

## Report

Artist Mentoring & Networking Programme Co. Clare

Consultant: Niamh O'Connor

Commissioned by Clare County Arts Office, March 2010

## Report Artist Mentoring & Networking Programme Co. Clare

The Artist Mentoring & Networking Programme took place in early 2009, was open to artists living and working in Co. Clare and was funded by Clare County Arts Office with the assistance of the Embrace Arts & Disability Programme, the Mental Health Services, the Brothers of Charity and CREATE. The invitation was extended to: 'artists who are currently engaged in or are interested in working in the fields of Arts & Health and Arts & Disability'. It was specific to participatory art as participant led art activity and collaborative arts practice in those contexts.

The programme sought to:

- Assist the sustainable mentoring of participating artists, particularly in relation to maximising those artists' talents, to foster greater understanding of the special requirements needed to work in this area and to encourage more artists to participate in schemes locally.
- Develop a model of self-sustaining / peer mentoring amongst participating artists.
- Make a formal report to the Arts Office as how best to proceed with the programme and to identify resources required to do so and sources for same.

This document sets out the work of the Artist Mentoring & Networking Programme, it's benefits to participant artists and makes recommendations as to how Clare County Arts Office can best support the establishment of an artist led Arts & Health::Arts & Disability Artist Network.

The mentoring programme took place over three months, from Jan. - March '09 whereby the participants and their mentor met on 6 occasions on a Saturday. At the outset, an outline for the programme was provided to Clare County Arts Office and as expected this was amended during the programme to best meet the needs of the artists as they emerged and were identified. These sessions consisted of presentations, group workshops and discussion and were approx. 3-5 hours in duration. Other elements included providing artists with a number of relevant documents and research reports e.g. sample artist contracts, work opportunities, a draft of the current *Guidelines for Participatory Arts & Health Practice* etc. and the facilitation of peer mentoring through an Artist-Shadowing-Artist opportunity. There was an emphasis on learning through discussion and rather than the 'expert knows all' instructive approach an atmosphere of genuine exploration of issues, concerns and concepts was nurtured. The mentor was available for one-to-one mentoring and this was taken up by 5 participants on a number of occasions throughout the lifetime of the programme. See breakdown of Mentoring/Networking Sessions.

The work of artists in health and disability settings in Ireland has changed over the past five years with huge shifts and developments in the respective fields, in the study of positive psychology and creativity and also in the Disability and Health sectors. The Arts Council of Ireland recognises Arts & Disability as distinct from Arts & Health, each with their own concerns and agendas. On the ground there is much overlap between the area of Health and Disability with a history in Ireland of care and service provision to persons with a disability in health care settings. Arts & Health can and often does include people with a disability. In Co. Clare the Brothers of Charity are working towards supporting people in their own communities thereby addressing the widespread historical congregation and isolation of persons with intellectual disabilities. These shifts in service provision have an impact on how and where artists engage with people with disabilities.

This programme was open to artists working in these settings and was inclusive of all approaches. While it may be said that there is a continuum between an exclusively facilitative and a collaborative approach this has major implications for the work itself and the nature and level of engagement of participants and artist; and is not only influenced by the artist's rationale but by the

considerable weight of influence, understanding and expectation of funders and other agencies, not to mention the financial considerations at play. The mentor attempted to tease out and help define these differing approaches and has made some recommendations in this regard. While much was done to explore the principles of Arts & Health and Arts & Disability in terms of participatory practice, it is an area that is complex and still in consolidation in Ireland, with little support for artists who engage in this work. As a consequence there is a real lack of a conceptual framework for artists to underpin and sustain their practice. Where is the boundary between an artist working to support another individual's own artistic exploration and a collaborative arts practice in healthcare or disability contexts? Most artists had some experience of the former with some seeing themselves as 'artist' and not alone 'art facilitator'. This delineation of approach also has tax implications for artists as art teaching is not tax exempt while it could be argued that collaborative practice could be tax exempt. Artists also questioned the health value of this work and sought evidence based studies to give further meaning to their work in context. There is often an overlap between both sectors in terms of service provision and from an artist's perspective often no career decision to work exclusively with one group or another (whether that be in disability, health or other community contexts) with simply different sets of sensitivities and challenges underpinned by a common curiosity and openness to listening and working through an artistic process in creative exchange.

