

SHARING THE STAGE

A SUMMARY EVALUATION



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION

UK BRANCH



SARAH BEDELL

FOREWORD

As François Matarasso compellingly emphasises in his book *A Restless Art: how participation won and why it matters*, the participation of non-professionals alongside professionals in the performing arts has a long and distinguished history. Renewed interest is rightly being shown in work of the sort supported through the Sharing the Stage initiative. Co-funded with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and support for the learning community from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, this initiative is a necessarily small part of the burgeoning of activity undertaken by artists, produced by arts organisations and supported by a wide range of funders.

Experimentation is important in breaking new boundaries; it brings fresh challenges as it generates insights. Among these, highlighted in Sarah Bedell's report, are the real benefits this work brings to those who take part in it, especially those who are disadvantaged or whose voices are otherwise marginalised. Much work is of high quality and is deemed to be so by audiences. To ensure its artistic merit, this report argues that participatory work should be given parity alongside other arts productions in terms of resources and development time.

Together with arts organisations, we need to think about how we can make participation more central to the mission of organisations; worthy of the main stage not just a rehearsal space. That is one of the questions we continue to ask as part of our Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations. We hope that other funders will follow Sarah Bedell's recommendations to consider ways of nurturing best practice and ensure that their monitoring and evaluation requirements are fit for participatory arts. Funding for touring, for example, of particularly high-quality work that could engage more people as participants and audiences, appears to be a gap that should be filled.

I want to thank all those who helped make this initiative possible and to the many others who bring to participatory arts creativity, trust, funding or who simply champion it.



Andrew Barnett, Director
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch)

Independent evaluator Sarah Bedell was commissioned by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) to write this report about Sharing the Stage. She also produced the accompanying [case studies](#) which can be viewed on the Foundation's website. The Sharing the Stage initiative (2014–18) was led by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and co-funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, with support for the learning community from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

This report only covers the work of Sharing the Stage. The Foundation recognises that there are many other innovative participatory projects happening around the country.

Sharing the Stage: A summary evaluation
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Front cover: *Turn* was a 2016
Sharing the Stage performance
created especially for Glasgow's
Govan Graving Docks by theatre-
maker Nic Green

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Contact Theatre and Ockham's Razor worked with young Manchester performers. Using movements from circus, dance and martial arts, *Switch* reflected on the challenges they face. (Photo: Lee Baxter)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Sharing the Stage initiative ran from 2014–18. It aimed to help achieve the Foundation's purpose by supporting arts projects in which vulnerable and under-served groups of people 'share the stage' with professional performers, and projects that are based on partnerships between arts organisations and social partners. Phase One supported the research and development (R&D) stage of 14 consortia projects. Phase Two ran from 2016–18, supporting 10 consortia projects to full production of the work created through the participatory process. Sharing the Stage was co-funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, with support for the learning community from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Sharing the Stage demonstrated what happens when holistic support, sufficient resources and development time are invested in participatory performing arts, with a steady output of new creative works, from *Turn*, a tidal orchestra for voice and bells in the Govan shipyards, to *Switch*, produced by Contact and Ockham's Razor in Manchester, an extravaganza of aerial and circus work.

"I have found that working with the production team and cast has allowed me to find new friendships and better working relationships."

Karl, ex-prisoner and crew member
The Monkey, Synergy's *Homecoming*

"This is what I've had to look forward to and has helped me with my recovery. I've met some amazing people and feel confident. I don't feel trapped anymore, I feel positive."

Participant
Staging Recovery, Geese Theatre Company

Examination of the documentation, interviews and conversations with project leads and analysis of the data gathered during the process suggests that **Sharing the Stage Phase 2 broadly succeeded in its core goals:**

- **The evidence base of what works is growing**, adding to the Foundation's Participatory Performing Arts strand (2014–18), with 10 diverse and multi-layered consortia projects to add to sectoral knowledge. The evidence will be more powerful if pooled with other existing evidence, to build a critical mass of examples, case studies, effective approaches – and what to avoid.
- **The learning community is still active and continuing to maintain the network**. This has been an extremely successful element of the strand and seems to be self-sustaining in terms of maintaining connections and informal networks at this point. The Foundation is currently establishing how it will continue to support the learning community, maintain momentum and maintain collaboration.
- **Sharing the Stage has helped to change perceptions around participatory arts** – some partners and funders are taking participatory arts more seriously, recognising its role and value, such as the Scottish Association for Mental Health's active partnership with National Theatre of Scotland throughout *Home Away* and the activities since.
- **Sharing the Stage has succeeded in giving people who are marginalised and disadvantaged a voice through participatory arts**: the process and practice gave their voice the opportunity to be heard. This is shown in the reflections, case studies and feedback from participants, and also practitioners, commenting on the collaborative process. Audiences indicated their appreciation of having been able to hear these new voices and stories; as well as being powerful stories, many audience members also indicated that the pieces had increased their understanding of issues and challenges facing others.

In addition to the considerable canon of work produced as a result of Sharing the Stage, which included a festival of 10 new pieces, world premieres of new compositions, numerous performances and sharings in non-theatre settings, new plays, circus and dance and an online worldwide choir, key outcomes and impacts included:

- **Participants had transformative experiences.**

Ranging from pleasure at learning something new and then performing it, to discovering a talent that has led to successful careers, finding the strength to stay with a recovery journey or being employed for the first time in nine years after becoming disabled, participants gained a great deal from playing a part in Sharing the Stage.

- **Artistic development:** artists and creative practitioners reflected upon the value of collaboration and partnership, gaining new skills, extending and developing their practice, working with new organisations and the opportunity to work with participants to tell their stories.

Home Away was a five-day festival and conference of participatory arts, which launched the National Theatre of Scotland's 10th Anniversary season

- **Sharing the Stage helped organisations grow,** extending their vision, practice and the scope of their activities. The partnership working and learning community had encouraged high ambitions for each project and acted as a springboard for further collaboration and activity.

“It is something special when given the opportunity to express myself in this accepting, respectful way, helps me to feel part of things.”

Participant, West End Voices Choir
We, The Crowd, Sage Gateshead

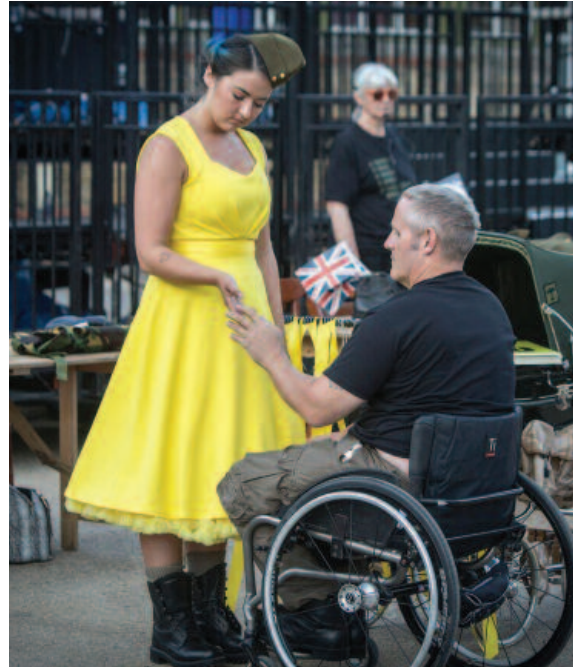
“[Inclusive Creativity] opens up new possibilities; it takes the creative process further than I've been able to take it before.”

Participant
Walled City Music's Inclusive Creativity



The most valuable lessons from Sharing the Stage that need to be taken forward are that:

1. **The optimal length of time to develop a high quality piece of participatory work from R&D to final performance is up to three years.** The resources and wraparound support from the Foundation enabled the organisations to bring professional artists and non-professional performers together to share the stage on an equal basis.
2. The model of **co-commissioning allowed organisations to be responsive to community and participants' issues and needs**, because there was an extensive period of time in R&D, allowing for adaptation, change and relationships to be built. Individuals and participants undoubtedly felt they were driving the process. Co-commissioning in this instance enabled organisations to gain in-depth expertise and skills in specialist areas, such as Geese Theatre, which has used Sharing the Stage to embed itself in a specialist health area.
3. Creating the environment for **a learning community encourages knowledge transfer, builds confidence, creating networks that lead to further collaboration and partnerships**, especially between organisations and within the cultural sector. This supports the overall health and practice of the arts and culture sector with a skilled-up workforce, and resilient organisations. Cross-sectoral learning was limited within Sharing the Stage, and some partners reported that they had learned about new approaches; it is possible that some further learning will take place on an organisation by organisation basis.
4. **Participatory work needs to be delivered by organisations which are equipped to meet participants' needs**, and this is even more important when working with communities who have specific needs; continuing professional development (CPD) and support to make sure that organisations work to the highest standards should be costed into proposals and funded adequately.
5. **Cross-sectoral partnerships, such as health or criminal justice, worked well** within Sharing the Stage on the whole. Some of these partnerships or connections were pre-existing and seemed to have grown and developed organically; well-developed relationships, such as that between National Theatre of Scotland and Scottish Association of Mental Health, achieved the most long-lasting results. However, the productions and presentations, particularly invited audiences, raised awareness of participatory arts and the potential for collaboration to benefit service users – especially at a local level – and are an effective way to continue to work at cross-sectoral partnerships.
6. **Standardised approaches to evaluation that focus on quantitative data and numbers do not provide the right data to measure success and impacts**, impeding understanding for the sector, funders, partners and policy-makers. The highest quality, and most effective, participatory arts are created when the process and product is driven by participants with professionals, for participants and their communities. In order to create the highest quality participatory arts, organisations cannot predict the themes or nature of the process or final product at the application stage.



