

Day One notes by Elizabeth Greaves

The key points for me from the first day were as follows. I have divided them into 'presentational' - where people explained a bit about their practice, experience and projects; 'emerging themes' and 'possible actions'.

Presentational – a short summary of each presentation is below

Accessibility: importance of networks to support emerging artists.

Action for Children's Arts: Listening to children project, Arts Backpack. Early stage of this second initiative - unclear how it will develop. Flexibility of the model will be needed to allow regional variations. Link between these 2 projects is that children will be the catalysts influencing parents to influence their MPs

Chickenshed: inclusion is at the heart of all their practice.

Creative Pedagogy: focus on the way that children learn and how adults can support them.

Curriculum concerns: continue to be severe. View that arts should be mandatory provision for primary children. Chasm between DCMS and DforE.

Spark Arts: have a range of projects including Vital Sparks.

The Potential Trust: supporting children who are in some way isolated by having special educational needs - at either end of the spectrum.

Emerging themes

- Isolation of children (for varying reasons) - the arts can change this;
- Arts can make a positive contribution in the well-being debate;
- Diminution of listening skills - music and story-telling key to preventing this;
- Importance of participative theatre - huge expansion of this at Polka - opportunities for parents to engage alongside their children - reflected also in Spark' s home visits and Janet's family days;
- Emergence of libraries as new cultural hubs replacing lost facilities such as youth clubs.

Possible actions

To me the things that emerged as significant in the first day were:

- Arts v isolation / disaffection in children, which can lead to anti-social behaviour or depression. Knife crime in teenagers is very high in the public consciousness as is depression. There is a recognition that early intervention can change this but it is a long-term project. The case needs to be made for the impact of early-arts education in improving children's wellbeing as a preventive measure against isolation, crime and depression.
- If there are connections with the new Health secretary these should be pursued and exploited. There is probably more potential to secure a change in attitude here than in the Department of Education. Proposals need to be evidence based.
- Anna suggested enlisting support from the RSA fellowship. There will be representatives of social welfare, mental health policy and crime prevention in that body of people who could be powerful advocates in drawing these strands together to make a case for reinstating both arts education and opportunities to experience the arts for children of primary age. It needs to be seen as a possible way to correct an urgent problem if it is to attract funding.
- The growth in demand for participative arts and the changing role of libraries seemed to be important developments. If parents see first hand the enjoyment that children get from the arts then they are more likely to be advocates. The role of libraries may be worth exploring here. It was good to hear the library situation presented in a positive way. We have to work with new technology and children can now access stories in a whole range of ways. The old fashioned lending model of books from the library is not perhaps as important as it was (although it may remain vital in some communities) but the possibility of seeing those buildings that have remained open used for a wider range of arts offers is really exciting.

The evening was spent playing a memory game, thanks to Jude.

Day Two notes by Vicky Ireland

We talked about initiatives, other than the Arts Backpack.

The main initiative to emerge was an idea to counter the thinking that the arts are left-wing, only for the elite, something to do with a paintbrush, nothing to do with real life etc.

The idea of a film of everyday life, which slowly drains out of the picture everything connected with the arts was developed.

The one thing we have is **our art**, and we should raise money to make a short film, showing the potential desolate landscape if the arts fail – draining colour/sound/shape from everyday things that have drawn on the arts in their creation. Nearly everything in our lives - eg newspapers, TV and radio, clothes, furniture - would not be here without art, plus no exhibitions and museums, empty libraries, cinemas with no British films, children with no sense of play or taking risks, **a society without a soul.**