One important development which was not originally envisaged during the lifetime of the programme was taking the next step towards initiating an artist led network. While it was an aim of the programme to investigate the structure and feasibility of such a network and to involve the artists in thinking about the nature of its work and possible formation; the enthusiasm expressed by a number of the artists, particularly in relation to finessing its structure, led to the setting up of a small coordinating group, with the support and advice of the mentor.

## The Artists

A total of 36 artists registered their interest in the programme. The artistic background of the participant artists ranged from the fields of dance, performance art, visual art, theatre and music. Two participants identified themselves as craftspeople. As far as I am aware there were no writers in the group or at least none that attended consistently. The level of experience was varied with some artists having no direct experience of working with others in creative exchange.

Some artists initially found themselves working in the disability or health sectors because of a local programme which offered them a working opportunity or came from an art education starting point and a number seemed to identify with their role as art teacher or art facilitator more so than as an artist who also (at times) facilitates and (at times) teaches, as well as being engaged in forming the work in a collaborative way. Many had rich, exciting and rewarding experiences of working with people in these contexts and this was a source of inspiration to them. It is difficult to ascertain how many artists saw their work in health and disability contexts as integral to their own arts practice but an interest in working creatively with people and sharing 'the magic' of artistic possibility and outcome was identified as a prime motivator.

It was evident that there was a great diversity of experience and confidence levels among the group of artists and during the course of the programme it was very obvious that the group was committed to the process of sharing this experience, of questioning their own practice and offering insight, advice and encouragement to others as appropriate. The mix of artistic perspectives and methodologies was of enormous benefit to everyone in the group, particularly the experience of artists more familiar with collaborative working processes.

A total of 36 artists registered their interest in the programme with 31 artists attending at least one session. 1 artist attended all 6 sessions, while 6 artists attended 5/6 sessions and a further 8 more attended 3-4 of the sessions. While the attendance was excellent it was the nature of the artists engagement which was most remarkable. There was an appetite to inquire, to share personal

experience and to tease out the various issues arising from this complex area of work. The discussions among the group were far ranging and proved to be stimulating and engaging - spanning an examination of particular instances where artists felt personally and artistically challenged, the value of Arts & Health or indeed one's own attitude to illness and disability. This all took place in the most respectful manner. Artists expressed a difficulty, with some disappointment, in attending all of the sessions and this proved most difficult for parents of small children and those who had work commitments on the day. In the last session 6 artists, committed members of the group, were unable to attend.



Session 5, Nature Quest Gallery, Kilrush

## Attendance

Mentoring sessions Jan-March '09	Venue	Attendance participating artists
Session 1	Auburn Lodge Hotel, Ennis	Approx. 20
Session 2	Glór, Ennis	19
Session 3	Raheen Hosp. & Day Centre	14
Session 4	Glór, Ennis	16
Session 5	Mental Health Day Hosp. & Nature Quest Gallery, Kilrush	12
Session 6	X-PO, Corofin	7

## Training

The lack of accessible training opportunities for artists in Ireland was underlined, as a small number of artists expressed the significant shifts in understanding, experience and confidence gained through training programmes they participated on. For others they felt that they gained the necessary organisational, negotiation and facilitation skills through the 'doing' and not through any art college training. A small number of artists made use of the 'Artist-Shadowing-Artist' opportunity, which was an idea developed during the mentoring programme, whereby an artist offered and organised to have another participant artist 'shadow' them for one or more art sessions. An information form for the artists to fill out was drawn up by the mentor, with discussion around the aims and logistics of such an opportunity. As this particular initiative could not be supervised or coordinated by the programme mentor each shadowing experience was facilitated by the host artist. A number of artists did this as an exchange. One development was the expressed need to attend training around working with vulnerable adults as child protection training was thought to be inadequate in these circumstances. This may be followed up in 2010, by the Embrace programme.