This Is Not For You celebrated the contribution of veterans who have become disabled through war, but were never commemorated as a casualty of war. (Photo: Alison Baskerville)

7. **There is a danger that without a national, strategic approach to participatory arts, its progress, development and the amount of activity will proceed on a stop-start basis.** instead of artists and organisations being able to plan strategically and long-term, and in alignment with their partners' own work and funding cycles. A national approach would also ensure quality assurance, for example, organisations adopting ArtWorks Alliance's Code of Practice. There are two aspects to this:
 - a) for participants (and communities), the opportunities to participate are one-off or *ad hoc*, and they cannot sustain or develop a creative interest or talent. A negative or poorly thought through approach can also impact negatively on communities and participants if delivered by poorly equipped arts organisations;
 - b) for practitioners and supporting networks, the lack of a coherent strategy or vision for participatory arts in the UK prevents a unified voice and advocacy which can change policy and funding decisions through disseminating and sharing learning and best practice, recognising what is best practice and sharing standards.
8. **Audiences are open to new work, written by new voices, telling new stories.** Audience responses across the Sharing the Stage performances and presentations were positive, both to how the work had been created (where that had been part of the communications) and the quality of the production and performances. If it does not matter to an audience member, it begs the question of whether it needs to be highlighted, that the work came through a participatory process and is being performed by participants alongside professionals. Organisations did have to learn about different approaches to promoting different artforms, for example, the differences between selling circus and theatre, and regarded this as a positive learning opportunity.
9. Although the learning community had worked together on the evaluation toolkit, some of the questions and ways of asking were inappropriate for particular participants and not always welcomed by them, either. Apart from highlighting the difficulty of standardised approaches for individually unique projects – especially and deliberately so with Sharing the Stage – it resulted in variable quantitative data, mainly because respondents (practitioners, participants and audiences) were reluctant to complete forms which asked questions they probably thought irrelevant to them. **Monitoring and evaluation needs to be adaptable, flexible and able to capture what matters in each project.**

“If you want to make an influencer change their mind, show them a film, with someone saying, ‘This changed my life.’”

Simon Sharkey,
National Theatre Scotland

It is recommended that:

- **The learning and findings from Sharing the Stage have been passed to the Foundation's Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations** for examination and to contribute to the growing collection of resources, case studies and examples of ways to encourage participation.
- **The learning community model provides a useful way of creating community and networks, and particularly supports the sharing and dissemination of learning.** The Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations might wish to adapt elements, as the structure provides an effective way of maintaining networks and knowledge transfer over the course of longer-term projects.
- **Funders and policy-makers consider ways in which best and next practice and thinking in participatory arts can be supported and nurtured.** This includes support for networks which connect practitioners and organisations, encouraging the sharing of learning, peer-to-peer support and partnership working.
- **The Foundation uses the findings and films from Sharing the Stage to lead on strategic discussions and conversations at policy level,** identifying areas of common interest and ways in which funders can co-operate on specific and targeted areas of research and funding and create high level networks for advocacy and partnerships.
- **Funders and policy-makers consider whether their current monitoring and evaluation requirements are fit for purpose for participatory arts,** that is, whether it captures the right data to analyse and understand what works and doesn't work when creating and developing participatory work. Further consideration should be given to how funders use this evaluation learning, particularly informing funding policy and decisions about new funding streams.

We, The Crowd was a performance which saw non-professional performers – such as primary school students, footballers and church goers – star alongside professional actors and musicians. The story explored what music and football meant to people aged from eight to 85 living in Newcastle's West End





Staging Recovery is an ensemble of people with multiple and complex needs, exploring their individual and collective recovery journeys

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INTRODUCTION

The Sharing the Stage initiative ran from 2014–18. It aimed to help achieve the Foundation’s purpose by supporting arts projects in which vulnerable and under-served groups of people ‘share the stage’ with professional performers, and projects that are based on partnerships between arts organisations and social partners.

The long-term aim was to see participatory performing arts practice become more mainstream. With Sharing the Stage, the Foundation wanted to:

- explore the impacts, if any, of participatory practice on artistic quality and definitions of quality;
- demonstrate the value of participatory practice to arts organisations, artists, funders, critics and audiences;
- develop a strong community of practice/learning;
- improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities who are vulnerable and/ or under-served;
- place a particular emphasis on homeless people (who often have multiple and complex needs) and older people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, loneliness and isolation.

The Foundation supported 14 consortia of organisations to conduct research and development (R&D) work from 2015 to 2016. A selection of 10 of these projects were supported to develop their R&D work to full production using an independent assessment framework.¹ The key learning from Phase One (R&D) was shared in 2017,² highlighting the emergence of a number of overarching themes, including the opportunities and challenges faced by organisations working in this space:

- the power to impact positively on individuals and communities
- brokering, negotiating, delivering and maintaining partnerships
- participant: recruitment, retention, support (including access), expectations and outcomes
- understanding the value of Participatory Performing Arts beyond the costs, for individuals, organisations, communities and policy-makers/funders)
- quality in participatory settings: the balance between the quality of the process and product
- legacy outcomes and impacts which continue after the project is completed, for participants, professionals and organisations.

What does “participatory performing arts” mean?

“Participatory performing arts” means non-professionals doing things like acting, singing and dancing. The Foundation is especially interested in activities where vulnerable groups participate in a way which brings them joy. In participatory performing arts, taking part is as important as the final performance because, when done well, the creative process enables people to discover their strengths, gain confidence and develop a positive self-image.

1. See Appendix for outline of project descriptions
2. Sharing the Stage Learning from Phase One: Research and Development

SHARING THE STAGE PHASE TWO: PRODUCTION

Phase Two of Sharing the Stage ran from 2016 to October 2018, with a final cohort of 10 consortia projects. The Sharing the Stage cohort of projects was selected after a process of Expressions of Interest, independently assessed. The aim was to bring together a range of

approaches towards working with vulnerable groups, to enable non-professional artists including older people, injured veterans and young people with disabilities, to share the stage with professional artists. This approach enabled organisations which would not otherwise have had the opportunity to work together, to learn from each other's process, networks and expertise.

Lead artist/organisation	Project title	Partners	Location
Contact Theatre	Switch	Ockham's Razor, Imitating the Dog, and The Factory Youth Zone	Manchester
Geese Theatre Company	Staging Recovery	The REP, Reel Access, Changes UK and Crisis UK	Birmingham
Geraldine Pilgrim	Sitting Comfortably	Novak, Katherine Low Settlement, George Crouch Extra Care Home, Dagenham, Creative B&D, Broadway Theatre Barking, Peel Centre King's Cross	London: Barking and Dagenham, Wandsworth, King's Cross
Graeae Theatre Company	This Is Not For You	Blesma, The Limbless Veterans. ACE, The Drive Project, National Centre for Circus Arts	London, Stockon-on-Tees
National Theatre of Scotland	Home Away	Art Link, Plan B, Fullbright, Manifesto JA and Yuva Ekta Foundation	Australia, Brazil, India, Jamaica, Scotland and USA
Nic Green & Artsadmin (producer)	Turn	Feral, Glasgow Doors Open Day, GalGael, Sunny Govan Community Radio Buzzcut	Scotland
Royal Court Theatre	The Boys' Project: Boot Camp	Bryony Kimmings, West Yorkshire Playhouse, ACE, VICE, and Roundhouse	UK-wide
Sage Gateshead	We, The Crowd	Newcastle United Football Club and Newcastle United Football Foundation	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Synergy Theatre Project	Homecomings	Theatre 503, HMP Send and HMP Thameside	London
Walled City Music	Inclusive Creativity	University of Ulster, Drake Music and St Magnus Festival	Ulster, Derry

INVESTING IN PARTICIPATORY ARTS PRACTICE

In Phase Two, the Foundation invested £469,000 for the project costs and up to £16,000 to cover the costs of the cohort's participation in the learning community, such as staff time, travel and support. Eight of the projects were fully funded by the Foundation, and two co-funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation by £150,000, which has a shared interest in these areas of work and the target participant groups. The total cost of the eight projects fully funded by the Foundation was £1,843,000 (Sharing the Stage Phases One and Two).

