

16th July 2014

Response by the Arts Alliance to the Independent Review into Self-Inflicted Deaths in NOMS
Custody of 18-24 year olds

The Arts Alliance is a coalition of over 600 artists, arts organisations, prison staff and academics working in the criminal justice sector using creative approaches to reduce reoffending. Our aim is to ensure ***all offenders have access to arts opportunities as a springboard to positive change***. We are currently managed by Clinks, the national umbrella organisation for Voluntary Sector organisations working in the Criminal Justice System. 20% of the Arts Alliance membership works specifically with Young People in prison and offenders in the community. This brief contribution to the review into self-inflicted deaths in custody of 18-24 year olds aims to highlight evidence of good practice from the arts in providing rehabilitation and purposeful activity leading to improved mental health and wellbeing.

Self-inflicted deaths in custody is not our area of expertise; however we do believe it is important for the review to be aware of the importance of arts interventions as a preventative mechanism, in order to assist its recommendations for building more positive regimes. The focus of this short paper is to therefore highlight preventative work that can improve young people's mental health and wellbeing - leading to reduced self-inflicted deaths in custody. The Arts Alliance and Clinks also fully support the recommendations made in the T2A response to this consultation.

Arts as an example of good practice in rehabilitation and purposeful activity -improving mental health and wellbeing for young people in custody

The arts have a long and successful history of delivering effective interventions for rehabilitation and education purposes across youth custody and in the community. This is delivered via the Offender Learning and Skills Services (OLASS) and a dynamic Arts and Voluntary sector. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), jointly with the MoJ published *Making Prisons Work: A review of offender learning strategy* in 2011, which states that the arts is necessary and crucial for supporting offenders:

"We recognise the important role that the arts, collectively, can play in the rehabilitation process through encouraging self-esteem and improving communication skills as a means to the end of reducing reoffending. Future employment or self-employment in, or associated with, the creative arts and crafts can for some represent a potential pathway to life free of crime. Engagement in the arts with the possibility of fresh vision, or at least a glimpse of a different life, often provokes, inspires and delights".

The Arts Alliance's online [Evidence Library](#) points to over 80 evaluations which support the case that arts including music, creative writing, theatre and visual arts have a significant impact upon improved wellbeing and sense of worth for young offenders. One specific example is *Beats & Bars, Music in Prison: An evaluation*;; a study conducted by the leading criminology department at the University of Cambridge, which states that ***"it is clear that the Music in Prisons project contributes to the Prison Service's aim to provide 'safe, secure and decent regimes'"*** (Cox and Gelstropes, 2008). Key findings from the report included a reduction in adjudications both during and after the project, an increase in confidence to participate in other educational programmes as well as confirmation that Music in Prisons projects can play a role in fulfilling the NOMS 'Seven Pathways to Reducing Reoffending'.

The Arts Alliance research carried out in the partnership with the Institute of Education (IOE) found that *Write to be Heard* -a creative writing project which worked with offenders across the prison estate including YOIs, improved people's wellbeing. The research found that "80% of participants could see themselves differently and 70% felt more positive about the future" (Hurry, 2013).

Research from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) into arts and intermediate outcomes, carried out by RAND, Europe concluded that: *"The best available evidence indicates that arts projects are effective at improving in-prison behaviour (such as compliance with rules and engagement with the regime) and individual psychological factors such as depression and a sense of purpose"* (NOMS, 2013)¹.

In May 2014 as part of the Arts Alliance's development work, we carried out a survey via our membership and utilising the prison newspaper Inside Times. The survey asked prisoners to contribute their views on the use of arts in custody. We have so far received over 50 responses, many of which have given a clear insight into the value offenders place on arts activities. For example prisoners reflect on the use of arts as a therapeutic tool, which has helped them reflect on their behaviour.

"There's no doubt that creative writing has made me a calmer more reflective person, whereas before I was more impulsive, which is part of the reason I got into trouble in the first place"

One prisoner refers to how the arts have actually helped him reduce his self-harm

"Art [...] is also a great help for someone like me who has attempted suicide in prison and I am a self-harmer at times. Art relieves me of a lot of stress and is also a form of escapism. Much better than any drug"

Another prisoner talks about how using arts has helped him manage his mental health:

"Arts helps me with my PTSD. I have it bad, very bad nightmares and lack of trust of people, nerves, the shakes etc. but art – well that helps a lot!"

Many more letters and quotes talk about the how in cell activity such as hobby and craft, music making and writing support them in coping with their sentence. The survey also highlights that external organisations providing theatre and music opportunities enable a change of insight and help in making stronger links with family and friends.

Other relevant studies, which point to the usefulness of arts in supporting the wellbeing of young people includes:

Musical Pathways: An exploratory study of young people in the criminal justice system, engaged with a creative music programme (2013) This report found that music provides a medium that can enable

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254450/Intermediate-outcomes-of-arts-projects.pdf

young people to engage their life experiences in creative ways, draw positively from their experiences, achieve real success in learning, engage with their peer group, and develop aspirations and positive feelings about the future.

Key quote: 'It's amazing to see the transformation. He's sitting upright and looking around at other people. He's so much more confident than before ... He's like a new person.'

Good Vibrations: Music and Social education for young offenders. This report looks at the impact of music making with young offenders:

Key quote: 'The processes of musical development are shared processes with the development of aspects of individual agency and social capital considered to be integral to desistance from crime. Not only did the music allow participants to develop positive self-concept, communicate with each other and work together, through engaging in musical development, participants also engaged in personal and social development' (Hennely, 2012)

Conclusion

We very much hope the Review finds this evidence of interest and that it provides some useful ideas for future thinking about positive regimes for young adults. We would also like to conclude by noting that the large scale change, which is about to commence through Transforming Rehabilitation puts these already fragile and unique arts services further at risk. It is worth noting that new Tier 1 providers will be under no obligation to include effective interventions such as arts in their supply chains, meaning that essential interventions that support young people in custody could be lost.

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