## Attitude & Preconceptions

One of the first things the group did was to explore and define for themselves their own motivation and rationale for working with groups and individuals in these contexts. This enabled artists to move closer towards articulating their own approach, which is crucial to assessing compatibility. It was understood that personal judgments are inevitable but that human dignity and equality are the bedrocks towards working with others, be it in the disability or health context.

During the course of the programme some misconceptions did emerge, was further complicated by a lack of clarity of the artist's role and it was obvious that the approach of one or two of the artists was inflexible or did not support best practice. The approach to working with others was perhaps patronising or showed little understanding of the concept of exchange. Artists sometimes saw themselves as the art teacher and in one instance related feelings of frustration at being unable to impart knowledge or art technique when working with persons with a disability. The notion of shared authorship and 'right relation' was examined by the group. The charitable attitude of helping those less fortunate was a primary motivation for one artist. For the most part these attitudes were challenged as they were expressed, by the mentor and group members with advice offered towards developing new understanding of one's role as an artist in these contexts. In these instances the mentor also followed up with a phone conversation or private discussion to elucidate the point.

In terms of difficulties experienced through attitudinal difference, artists commonly expressed being challenged by the divergent approach of staff towards not only the art activity or project but the service users themselves. Artists sometimes experienced first hand the inadequacies in service provision and found themselves frustrated by the perceived lack of action from the service in meeting obvious and expressed need, particularly relating to equality of participation. Meaningful and responsive art making does demand flexibility and to an extent risk taking from all stakeholders which is not always easy, immediate or possible. If 'doing art' is about the business of possibilities (at least for some of the time) then making art in contexts where services are being withdrawn and severely limited creates its own challenges. The importance of partnership, fostering good communication and an understanding of other interests was acknowledged as essential to supporting and sharing the benefits of participatory arts.

## Value of Participatory Art

The notion that art can have a positive health value was a commonly held belief among the artists in the group as most artists know firsthand the value of making art and being creative to their own wellbeing. But apportioning specific and long term health gain was seen to be the business of other professionals who have the expertise to measure health. It was acknowledged that other non artistic participatory activity in health care or disability settings are just as appropriate and should ultimately be determined by the interest of participants. Artists related anecdotes of pleasurable enjoyment of participants, of building trusting relationships and of the satisfaction of (at times unexpected) artistic shifts and rewards. The artists together workshopped the necessary abilities and requirements for quality participatory art projects and activities to flourish.

What then is the value of participant led and collaborative practice to artists? As mentioned earlier few artists saw the work as essentially part of their artistic practice. Those artists found the groups they were working with to be interesting to them in some specific way and the experience of exchange provided stimulating artistic opportunities which would otherwise not have been possible. Artists who would have identified themselves more as facilitators to a creative process and the art making skills of others valued the experience of contact with others, nurturing creativity, the development of art skills, communication and confidence of participants and were often directly inspired by participant work in their own practice.

Assessing the value of art created in health and disability settings was a topic of discussion which provided lively comment and opinion. The relationship of the artist to the work is another way of coming to the same question. It was argued that while the work of non artists (in the professional sense) may never reach art audiences (nor is it necessarily a motivating factor) that they have an inherent value and can be spontaneous, and as inspiring, thoughtful and moving as 'officially appreciated' work. Artists sometimes purchased the work of participants.



Session 6, X-PO Corrosion

It was articulated that evaluation be based upon intention and establishing an agreed set of aims and objectives is essential to promoting best practice, in terms of collaborative process and outcomes. The recognition of layered benefits was discussed by the group – that people are individuals and have their own reasons to participate. Defining value – what constitutes good art, was seen to be a matter of opinion and was argued by one artist to be therefore a ridiculous concept. Producing work of meaning, integrity and significance to both the artist and participant groups was valued as a satisfying experience for all.