Understanding that participatory arts practice begins with the process and participants, rather than having a fixed outcome, Sharing the Stage's approach to funding was deliberately flexible, to ensure that each project had the funds it required to achieve the outcome; it was preferable to extend grants if there was a need as the work developed, rather than the projects experience unexpected costs during production, which they could not cover.



LEARNING AND REFLECTING

The bespoke evaluation toolkit developed in 2015 was implemented by each of the projects for the production phase, with the intention of producing read-across data for the cohort, to be tested. The regular cycle of meetings and seminars continued, with a final symposium event at the Royal Court Theatre in October 2018, bringing the cohort together to celebrate their achievements.

The Foundation appointed an independent evaluator to assess the impact of Sharing the Stage and bring together the outcomes and learning from Sharing the Stage as a whole (intended and unintended) and produce individual summaries of each of the participating projects, which are available on the Foundation's website. Highlighting key outcomes, achievements, challenges and the potential for participatory performing arts in the future has identified key learning and some recommendations to take forward into the Foundation's Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations.³

The methodology enabled three key tasks:

1. Collate, analyse and interrogate the data available, and identify the extent to which Sharing the Stage achieved the changes projected in the Theory of Change Logic Model artistically, socially, organisationally and influencing policy
2. Identify any key legacy outcomes or further learning since the completion of individual projects as a result of Sharing the Stage
3. Communicate and share the learning with the stakeholder group (including the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations) and wider sector to encourage further positive change.

The Boys' Project: Boot Camp
nurtured young creative
talent and activism

3. <https://civicroleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk/> is the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's (UK branch) current programme for the arts

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SHARING THE STAGE – OUTCOMES

Sharing the Stage demonstrates what happens when holistic support, sufficient resources and development time are invested in participatory performing arts. Ranging from shows made in care homes, disused shipyards, a football stadium, prisons and outdoor spaces, performers included adults recovering from substance abuse, prisoners, people with physical and learning disabilities, marginalised young people and disabled veterans.

Over the two years of Phase Two, there was a steady output of new creative works, from *Turn*, a tidal orchestra for voice and bells in the Govan shipyards, to *Switch*, produced by Contact and Ockham's Razor in Manchester, an extravaganza of aerial and circus work.

Inclusive Creativity brought together disabled and non-disabled musicians on the concert platform and hosted a conference programme within the annual Walled City Music Festival

It is strongly recommended that readers watch the accompanying films at bit.ly/sharingthestagefilms and read the project case studies available on the Foundation's website alongside reading this document to gain a greater sense of each project and impacts for individuals.



PRODUCING GREAT ART

Sharing the Stage has added to the Foundation's cultural output with new writing, dance, circus, music and productions, as well as adding to the UK's creative output through the following new works and productions, which in some cases reached across the world:

Switch, created by **Contact** with young people from Manchester and the team from **Ockham's Razor**, brought circus, dance and martial arts training to young people in Manchester, along with newfound confidence and friendships

Geese Theatre Company worked with adults in recovery from substance abuse to create an ensemble that writes, produces and performs new work in a range of settings – ***Staging Recovery***

Sitting Comfortably was produced by **Geraldine Pilgrim**, designed for both theatre spaces and care homes, celebrating memories of joy and happiness held by residents, and eminently suitable for touring

Graeae Theatre Company developed and produced ***This Is Not For You***. Part of 14–18 NOW, this outdoor performance celebrated the contribution of veterans who have become disabled through war, but were never commemorated as a casualty of war

Home Away – a five-day festival and conference of participatory arts – 10 new pieces of theatre and choral work, bringing together communities from Scotland and the rest of the world, launching the **National Theatre of Scotland's** 10th Anniversary season

Artist **Nic Green**, with producer **Artsadmin**, brought together unheard voices, traditional crafts, making a tidal orchestra for voice and bells on Govan Docks, ***Turn***, celebrating the cycles of life, nature and birthdays

The Boys' Project Boot Camp produced a sharing for the **Royal Court** Stage and nurtured young creative talent and activism at an early stage, supporting 11 thriving careers

Sage Gateshead worked in the West End of Newcastle to present ***We, The Crowd***, a mass participatory event, bringing non-professional musicians and composers together with theatre and orchestral professionals

Synergy Theatre Project produced a festival of new writing by prisoners and ex-prisoners at Theatre503, ***Homecomings***, launching and nurturing several new creative careers, in addition to readings and performed extracts in prisons

The **Walled City Music** project, ***Inclusive Creativity***, brought together disabled and non-disabled musicians on the concert platform who toured to London and Dublin with a new 30-minute composition and hosted a conference programme within the annual Walled City Music Festival.



Actors in treatment for substance abuse stage a production with the Geese Theatre company

Each of the individual projects enjoyed positive reviews and responses from the media, critics and audiences, some garnering national media interest. There was a demand for the work produced, judging by the ticket sales and attendance records, which challenges the notion that ‘difficult’ work by ‘non-professionals’ will not find an audience. For example, over 8,000 people attended or participated in *Home Away* over five days, and nearly 4,000 people saw *This Is Not For You* in London and Stockton. Work was also shown in smaller, specific settings, such as HMP Thameside or the George Crouch Extra Care Home, sharing work with smaller audiences of fewer than 50, who may not be able to access the arts otherwise.

Paying or invited, audiences were enthusiastic about seeing this work and hearing these new stories and experiences, often stating that it was ‘important’ that the arts told new stories and included people who are not usually invited to make work. The evidence from audience feedback suggests that audiences were moved, inspired, touched, amazed and delighted⁴ by the dance,

music, theatre, voices, circus and aerial arts they shared and experienced, whilst media placed it in the arts and culture sections – sharing the stage with other productions.

There was a demand for the work produced, judging by the ticket sales and attendance records, which addresses the notion that ‘difficult’ work by ‘non-professionals’ will not find an audience.

4. Words taken from audience surveys across the cohort of projects.

DEMONSTRATING VALUE

A key goal of Sharing the Stage was demonstrating the value of participatory arts to the rest of the sector, policy-makers and funders, in enabling more people to participate in arts and culture, from a wider range of communities and backgrounds, and widening the breadth and numbers of people who attend participatory arts performances and productions, addressing the perception that participatory arts practice is not 'equal' to other arts practice.

In addition to conferences, invited workshops, seminars, and pre- and post-performance talks and debates, organisations used the performance opportunity to invite their peers, not just from the cohort, but across their field. Inviting partners, stakeholders and key decision-makers from the health, justice and social care sectors, ranging from ministers to recovery agency staff, showed the role and value of participatory arts in other sectors. Although the focus was placed on creating high quality artistic productions, outcomes arising from this initial engagement included gaining new skills, training, paid employment, new career paths, and improved wellbeing and mental health for adults, young people and older people.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY

The project leads participated in four learning community meetings and four seminars to explore particular issues of relevance to the field and enhance learning. The final symposium provided a valuable opportunity to have rich discussions and identify opportunities for further learning and collaboration, as well as recognising what can be achieved when non-professional performers share the stage. The cohort reported that this aspect of Sharing the Stage had been particularly valuable, regardless of the size or type of organisation and project. Feedback and reporting indicates that there was a great deal of peer-to-peer learning across artforms and types of organisation, professional development through debate and the sharing of experience, and increased confidence from 'sitting at the same table' with leading companies, artists and practitioners. By the completion of Sharing the Stage there was evidence of further collaboration, for example, Nic Green working with National Theatre of Scotland or performed extracts by Synergy participants on the Royal Court Stage.

The learning community forged strong relationships which have already led to further activity. The longevity of the programme, together with the carefully structured and formalised learning community, not only supports continuous improvement but also cross-fertilisation, continued activity and further funding.

GIVING THE UNHEARD A PLATFORM

Sharing the Stage sought to widen participation in the performing arts to people from all walks of life, especially from the most vulnerable and under-served in our communities. It is now understood that participating in groups, such as singing, playing music or acting boosts confidence, develops new skills and knowledge and builds social networks, which contribute to our health and wellbeing, physical and mental. However, the most vulnerable and under-served are not as able to participate as much as the general population, such as people living in poverty, marginalised and at risk of offending young people, prisoners and ex-prisoners, older people in residential care, some people with both physical and learning disabilities, and adults recovering from substance misuse.