## Breakdown of Mentoring & Networking Sessions

### SESSION 1 INTRODUCTIONS (4.5 hrs.)

Venue: Auburn Lodge, Dennis

- Introduction to the Mentoring and Networking program
- Introduction to Niamh O'Connor (mentor) slideshow presentation of work
- Introduction to Alan Shoosmith and the Embrace Program
- Overview Arts & Health & Arts & Disability in Ireland, artist in the community scheme, arts & health training pilot program, Katherine Atkinson CREATE
- Discussion: What special abilities and requirements does an artist need to have when working creatively with persons with a disability and in the context of art in health?

### SESSION 2 (3 hrs.)

Venue: Glór, Ennis

- An Evolving Rationale,  
Why work in the area of Arts & Health/ Arts & Disability?
- What works (Exploring personal Successes & Challenges)
- Before I begin ... A checklist for Artists
- Review and feedback

### SESSION 3 (3 hrs.)

Venue: Raheen Hosp. & Day Centre

- A Checklist for Artists (group work)
- Presentation by visiting artist, Sarah Stevens
- Awareness Training, Intellectual Disability, Michael Reen
- Artist – Participant – Staff Relationship
- Presentation Nicola Henley, Arts Coordinator, Raheen Hospital & Day Centre

### SESSION 4 (3 hrs.) Glór, Ennis

- 'The work' - What is the artist's relationship to the work, to the group and participants?
- Discussion
- Artist presentation, Niamh O'Connor

### SESSION 5 (3 hrs.)

Venue: Kilrush Mental Health Day Hosp. & Nature Quest Gallery, Kilrush

- Awareness of Mental Health, Breda Latham
- Guest Speaker (testimony from participant of drama project)
- Artist presentation, Sarah Fuller
- Evaluating a project

### SESSION 6 (3 hrs.)

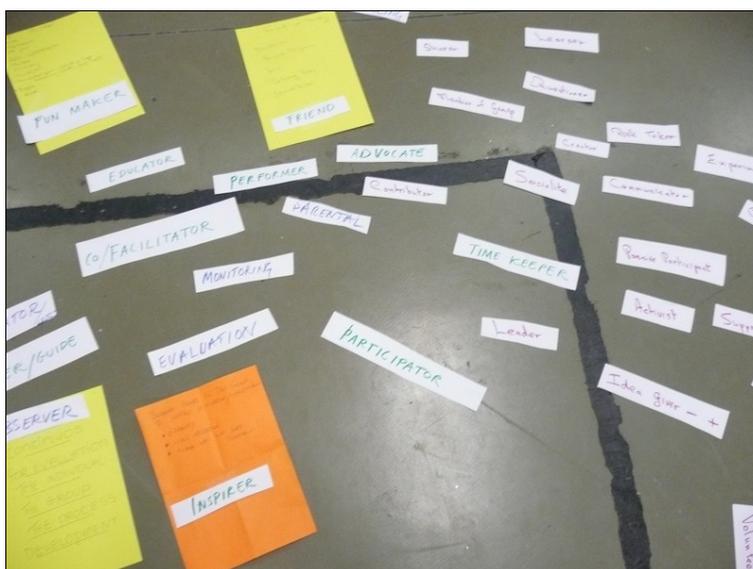
Venue: X-PO, Corofin

- presentation by Deirdre O'Mahony re. X-PO
- Types of Engagement, looking at participation and collaboration
- Arts & Health::Arts & Disability Artists Network Co. Clare looking at the benefits, structure, supports within and without the group to form a sustainable network

To briefly mention - two collaborative artists, external to the group, were invited to present their work. The first Sarah Stevens, visual artist, was chosen as she has a unique relationship with another intellectually disabled artist – Mary Kate. Sarah invited her friend Mary Kate to share a studio with her one day a week. They have recently exhibited their work, made in response to the other.