Sharing the Stage deliberately sought out new voices and stories to share with audiences, giving participants the opportunity for self-expression, developing skills and new careers, making friends and social connections. Many participants reflected on the impact of seeing or hearing their words, ideas or experiences presented to a public audience, the increased confidence, new training or work opportunities and wider social networks and strong connections. Equally, audiences often reflected on the need to have a wider range of experiences and stories represented in our performing spaces.

“It was great to tell my life story and to be witnessed and know that the telling of my story made a positive impact to many listeners.”

**Participant
Nic Green's Turn**

3

MEASURING SUCCESS

The Foundation had considered what success would look like, that is:

- An evidence base of what works in supporting and promoting participatory practice
- A self-sustaining community of practice, sharing learning and forming networks
- Funders, arts organisations, artists, critics and audiences taking participatory arts seriously
- People who are marginalised and disadvantaged finding a voice through participatory arts.

Taking the original measures of success, Sharing the Stage has achieved the following:

The evidence base of what works is growing, adding to the Foundation's Participatory Performing Arts strand (2014–18), with 10 diverse and multi-layered consortia projects to add to our knowledge. The evidence, however, will be more powerful if pooled with other existing evidence, to build a critical mass of examples, case studies, effective approaches – and what to avoid. Any evidence base is also only useful if people know it exists and are encouraged to access it and therefore needs to be accompanied by a dissemination strategy (see below).

“The process was strongly affirming that participatory arts can successfully create meaningful change. I’m eager to collaborate with international artists and communities to make theatre that is impactful on those in the audience and those participating.”

Group Director, Home Away

The learning community forged strong relationships which have already led to further activity

“The learning gained from the learning community was invaluable. The wider UK context of the practice was highlighted and allowed us to see our strategies in an international context.”

Simon Sharkey,
National Theatre of Scotland

The learning community is still active and continuing to maintain the network – the project leads referred to collaborative activity or development plans in progress. The learning community formed by Sharing the Stage has been an extremely successful element of the strand, and seems to be self-sustaining in terms of maintaining connections and informal networks at this point; although there may be a challenge of maintaining momentum over the longer-term.





Professional actors performing alongside older people in care homes in Geraldine Pilgrim production *Sitting Comfortably*

“I came to see *Sitting Comfortably* last week and wanted to write to congratulate you on such a huge achievement. The layering of stories, different generations of people on stage and in the choir, the level of detail and high production values made for a complex and joyful work. Such a powerful antidote to the stream of gloomy stories about social care in the media! I so admire your tenacity and the sheer determination it must have taken to realise this important idea.”

Audience member,
Broadway Theatre Barking

Sharing the Stage has helped to change the perceptions around participatory arts – being taken seriously – whilst it was running, which is shown by the responses of audiences, critics and arts sector professionals. Some funders are most certainly taking participatory arts more seriously, recognising its role and value, evidenced by the Scottish Association for Mental Health’s active partnership with National Theatre Scotland throughout *Home Away* and the activities since. At a local level, the cohort report that they have maintained relationships; in the case of Geese Theatre, it has extended its local reach with several performances and commissions. This suggests that the health sector see benefits for their service users and value through commissioning creative, participatory activities: this reflects a greater awareness in the public health and wellbeing sector about the links between culture and wellbeing, with more local councils providing small grants and other funding.

However, maintaining national or regional level interest and dialogue, specifically with budget-holders, commissioners and policy-makers is essential and needs to be addressed at a national, strategic level. Advocacy and dissemination of the positive outcomes and powerful impacts for individuals will need to continue at a policy level, in order to keep participatory arts in the picture and maintain this progress.

“[*Home Away*] has given me the confidence to commit to engaging more with hard to reach communities that deserve to have their stories told.”

Group Director



Dancers from Dundee performing at the National Theatre of Scotland's *Home Away* festival in 2016. (Photo: Beth Chalmers)

Sharing the Stage has succeeded in giving people who are marginalised and disadvantaged a voice through participatory arts: the process and practice gave their voice the opportunity to be heard. This is shown in the reflections, case studies and feedback from participants, and also practitioners, commenting on the collaborative process. Audiences indicated their appreciation of having been able to hear these new voices and stories. As well as being powerful stories, many audience members also indicated that the pieces had increased their understanding of issues and challenges facing others. Some audience members recognised the stories and issues being raised.

“[There’s] a high proportion of people suffering from alcohol and drug addictions – it’s important that productions like this are available to the public to reduce the stigma.”

Audience member

“Being a recovering addict, I was stuck in that box and couldn’t get out without the help of others.”

Audience member

WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS SHARING THE STAGE MADE?

As well as wanting to effect change, Sharing the Stage wanted to make a difference, artistically, individually, organisationally and across the public sector (bringing together health and wellbeing, social care, career and learning pathways and criminal justice), as the cohort presented a range of projects across these areas.

Skills and development

Artists and creative practitioners reflected upon the value of collaborating with a wide range of different artists: gaining new skills, extending and developing their practice, working with new organisations. They frequently commented that working with the participants had extended their horizons, understanding and artistic practice. Individual artists who bring together a company project by project benefited from being part of a learning community that also included national companies: more than one referred to the ‘buzz’ of being on the Royal Court stage.

The collaborative nature of Sharing the Stage – each project was a consortium of organisations and partners – enriched the artistic work created because it brought in a wider variety of partners and participants, thus broadening the range of experiences and stories that formed the starting point for each piece of work. The Walled City Music project, *Inclusive Creativity*, has contributed to the development of a new, inclusive instrument, the Kellycaster, as well as using technology to make inclusive music-making easier to achieve.

“To say that I got to be a lead artist on a project with the National Theatre of Scotland is honestly a dream come true!”

Group Director, Home Away

For individuals

Each project contains evidence of many individual impacts, of great significance to the individual participants, from the joy of the birthday women in *Turn*, to the thriving careers of at least two ex-prisoners, who are now playwrights as a consequence of taking part in Synergy’s *Homecomings*. In Manchester, young people working with Contact and Ockham’s Razor have gone to circus school as a result of taking part, and one is now a Contact board member. Older people participating in *Sitting Comfortably* talked eloquently about the social and health impacts of having the project to look forward to, and the joy of performing. Many participants talk about how the participatory process built their confidence, enabled them to make new friends and made them feel part of a community.

“Taking part in getting my play come to life through the workshops and then from rehearsals to a read-through and finally the production has been an incredible experience from start to finish. To see my play being performed by professional actors at a theatre every evening has been extremely gratifying and is the only thing in my life I feel I can be proud at having achieved. Completing this project has made me realise that very occasionally in life dreams do materialise and for that reason alone it has made me feel good about myself”

John Stanley, playwright, participant in Synergy’s *Homecomings*

“I have had better mental and physical health, being productive and waking up early each day.”

Participant, Contact and Ockham’s Razor

As well as the softer impacts, Sharing the Stage enabled many harder impacts: disabled veterans have been given skills that enable them to take up paid work as a consequence of the process leading to *This Is Not For You*; the musicians in Acoustronic (Walled City Music, *Inclusive Creativity*) are undertaking another tour and are Ensemble in Residence at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. Paid work programmes and opportunities to continue working with some of the organisations also extended the opportunity to gain new skills and explore new career pathways.

“I have found that working with the production team and cast has allowed me to find new friendships and better working relationships.”

Karl, ex-prisoner and crew member on *The Monkey*, Synergy’s *Homecomings*

Organisationally

Each participating organisation and lead partner recorded a number of positive impacts, as a result of commissioning and showcasing new work, as well as sharing new approaches to work, which include:

1. Supporting emerging talent and nurturing creative careers that will continue to make great art in the future, thereby contributing to the creative industries overall. As well as encouraging artistic development and next practice, this has also led to employment, new commissions, contracts and funding opportunities (although this impact has not been evenly felt).
2. Sharing the Stage enabled organisations to grow and extend their vision, such as Geese Theatre which moved out of its usual context of working in prison settings, enabling it to move towards its vision of creating safe, crime-free communities and for the arts to be recognised as a powerful vehicle for individual and social change, in this instance, demonstrating the impact of arts engagement in improving recovery rates.

3. Working with new groups and communities has stretched the entire organisation throughout the process, including marketing and impacting on policies and future practice, as in the case of Graeae, which provided mental health first aid training or Contact, where its marketing team had to take on the nuances and differences around communicating the thrill of circus as opposed to theatre.
4. The partnership working, which was a fundamental part of Sharing the Stage, encouraged and enabled organisations to have higher ambitions than usual and acted as a springboard for subsequent partnerships and activity.
5. Raising the company profile and awareness of their work within the sector and across other sectors, through the collaboration and partnerships with other agencies and organisations in health, social care and the third sectors. Some of the cohort developed seminars, workshops, talks and other events to encourage debate, discussions and networking across sectors. As a result, some of the original cohort has been able to take forward elements of their Sharing the Stage project, or build on it with further activities.
6. The opportunity to develop meaningful and strong partnerships that were sustained not just during Sharing the Stage but have a life beyond it. Synergy is now an associate company with Theatre503, has extended its programme of workshops and is being programmed into the 2019 season. Unfolding Theatre produced a summer show in 2018 with Sage Gateshead, including a Relaxed performance, and the *Staging Recovery* ensemble has been active in new writing and performances across Birmingham throughout 2018.

“We have learned about how a big organisation can work with a smaller one in an equitable partnership.”

Sage Gateshead

Funders, partners and decision-makers

At present, it is hard to quantify the impact of Sharing the Stage on funders, partners and other agencies in the public sector, including the creative industries, as the findings have not yet been shared and disseminated. However, Sharing the Stage provides a number of practical insights into the ways that arts organisations can collaborate and strengthen their relevance to local communities, which could usefully feed into the Foundation's Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations; not least lessons about project timing, different resourcing needs and upskilling within organisations. The experience of the Sharing the Stage cohort is useful to the Inquiry on an individual and group basis because of the diversity of communities and settings the cohort was working with.

The impacts of Sharing the Stage are likely to be longer-term than the project's lifetime, as can be seen from the legacy outcomes for individual projects, and as they are brought together with other evidence being gathered and collated by other foundations, networks (such as the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing). The longer-term impacts can be measured by (1) changes in policy and budget decisions that actively support and nurture the development of participatory arts through funding streams; (2) application processes that support the particular needs of participatory arts; and (3) developing monitoring, evaluation and reporting methodologies that better match the participatory process.

“The profile of participatory arts is very high amongst participants, they're not the ones who need the advocacy.”

Project lead

Geraldine Pilgrim worked with residents of care homes to bring their memories to life on stage

On an individual project basis, there is evidence that some agencies and sectors have recognised the potential and benefits of participatory arts practice for their service users, clients and staff through the process of being involved or engaged with individual projects. Geese has been able to consolidate the work of Staging Recovery within the health sector and specialism of recovery, and Synergy has extended its work in prisons. On the other hand, despite the immediate positive impacts on residents in care homes, it has not been possible for Sitting Comfortably to secure funding to repeat the process with new groups of older people. At a local level, then, there is an increasing awareness of the role of participatory arts in some sectors. However, anecdotally, it still seems hard for organisations to initiate partnerships at a hyperlocalised level, for example, with individual care home providers, or identifying the local authority Health and Wellbeing Commissioner. The challenge and opportunity therefore is raising this awareness at a policy level across the public sector, so that the funding, mechanisms and opportunities exist for participatory arts practice to continue developing and working across sectors.



FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Sharing the Stage has been a success in achieving or going some way to achieving what was intended, and so it is worth exploring *what* contributed to these achievements, so that future projects can benefit from knowing what should be in place in order to be effective.

A different approach

Sharing the Stage wanted to explore what would happen if a different approach was taken to participatory arts, from the application and selection process, offering full R&D opportunities, development time and production budgets. The cohort were not funded and left to report back upon completion, but instead supported through the learning community, regular meetings and events, with an active interest shown at Director level. This gave the organisations and artists the freedom to innovate and explore within a clear framework and set of expectations.

Learning and sharing experience was actively encouraged through the learning community and reinforced through the structure of Sharing the Stage and the evaluation process, which encouraged experimentation, reflection on the outcomes and active learning. The Foundation supported the production of 10 films which told the story of each project through the participants, bringing each one to life in a way that paper reports cannot. The cohort all agreed that the time they had been given in both phases had been crucial to their success, with several suggesting that in order to achieve artistic and programming parity, participatory arts projects should be seen as having a three-year timescale as a minimum.

Several members of the cohort suggested that in order to achieve artistic and programming parity, participatory arts projects should be seen as having a three-year timescale as a minimum.

Continuity

One notable feature of Sharing the Stage was the continuity and consistency of the project teams throughout most of the projects. Although one or two projects did experience significant personnel changes, they were able to deal with this through having a strong team. Conducting legacy interviews, it was noticeable that in most cases, the original personnel were still within organisations or working with the original partners. It is likely that this continuity has contributed to the high level of legacy outcomes and activities, because the project had time to bring together people and organisations and build deep relationships, shared priorities and an in-depth understanding of how different organisations can support each other's goals whilst meeting their own priorities.

Expectations and commitment

Sharing the Stage had high expectations and big ambitions: to place participatory arts and people who are not usually invited to make art centre-stage, with full productions and performances. Each member of the cohort shared this vision and had an absolute commitment to making art of the highest quality whilst also offering the most fulfilling experience possible for participants and giving audiences a unique experience.

The cohort had a very strong sense of responsibility towards participants and practitioners, considering carefully how to manage expectations and signpost or further support participants after the projects had been completed. This ranged from chats over tea in care homes to offering paid 12-month work programmes, including bus fares or offering one to one mentoring afterwards. Pastoral care, an awareness that practice might need to be adjusted or training offered all indicated the level of consideration that was put into projects, ensuring that participants had a positive, high quality experience.

“Being based in North Manchester was a great help for me.”

Participant
Switch, Contact and Ockham's Razor

“Money for food meant I didn't have to worry about having a job.”

Participant
Switch, Contact and Ockham's Razor

CHALLENGES, BARRIERS AND WHAT DIDN'T WORK

Sharing the Stage largely achieved its objectives overall and within individual projects, but there were still some challenges that arose and evidence that particular barriers are persistent. There were also some aspects of Sharing the Stage and its learning community that didn't work as well as others. Learning from what doesn't work well, or is difficult to achieve as imagined, is as important as having affirmation that many aspects of Sharing the Stage worked well.

Perceptions

Audiences did not differentiate in their feedback between professional and non-professional performers, writers, musicians or dancers, but based their responses on the quality of the work and the performance – how it moved, inspired and informed them. To this extent, Sharing the Stage has shown that there need be no barrier to placing participatory arts on our main stages, as well as participatory settings. Many of the organisations in the cohort took the opportunity to invite colleagues from the wider cultural sector to performances, sharings and presentations, organising conferences and programmes that not only promoted debate and discussion but encouraged further exploration through masterclasses and professional level workshops. The reported feedback suggests that this was successful, but does not indicate whether previously held perceptions were *changed*, or if they were, *why*.

Further feedback and conversations suggest that within the sector, there is still a perceptual problem about the artistic quality and merit of participatory arts at the level that drives policy, funding and programming:

“[I would like to think that we have moved closer to] an artistic acceptance that people with learning and physical disabilities can contribute on the same level as non-disabled people. An artistic acceptance of relevance and quality of work.”

Project lead

“How do we move the perception away from [participatory arts] being about ‘watching other people’s children singing’?”

Funder

Therefore, the key change needs to be made at the policy and funding level, so that an appreciation of the role and value of participatory practice within the overall cultural sector becomes embedded from top to bottom. One should not need to be a leading practitioner or company in the field of participatory practice to see where it fits into the UK's creative and cultural landscape. Sharing the Stage removed some of the barriers to creating quality participatory work through the structure, funding available and approach to supporting the cohort, which could be usefully explored further in collaboration with other funders, grant- and policy-makers.

Demand is growing

Sharing the findings and outcomes, particularly through the [films](#) commissioned alongside this report will hopefully contribute to the debate and increase understanding around the role of participatory arts in society at this policy and funding level and change perceptions. This is happening to some extent, with the example of Creative People and Places, and the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Organisations. Perceptions would be seen to have been changed at this strategic level with the development of strategic funding and action research programmes at a national level to incubate and support the same level of product, knowledge, practice and resources for participatory arts as enjoyed by other means of making art.

Limitations of sector environment

Sharing the Stage explicitly explored what would happen with a different approach to structuring and supporting a programme of participatory practice, notably allowing for R&D in Phase One, adequate funding to realise high quality production values and strong support during the process. The *flexible* approach to funding, where the cohort asked for the funding they knew they would need at the time, instead of forecasting needs a year in advance, and giving the full amount of funding requested was also different, and gave the Foundation a much clearer idea of the real costs of supporting a high quality participatory project, as well as preventing any corner-cutting or budget reallocations when organisations found the actual budget needs were different or a smaller grant was given.

However, the cohort were still operating within the current funding system, and so although there was appreciation of the different way the Foundation had gone about supporting Sharing the Stage, organisations were still reliant on other funding, finding and sustaining new partnerships with colleagues in the cultural and other sectors (with their attendant timescales, budget constraints, hierarchies, operational cycles, terminology, understanding of participatory practice and creative activities). Some organisations reported that they had found it difficult to obtain co-funding or follow-up funding for their work, especially

those smaller organisations, where feedback and the data suggests that being able to conform and be successful with current funding bodies adds considerably to the workload (navigating various portals, crafting applications with 500-character limits, the level of advanced negotiations in a sub-sector of the arts that works on a shorter timescale) and represents a barrier and challenge.