Deirdre O'Mahony spoke of the genesis and development of X-PO as being initially a practice based Phd to become a community art action project and of her own artistic and conceptual development in redefining her practice as a landscape artist to an artistic examination of people and the landscape.

The valuable input of two professionals namely Senior Psychologist Michael Reen from the Bros. of Charity and Nurse Manager, Breda Latham from the Mental Health Services was provided free of charge to the group. Raheen Hosp. & Day Centre also kindly provided facilities and catering at no expense to the project.



## Artist Feedback

A Questionnaire was circulated in session 5 to try to capture the general experience of the mentoring programme for artists and also to ascertain their interest and commitment in a proposed peer mentoring/networking group, with a similar intent. The questionnaire was also mailed to artists who attended more than 1 of the 6 sessions. 13 artists returned completed questionnaires.

Here are the findings:

### Q. 1 How would you rate the Mentoring Programme overall?

Rate	10 (excellent)	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1 (poor)
no. of artists	3	1	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	-

Unfortunately 3 artists omitted their overall rating. Most likely this was due to the layout of the questionnaire. Otherwise these 3 artists' feedback was very positive. They found the programme to be "useful", "insightful" and found the opportunity for "reflection" beneficial.

**Q. 2** What were your expectations for the programme at the beginning?

The x symbol followed by a numeric value, indicates how many artists shared common expectations

- Meet and share ideas, issues x 3
- Communicate with peers x 3
- learn about Arts & Health x 3
- learn about Arts & Disability x 2
- to be informed and become more involved in local programmes x 3
- learn specific skills i.e. organisational, creative ideas, greater understanding of intellectual disability and mental health sectors, making funding applications
- to see examples of good practice and a code of practice for artists
- none

**Q. 3** What were it's (the programme's) strengths?

The x symbol followed by a numeric value, indicates how many artists shared similar concerns (Some artists gave specific examples while others made more general comments)

- Openness, generosity and diversity of participants x 6
- programme was well organised and delivered x 4
- Meeting peers x 4
- visiting different venues to experience projects around the County x 3
- group discussion x 3
- variety of information provided incl. participant artists and their work x 3
- informative x 3
- opportunity to reflect and articulate on own practice x 2
- strengthened confidence in own work x 2
- insight provided by Mental Health Nursing Manger & service user
- practical information re. making work and working environments
- coordinator
- fun

**Q. 4** What were the programme's weaknesses?

- Initial reservation re. emphasis in first session on courses others attended (otherwise the programme "was strong and grew and developed with the group")
- none x 3 ("really helpful", "would be great to continue")
- not enough time for a tea-break!
- Sometimes discussions not as inclusive
- too much discussion time x 2
- pitched at introductory level, superficially looking at complex areas x 2
- cold venue (first session)

Three artists included here that they were disappointed that they were unable to attend all the sessions and felt the time commitment difficult to manage.

**Q. 5** What elements did you find most useful?

Elements of programme	
Artist Presentations	10
Group Discussion	11
Disability Awareness	7
Information Handouts	4
Networking Opportunities	10

3 artists ticked all 5 elements of the programme, while four artists ticked only 2. Two artists indicated that they missed the Disability Awareness sessions and therefore could not comment on this. 5 artists availed of one-to-one mentoring and sought assistance with specific challenges e.g. Making funding applications, difficulty with attitudes experienced in working environment etc.

**Q. 6.** Would you like to participate in an Arts & Health and Arts & Disability, Artist Networking Group?

All 13 respondents affirmed their interest in being part of a similar group in the future

**Comments:**

- request for feedback and handouts of missed sessions
- emphasised the importance of the diversity of art disciplines in the group, towards broadening understanding of working methodologies and working environments.

## Summary

The Mentoring and Networking Programme:

- Informed artists of participatory art in these contexts
- Enhanced confidence, critical awareness and articulation of members practice
- Provided insights into different methodologies of other practitioners
- Informed artists of local and national opportunities and agencies
- Supported the formation of a new peer-mentoring network

The benefit to artists was evident throughout the mentoring programme and was clearly expressed through the committed and engaged participation of its members. Artists patently welcomed meeting other artists from a diversity of backgrounds and found in this group opportunities to share the challenges and successes of their practice being both affirmed or stimulated by other perspectives.

The programme was a simple but effective initiative towards building confidence and competence of it's members. Through a variety of means, teasing out the complexities of the work proved instructive and insightful and gave artists an opportunity to redefine their approach to working collaboratively. Visiting different centres and experiencing the work of other programmes played a role in platforming and recognising the wealth of activity in the county. Although the Mentoring Programme gave the resource of time to it's members there never seemed to be enough of it to fully grasp the particular issue under consideration. Bearing in mind the range of experience in the group and in order not to overwhelm participants with too much discussion, a mix of activities was programmed to bring balance and interest. Achieving that balance and managing the expectations of members was certainly challenging.

With a view to working towards a self-sustaining network one main aim was to establish healthy communication within the group. The level of participation was marked by generosity, commitment and a willingness to share experience. From the initial sessions it was clear that the artists very much welcomed the opportunity to meet their peers to share practice and as the programme progressed readily offered to become involved in coordinating an ongoing artist led network. It's legacy is a committed group of artists who have come some way in exploring approaches to participatory practice and are motivated to sustain this mutually beneficial professional platform for themselves and each other.

## Artist Networks and Sustainability

Prior to the commencement of the mentoring sessions some desk research of extant artist networks was researched - to whom are they open to, what are their aims, actions and structure and how are they funded? Mentoring and peer mentoring, training, artist and disability/health related presentations, creative workshops, critique of practice and discussion of live concerns all featured.

While there are many established and emerging artist led collectives and networking opportunities throughout Ireland the interests of this network are particular, with a significant emphasis on the nature of their own artistic engagement with individuals/groups with disabilities or health issues, the institutional working environment and building self confidence and expertise of its members.

Although many disability networks exist throughout Ireland these networks are specifically for people with disabilities and relate mainly to disability awareness, advocacy and equality issues. No artist network for artists working with people with disabilities was found – In terms of Arts & Health a number of artist networks or mentoring and networking programmes do exist but overwhelmingly these are limited to a closed group who are in the employment of a particular service and are coordinated and funded by the supporting programme or service. The Artist Mentoring & Networking Programme in Co. Mayo meets a number of times each year for informal exchange, mentoring, peer support and to discuss training needs. The programme supports all 5 artists employed in an arts and health programme and is convened by Mayo County Arts Service in partnership with Age & Opportunity, The HSE Western Area and the Arts Council. A mentor is engaged to share expertise with the group of artists.

The Arts Initiative in Mental Health in Sligo and Leitrim places artists in various mental health settings to work creatively with service users. A panel of approx. 13 artists (all art forms) meet 3-4 times annually for training, professional development and peer support and meetings are quite structured. The group is closed to those artists employed in the programme but has on occasion organised events open to the wider Arts & Health community, including artists, coordinators and health professionals. Artists are funded their basic expenses to attend networking events.

Anam Beo based in Co. Offaly was developed in 2005 from a mentoring programme for artists, in partnership with Offaly County Council, HSE Dublin Mid Leinster and the Arts Council and is now an independent Arts in Health registered charity which supports training and networking for artists. Sligo County Arts Service organises professional platforms for its panel of Arts & Health artists which are also open to other artists to attend but is not a network per se.

Arts Care established in 1991 and based throughout Northern Ireland, hosts regular artist meetings for its artist-in-residence programme to share project work and practice.