Whilst Sharing the Stage removed some of the barriers and challenges around obtaining funding, the programme developed and delivered in the current environment: this was an inherent limitation. The extra support, especially the learning community framework and meetings, together with the ongoing involvement of the Foundation at a management level, and the commissioning of the *films*, provided the Foundation with the opportunity to see what difference investment of additional resources and frameworks make to the overall success of a programme: there was a consensus that both had been invaluable for the cohort and individuals. However, attendance at the meetings and sharings had been achieved in the face of the demands and responsibilities of the day-to-day business of an arts organisation, which seem to be growing, mainly in the search for funding. Again, the space provided by the learning community had the inherent limitation of being part of the total work undertaken by each organisation, being woven into their core activity.



Turn was a performance project created especially for the Govan Dry Docks with collaboration with local women and community groups



Graeae gave wounded veterans a new set of skills in circus arts, storytelling and performance. (Photo: Alison Baskerville)

Participant agency in participatory arts

The final limitation of Sharing the Stage was the degree to which the participants drove the process and artistic results, when the selection process required organisations to come with ideas to develop. Unlike Creative People and Places areas which are now well into Phase Two, where communities are driving commissioning, programming and participation, Sharing the Stage existed as a one-off exploration that has fed into and informed the thinking of subsequent initiatives developed by the Foundation, such as the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations. From the point of view of participants – perhaps the ex-prisoners now enjoying successful writing careers or the disabled veteran working after nine years of worklessness – this might be a nice distinction: the opportunity was given to them and has been joyful and beneficial in ways that have had a significant impact for them.

There is another way of looking at the issue: under-served communities are generally under-served and overlooked because they are not asked about what matters to them, or what they would like to create or explore. If one has not been included before, one is not aware of the choices or options, at which point a guided introduction can be a good springboard for finding one's voice: youth workers in Newcastle specifically commented that young people had become more articulate and confident in taking control of and responsibility for activities by the end of the Sage Gateshead project, *We, The Crowd*, as did the Royal Court 'Boys'. In the same way that we understand that audience engagement and attendance by new communities is a process that happens over time, this might apply to the ways in which people approach and increase their agency and participation as they gain experience and confidence *through* being offered multiple opportunities to participate in making art. The young people in Newcastle are likely to have taken more control in subsequent activities, whatever they are.

The participant data suggests that respondents felt that they had agency, had directed the development of their final piece of work, and were listened to. They often admitted that they had not thought themselves able to achieve what they had, and that this had given them the confidence and curiosity to either take it further or continue exploring their creativity. Sometimes this had been for individual pleasure, sometimes for education, sometimes developing new and exciting talent.

Practical challenges

The projects experienced challenges which are common to other artforms and arts practice, such as the availability of venues, but noted some particular issues for some groups, such as accessible accommodation and transport, the need to provide basic staples (food, toiletries) for participants in poverty, or the possibility of severe illness amongst older participants. The flexible approach to funding by the Foundation enabled the cohort to adequately budget for the usual and additional costs related to working with these particular communities and groups, and to learn what those costs were, which will enable stronger budget planning in future.

The length of time that quality, meaningful participatory practice requires from the initial idea to the final sharing, is a challenge within current mainstream funding streams and processes, and was one of the factors for success for Sharing the Stage. From the outset, participatory arts requires more time: lead partners need to align their work cycles, bed into the process and articulate their shared vision. Working with under-served, marginalised or vulnerable people also needs more time: to build trust in particular. Then the needs of participants or how their lives work need to be taken into account, but none of them can be asked or expected to commit to a three-week rehearsal period, for instance, like paid creative professionals. For example, working with young people means that schedules need to take account of school or education commitments, holiday periods, etc. Working with families, though, might mean an organisation focuses on weekends or holidays, like Sage Gateshead. All these requirements add time to a production schedule or drive the schedule. Barriers further down the project 'chain', such as securing the involvement of a key partner, or even finding the right contact, making contact with community groups and their own gatekeepers, all add to the time necessary for a well thought out and delivered production. Participatory work, that is professional and non-professionals creating and presenting work together, also requires the time and resources build relationships and trust, to share the skills and techniques with participants and bring them up to performance standard.

The arts and cultural sector is operating within a risk-averse landscape. There is an understandable tendency for public funders in particular, to stick with the tried and tested, rather than potentially 'waste' precious resources on the unknown or innovative, as funds are more limited and over-subscribed. One consequence of this is that applicants need to show guaranteed outcomes and outputs and audiences: the concept is required to be firm and viable, not presenting an idea with a clear process but no clear end-product. However, quality participatory arts practice is about co-designing and creating with participants as much as the final performance – the work develops out of the process. This does not sit easily with mainstream public funding application processes.

Creating a shared body of evidence and advocacy

There are schemes and programmes, funding streams and opportunities to apply for funding for participatory art, but they frequently overlap, or end with no follow-up activity; the value of participatory arts is evidenced and presented, knowledge banks, toolkits and resources abound, but there does not seem to be one locus, one space in which this sectoral knowledge is stored and known about: it is fragmented, located in different spaces and contexts with different priorities framing it. A fragmented knowledge base leads to a risk of reinventing the wheel, but also limits advocacy, if those advocating do not have easy, ready access to an authoritative, common, respected source of information and latest practice.

The Sharing the Stage cohort referenced networks, groupings and organisations that link together participatory arts practitioners and organisations, providing training, seminars and dissemination of new findings – much as Sharing the Stage did through the learning community, for the life of the project. However, it was also clear that some organisations did not feel as networked outside that setting, and felt the work was fragmented and therefore not able to demonstrate value as easily as other arts practice. This was also one of the original challenges that led to Sharing the Stage. Many networks come into being, thrive for a time or purpose and then lie dormant, the connectors and connections from those networks often shifting into new networks. This is very effective at a tactical level, it has led to a lively, thriving, dynamic participatory arts sub-sector, and many of the cohort were already plugged into the networks they needed.



Inclusive Creativity placed creative artists with disabilities at the core of its programme

However, to influence policy, budgets and decision-makers, there is a need for strategic networks and partnerships to enable conversations and connectors to develop a strategic, coherent approach to participatory arts practice, in the same way that mainstream arts practice has representation at the highest levels. This level of network and discussion would avoid unnecessary and artificial competing interests between funders and grant-makers, and the danger that specifically targeted schemes attract organisations seeking funding, rather than organisations with good ideas or a response to a particular community or need.

Evaluation and reporting

There are two issues with evaluation and reporting, as demonstrated by this review. Some in the cohort were surprised that there was any further follow-up or discussion of what had happened next, although all were pleased that the Foundation was taking this logical step (not least to prove that their effort in tracking, monitoring and evaluating was for some purpose). It seemed from various conversations that too often there is a feeling that evaluation reports, although required, vanish into a data black hole. The issues are at an organisational and global level:

1. The resources available within an organisation self-evaluating and meeting the needs of an overall evaluation framework consistently: time, budget, skills, priorities. There is a consensus that understanding the outputs, outcomes and impacts of work supports strategy, planning, and growth; the Sharing the Stage cohort clearly utilised the data they gathered whilst tracking and evaluating, as can be seen from the legacy outcomes and progress. However, with budgets so restricted, it can often be a balancing act between what should be spent on



The Foundation commissioned [short films](#) to accompany each project. They tell the story from a participant's perspective.

- evaluation (whether commissioning or bringing in extra resources) and other gaps in the budget that will prevent the activity happening (unlike evaluation); further complicated as evaluation is often seen as the final hurdle to receiving a sign-off or final payment.
2. This is coupled with a common issue with evaluation and reporting. How many reports and evaluations are read and digested? How much of the data collected and processed is used, and how? Are those asking for detailed self-evaluations reviewing or adapting what they ask for to keep it fit for purpose (and realistic)? Is it suitably flexible or does it force grantees into collecting unnecessary data? As the process of applying and then fulfilling reporting requirements becomes ever more driven by algorithms, 'streamlined' processes and tick boxes, there is a danger that the data is collected but rarely used to any strategic effect. This could be addressed through more pro-active dissemination and themed programmes which highlight different aspects of funded programmes.

In my view, these issues are compounded by the current epidemic of perceived 'busyness': everyone is too busy to read anything that needs scrolling down, and the funding system is increasingly driven by character limits, whatever the subject, size of application or the complexity of the project. In general, snappy summaries will have a wider readership than long, nuanced reports. In the case of Sharing the Stage, this is countered by the accompanying [films](#), which bring each project to life beyond this report. However, both formats share the same challenge: being viewed or read in the first place. This challenge could be addressed through a coherent, shared approach to dissemination, agreed and co-ordinated by the networks currently existing, perhaps supported by those funders with a direct interest in marginalised and under-served communities, culture and health and wellbeing, social justice, etc.