These networks are dependent on the coordination of a development worker or other which may not exist without its support, with artists coming predominantly from visual art backgrounds. An autonomous independently led artist network which is open to artists from all art forms, a diversity of backgrounds and experience will provide members with fresh perspectives and insights and will no doubt represent the needs of artists more closely.

Its sustainability will be based on equity and sharing – of participation, of contribution and in its balanced provision for an agreed course of action, based on the expressed needs of group member.

Each network will have its own style, structure, aims and objectives, duration and regularity but overarching all it does is the needs of its members. In session 5 a group of the 12 attending artists, outlined their needs.

## Identified needs of Artists for proposed networking group

- Continued contact (social connections)
- Ongoing support (sharing problems, ideas, experience and gaining confidence)
- Keeping informed of projects, funding, methods of working
- Developing skills
- Creative workshops within group
- Forming a code of practice
- Training
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations
- Mentoring and peer mentoring

## Structure

The nature of the networks mentioned earlier in the report vary from informal to quite structured and may take on all manner of activities and actions from critical reflection to research to policy development to social networking. They each have a coordinator who convenes and contacts group members and presumably establishes the agenda for the meeting with input from all parties. Artists bring their own concerns, experience and a willingness to share their thoughts and respectful criticism with other group members. Larger groups benefit from chaired discussion as equality of contribution is vital. The chairperson may be rotating and best practice would indicate that an agreement of collective responsibility for all matters relating to the group be exercised. There will be needs of artists which cannot be met by the network but there is no reason why the network couldn't be used as means to organise external events e.g. a social event or visit to exhibition etc.

In the absence of an employed coordinator a small coordinators group should be set up to oversee the planning and delivery of sessions with contributions of assistance from other members. There should be an understanding from the outset that artists are volunteering their time and that the coordinators group, or part thereof, will rotate annually.

## Proposed features of this Arts & Health::Arts & Disability Artist Network:

- Training
- Visiting Artist and Network Artist Presentations
- Group Discussion re. Critique of practice, particular issues, related research, essays, reports etc. (breakout groups, brainstorming other creative means)
- disability/health related presentations from professionals or service users
- Creative workshops
- Artist Shadowing
- Information Sharing (reports, opportunities, grants etc.)
- Roundup of current work of members
- Attendance at Exhibitions/Conferences/Training
- Online forum for members and other artists
- Initiating collaborative art projects etc.

## Recommendations to the artist network

- The setting up of a coordinating group with approx. 4 members with clarified roles.
- First session to agree Aims and Objectives of group, to whom is the group open to etc.
- Outline the needs and requirements of the group re. Coordinating, funding, chairing sessions, reporting to funders etc.
- Agree regularity of meetings and approx. Duration.
- Membership Agreement
- Audit of skills and contributions from all members (in what way can I assist the network?)

### The setting up of a coordinating group with approx. 4 members with clarified roles

#### Sharing responsibility

The network should obviously be a resource which enhances the professional development of all its members including those who have taken on greater responsibilities. If the organisational needs of the group are broken down into manageable elements no one individual should be burdened by excessive work demands. Some roles to consider : secretary, membership contact, someone to organise venue and equipment (projector etc), researcher (to perhaps research wiki or other online forum), chairperson etc. Specific parts of meetings relating to agreements and taking feedback should be recorded and disseminated to all members, whether they are in attendance or not. The coordinating group will take feedback from network members and plan the meetings and budgetary needs for the year. The coordinating group should always seek assistance from the wider group to share and rotate chairing and for other specific responsibilities and invite members to prepare discussion groups, present own work, a piece of research or document. There is much that the network can do with little or no funding and so it is primarily its organisational structure which needs careful consideration. I recommend that 2 members of the coordinating group rotate with each year.

First session to agree Aims and Objectives of group, to whom is the group open to etc.

Agreeing a set of aims and objectives with membership at the outset is essential. A set of aims and objectives will safeguard the interests of all members and will promote balance in terms of its activities. It will also help the coordinating group to articulate the network to other funding agencies etc. Without them it will not be possible to measure and demonstrate success.