With specific regard to the Sharing the Stage cohort, there was strong evidence that the process of evaluation was used by organisations to understand what had worked and to plan for the future. The quality of reporting was variable, ranging from evidence of analysis and use of the primary data to explain the process and outcomes and inform future planning, to an interesting narrative that did not clearly set out what had been achieved or what difference it had made. There was a difference between those organisations that are regularly funded and are familiar with the terminology and how to report, as with larger and smaller organisations. Reports that draw the reader into the story, so they see what the benefits will be to them by being involved with the organisation or proposed activity, will obtain better results in terms of partnerships, opportunities, profile and advocacy for individual organisations as well as participatory practice overall. Organisations which do not have this experience, have not commissioned any supporting evaluation guidance/advice/support or are very small/emerging and do not have in-house skills, are at a disadvantage.

Reporting requirements, combined with limited resources, can drive organisations to collect quantitative data when they are delivering qualitative outcomes and impacts. Although it makes for a quick sound bite to say that 80% of participants agreed very strongly that their confidence had increased at the end of the project, this doesn't offer any deeper insights, and long surveys are often not completed in sufficient number to be statistically significant. Higher quality data would have been obtained by having more flexibility about the format and questions used for feedback, as well as the methods for obtaining it, such as a structured conversation or using non-paper formats and transcribing the results to a simple spreadsheet. Even reading through the forms face-to-face may be preferable. Having the people and time necessary to achieve this, though, is the challenge, unless it is built into the application budget and *accepted* as a core cost, not an add-on evaluation or research extra.

Quite apart from the fact that most of the Sharing the Stage projects are of the scale where the number of responses would not be statistically significant, there are no control groups and the primary data is variable

because of many variable factors in each project. It is accepted that participatory arts practice is about quality, not quantity. The same approach needs to be applied to the data gathered to demonstrate delivery and understand the outcomes, that is, it should be accepted that participatory arts evaluation might employ qualitative techniques and methods, rather than surveys or scored answers. There is a nervousness about making claims for the role and value of the participatory arts because there is a lack of confidence in the quality of the data as a result of forcing qualitative outcomes into quantitative tick boxes.

Reporting about the 'value' of participatory arts remains problematic, because current thinking still attaches finance to the word 'value' and it is difficult to quantify the value in social or health terms, except in limited ways. It is also inappropriately utilitarian in some instances to relate the value of an individual's transformative experience to an intervention or service. There are databases with the unit cost of, for example, getting a claimant into work, or social worker contact with a young person at risk of offending, the cost of an unnecessary night in hospital, but they are difficult to locate and access and sometimes out of date. However, as social prescribing is becoming better understood, more widely adopted and measured longitudinally, there is a need for the arts and cultural sector as a whole to consider how value is expressed and measured, beyond what it costs.

There is a need for thought-leaders, influencers and existing networks and funders to collaborate in signposting and linking to the growing number of existing frameworks, models and toolkits that are being devised, created and tested, such as *Is this the Best It Can Be?*, Creative People and Places⁵ and the NCVO's Cultural Commissioning Programme.⁶ This would encourage better constructed and evidenced reporting as an immediate outcome for organisations and funders, enabling the learning to be used and deployed at a strategic level. Longer-term outcomes would be the continued learning and dissemination of best and emerging practice to the sector, a culture of understanding and improving, and would utilise the insights which have been captured across many participatory contexts.

5. http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning?field_our_learning_tags_tid=25

6. <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/funding/commissioning/cultural-commissioning/practicalities-of-cultural-commissioning/measurement-toolkits>

LEARNING FROM SHARING THE STAGE

Bringing together the outcomes and impacts from each project highlights the key learning for the participants, organisations, artists and the Foundation:

- Participants gained new skills, discovered talents and interests and learned about the process of creating art. Artists learned from each other – techniques, skills, ideas, experiences – as well as the participants. This led to increased career and work opportunities for participants and artists, in addition to personal satisfaction and fulfilment.
- Organisations learned how to take their current experience, practice and work to different groups, giving them the opportunity explore new areas of work, new audiences and new partners. They also learned new skills and approaches to working with participants and artforms new to them, from initial contact with community groups or creative partners, through to the marketing of the final show. The cohort were able to learn from the opportunity to showcase their work to peers in the sector and outside through the Sharing the Stage platform. This higher profile has acted as a springboard for partnerships, higher awareness, new activities and productions, and new collaborations from relationships built through Sharing the Stage. The cohort benefited as organisations from the peer learning which was inbuilt to the ethos and structure of the learning community which created a level playing field for a range of established, emerging and smaller organisations. This support structure could be adapted and incorporated in similar programmes in the future. Sharing the Stage would then have a learning legacy for future use and reference.
- The broader arts and culture sector have been invited to performances, discussion events, conferences and workshops that shared the results and learning from individual projects and as a whole. From the feedback, some in the sector have gained a better understanding of the value and role of participatory arts, specifically when working with people who are usually underserved, or find it difficult or impossible to participate in arts and cultural activity otherwise. There is still work to be done in changing perceptions.
- The cohort had difficulty in fitting their projects to the framework when it came to gathering qualitative data of a sensitive nature (about wellbeing, feelings, etc). Evaluation should not impede the process in this way, because then the data and understanding is skewed – it's not collecting what we need to know (as practitioners, organisations and funders). Monitoring and evaluation requirements for participatory arts could be revisited, in order to strengthen learning across the arts and culture sector. The knowledge gained from effective evaluation would enable advocacy at all levels.



Actors in Synergy
Theatre Project's
The Monkey

4

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Sharing the Stage has enabled the production and performance of many new pieces of work. The experience and learning has enhanced and added to the sum total of our knowledge and appreciation of participatory arts practice, particularly in terms of working with vulnerable people and under-served communities through the range of participants who were involved. Sharing the Stage worked with marginalised young people and communities, disabled veterans, people with learning and physical disabilities, prisoners and ex-prisoners, adults in recovery from substance abuse and older people both in urban and remote rural settings.

Sharing the Stage demonstrated that the artistic quality of the participatory practice is equal to mainstage productions with positive reactions from the cohort's peers in the arts and culture sector, partner agencies and organisations, audiences and critics. The length of time allowed to bring a production to performance, the approach to budgeting, providing holistic support to the cohort and providing a framework for shared learning enhanced the outcomes and impacts for organisational and sectoral learning, and created a strong community that has generated partnerships and further activity since. Allowing sufficient development time and production budgets has shown that publicly funded arts organisations can be relevant and serve all parts of its community and constituency through participatory practice.

Sharing the Stage made the whole greater than the sum of its parts through strategic support and the development of the learning community and offers an interesting example to funders and policy makers who wish to build networks and communities of practice and learning.

The value of participatory practice for socially engaged and community focused services and activities has been communicated to other arts organisations, artists, funders and policy-makers through showing how the work offers benefits in addition to the creation of new work: bringing arts organisations closer to their communities, and playing a role in health and wellbeing, criminal justice, learning, training and employment – civic society.

Participatory arts practice has a contribution to make to the improvement of wellbeing of individuals in different ways: the inclusive practice and process enables participants to acquire new skills, make sustainable change, explore new career or learning opportunities, provide opportunities for self-expression or simply have an enjoyable, social experience. Whilst not proving the potential of participatory arts for improving health, Sharing the Stage can be said to have added to a growing body of evidence showing the impact of participation on various aspects of people's wellbeing.

“This work has placed a real value on people telling their stories and holding the work to a professional standard. I hope this has helped to change some of the stigma that's existed.”

Group Director, *Home Away*

FUTURE PRIORITIES

The Foundation is ideally placed to take a lead on strengthening strategic partnerships and providing high-level, influential advocacy, changing the messages about participatory arts practice and support. The most valuable lessons from Sharing the Stage that need to be taken forward are that:

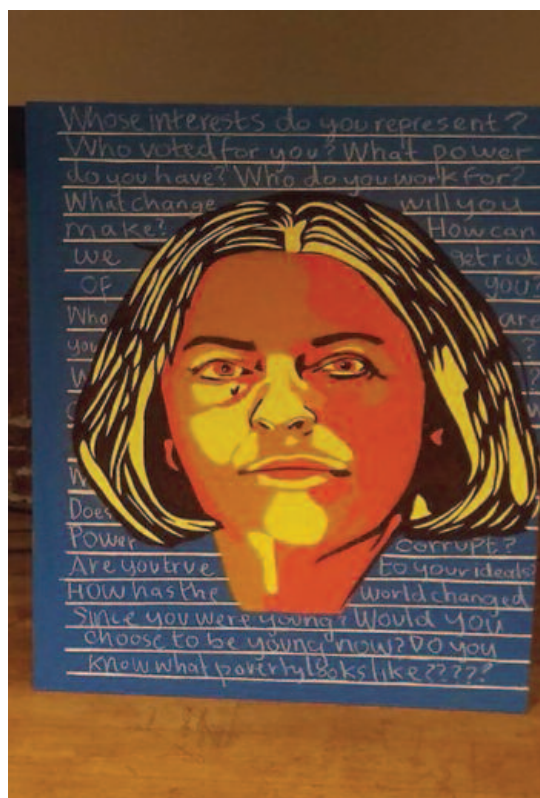
1. **Participatory arts practice can produce work of artistic merit and quality equal to mainstream practice when it has the same resources and development time as other arts productions.**

The length of time to work alongside participants and produce a show or performance allowed the full potential of the participants' stories to be fully developed. The resources, not just the production budget but the wraparound support from the Foundation in the films, events and learning community, enabled the organisations to bring professional artists and non-professional performers together to share the stage on an equal basis.

2. **Creating the environment for a learning community encourages knowledge transfer, builds confidence and creates networks that lead to further collaboration and partnerships.**

This supports the overall health and practice of the sector with a skilled-up workforce, and organisations that are resilient because they have strategies and experience to keep adapting and innovating, and evidence of effective delivery and partnership working. It follows then, that the costs for and commitment to CPD and support is understood and accommodated when working with vulnerable, under-served or otherwise marginalised groups, who might have specific support needs. Several of the cohort experienced a learning curve to acquire the skills and understanding to do justice to the work and be a positive experience for the communities they were engaging with: CPD and appropriate support were important elements of the practice, process and organisational learning. The ArtWorks Alliance has developed a Code of Practice, which is readily available online.⁷

3. **Flexibility around the application and evaluation process is needed to reflect the fact that participatory arts is driven by the participants.** It is therefore difficult to predict the themes or nature of the final product at the application stage, whilst standardised evaluation forms and paper-based data collection will not provide the right data to measure success and impacts, impeding understanding for the sector, funders, partners and policy-makers.



The Boys' Project: Boot Camp engaged young men from council estates across the UK, who have created, trained and experimented with art in a political context

4. **There needs to be some different thinking about the role of public funders in sustaining and maintaining the progress made by Sharing the Stage and other programmes devised and led by other funders.** There is a danger that without a national, strategic approach to supporting participatory arts (as with other artforms), its progress, development and the amount of activity will proceed on a stop-start basis. This means that work happens project by project for the most part, on a local or region-by-region basis, instead of being able to plan strategically and long-term. The experience of Geese suggests that sustained investment and support enables companies to re-examine their practice, policies and also their core activities, which can lead to sustainable growth and builds the organisation's resilience as it has a diverse range of partners, work, income streams and audiences.

7. ArtWorks Alliance has a Code of Practice in addition to specific guidance: <https://www.artworksalliance.org.uk/awa-resource/artworks-code-of-practice>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INQUIRY TO TAKE FORWARD

The core concept of Sharing the Stage preceded the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations which has developed out of the Foundation's work on participatory performing arts in recent years. Although the Inquiry is broader in scope, key learning can be taken forward from Sharing the Stage to be examined further by the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations. There are three ways these lessons can be taken forward:

1. Sharing the Stage reflects many of the findings outlined in *Rethinking Relationships*,⁸ and although focused on participatory arts with very specific groups of people who are more under-served than others, **the lessons, challenges and examples from the individual projects would usefully add to the information and resources for the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations.**
2. **The learning community model provides a useful way of creating community and networks for the Inquiry.** Elements that are appropriate could be adopted, particularly to encourage the sharing and dissemination of learning and findings from the Inquiry as it progresses. It is challenging for longer-term and wide-ranging programmes of action research, activity or enquiry to maintain awareness and interest between launch and presentation of the final findings. Regular research round-ups, short conferences and events that promote sharing and learning – similar to the way Sharing the Stage brought together the cohort regularly – maintain interest across the sector or area of inquiry and create networks and connections that can continue after the initial work.

3. **There is a need to discuss the purpose of monitoring and evaluation,** how it is used by funders and policy-makers and what difference the collected knowledge is making to practice and thinking.
4. **The Foundation can use the findings and films from Sharing the Stage to lead on strategic discussions and conversations at policy level,** identifying areas of common interest and ways in which funders can co-operate on specific and targeted areas of research and funding and create high level networks for advocacy and partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SECTOR

- **Funders and policy-makers consider ways in which best practice and thinking in participatory arts can be supported and nurtured.** This includes support for networks which connect practitioners and organisations, encouraging the sharing of learning, peer-to-peer support and partnership working.
- **Funders and policy-makers consider whether their current monitoring and evaluation requirements are fit for purpose for participatory arts,** that is, whether it captures the right data to analyse and understand what works and doesn't work when creating and developing participatory work. Further consideration should be given to how funders use this evaluation learning, particularly informing funding policy and decisions about new funding streams.

8. The report on Phase One of the Inquiry into the Civic Role of Arts Organisations: <https://civicleartsinquiry.gulbenkian.org.uk/resources/rethinking-relationships-phase-one-of-the-inquiry-into-the-civic-role-of-arts-organisations>

APPENDIX

SHARING THE STAGE PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Lead artist/ organisation	Project title	Partners	Overview	Location
Contact Theatre	<i>Switch</i>	Ockham's Razor, Imitating the Dog, and The Factory Youth Zone	<i>Switch</i> brought circus, dance and martial arts training to young people in Manchester, along with newfound confidence and friendships	Manchester
Geese Theatre Company	<i>Staging Recovery</i>	The REP, Reel Access, Changes UK and Crisis UK	Geese Theatre Company worked with adults in recovery from substance abuse to create an ensemble that writes, produces and performs new work in a range of settings	Birmingham
Geraldine Pilgrim	<i>Sitting Comfortably</i>	Novak, Katherine Low Settlement, George Crouch Extra Care Home, Dagenham, Creative B&D, Broadway Theatre Barking, Peel Centre King's Cross	Designed for both theatre spaces and care homes, celebrating memories of joy and happiness held by residents, and eminently suitable for touring	London: Barking and Dagenham, Wandsworth, King's Cross
Graeae Theatre Company	<i>This Is Not For You</i>	Blesma, The Limbless Veterans. ACE, The Drive Project, National Centre for Circus Arts	Part of 14-18 NOW, this outdoor performance celebrated the contribution of veterans who have become disabled through war, but were never commemorated as a casualty of war	London, Stockon-on-Tees
National Theatre of Scotland	<i>Home Away</i>	Art Link, Plan B, Fullbright, Manifesto JA and Yuva Ekta Foundation	A five-day festival and conference of participatory arts – 10 new pieces of theatre and choral work, bringing together communities from Scotland and the rest of the world, launching the National Theatre of Scotland's 10th Anniversary season	Australia, Brazil, India, Jamaica, Scotland and USA

Lead artist/ organisation	Project title	Partners	Overview	Location
Nic Green & Artsadmin (producer)	<i>Turn</i>	Feral, Glasgow Doors Open Day, GalGael, Sunny Govan Community Radio Buzzcut	Artist Nic Green brought together unheard voices, traditional crafts, making a tidal orchestra for voice and bells on Govan Docks, <i>Turn</i> , celebrating the cycles of life, nature and birthdays	Scotland
Royal Court Theatre	<i>The Boys' Project: Boot Camp</i>	Bryony Kimmings, West Yorkshire Playhouse, ACE, VICE, and Roundhouse	<i>Boot Camp</i> produced a sharing for the Royal Court Stage and nurtured young creative talent and activism at an early stage, supporting 11 thriving careers	UK-wide
Sage Gateshead	<i>We, The Crowd</i>	Newcastle United Football Club and Newcastle United Football Foundation	Sage Gateshead worked in the West End of Newcastle to present <i>We, The Crowd</i> , a mass participatory event, bringing non-professional musicians and composers together with theatre and orchestral professionals	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Synergy Theatre Project	<i>Homecomings</i>	Theatre 503, HMP Send and HMP Thameside	Synergy Theatre Project produced a festival of new writing by prisoners and ex-prisoners at Theatre503, <i>Homecomings</i> , launching and nurturing several new creative careers, in addition to readings and performed extracts in prisons	London
Walled City Music	<i>Inclusive Creativity</i>	University of Ulster, Drake Music and St Magnus Festival	<i>Inclusive Creativity</i> brought together disabled and non-disabled musicians on the concert platform who toured to London and Dublin with a new 30-minute composition and hosted a conference programme within the annual Walled City Music Festival	Ulster, Derry

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