The mentoring group was inclusive of artists working or interested in participant led and collaborative arts practice in health and disability contexts. It was not inclusive of art therapy or disability arts (meaning professional artists with a disability) but instead supported artists, who may also for example be therapists, to explore their arts practice working with groups and individuals in these contexts. I would recommend that this be maintained.

Meetings should combine a range of activities to appeal to different learning styles and needs of members e.g. regarding discussion the feedback of participants was mixed, most felt that discussion was a strength of the mentoring group, others felt there was too much. Specific and tangible examples of work, used to inspire critique and support discussion would be preferable.

### Outline the needs and requirements of the group

coordination, making funding applications, chairing sessions, reporting to funders, selecting and hiring guest artists, membership, secretary, room hire and prep. are all roles which will require commitment from members. Some of these roles have been filled already by the coordinating group but there is no reason why certain roles should not be rotated within meetings.

### Agree regularity of meetings and approx. duration.

Every opportunity should be made to facilitate accessibility bearing in mind the other commitments of members, the sporadic nature of artist employment and income. It was suggested that the network meet officially 3-4 times annually which would be in keeping with some of the networks mentioned earlier. At other times the group could come together for particular or related purposes. The duration of meetings may change depending on activity - a creative workshop may be left to the end of the meeting to allow members to choose to participate.

### Membership Agreement

An agreement of the principles of the network drawn up by members will facilitate effectual meetings with respect for other members' opinion, timekeeping and commitment to aims and objectives.

### Audit of skills and contributions from all members

In what way can I assist the network? A culture of shared responsibility should be fostered from the outset. No one person is responsible for the success of the proposed network and as mentioned earlier the vitality and relevance of the network will rest on the contribution of all its members. In order that meetings are used effectively to benefit members and not used to plan more meetings it is highly advised that members agree, at least in theory, to take responsibility for specific tasks and will commit to preparing the practicalities of this when required e.g. I read an article online which I would like to bring to the attention to the group for further discussion and I register this with the group. It is my responsibility then to circulate the document in advance of the meeting to the membership secretary who will disseminate it to all members. I should also plan how I will facilitate the discussion, what are the points of interest and how much time is needed for this etc. Artists may also relate their shadowing experience to the group. Another group member might agree to facilitate a short movement and dance session for members, is the room suitable? etc.

### Funding

Co. Clare Arts Service has identified the need to help establish an artist network and successfully delivered the Mentoring & Networking Programme and its report. The Arts Officer will be interested in providing assistance to the network but has also rightfully identified that practitioners should lead in this regard. I recommend that the coordinating group set out their Aims and Objectives, Plan of Action for the next 12 months, Management Structure and Budgetary Needs to the Arts Officer for advice and support.

Bearing in mind that much activity of the network will come from network members, will not require funding (possibly room hire only) and highly informative presentations were given free of charge to the mentoring group, it is advised that the coordinating group contact local relevant disability or health organisations to seek their assistance in regard to providing awareness presentations.

During and prior to the Mentoring Programme, the coordinator contacted a range of people and organisations for advice and information. There was much interest in the work of the group. Linking with agencies like ADI, CREATE, the Network of Arts & Health Coordinators Ireland and others will benefit the group. At some point in the future it is worth investigating the setting up of a company to seek charitable status.

## Contacts:

**Arts & Disability Ireland** and its Director Pdraig Naughton was very interested in the work of the group during the mentoring phase and offered to present ADI's work and current issues around disability. Unfortunately this was not feasible at that time.

Arts & Disability Ireland,  
10/11 Earl Street South,  
Dublin 8

Email: [info@adiarts.ie](mailto:info@adiarts.ie) // Tel: 01 473 6600 // [www.adiarts.ie](http://www.adiarts.ie)

**Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT)** together with the Centre for Medical Humanities, Durham University, the HSE and the Arts Council have produced 'Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Contexts, Guidelines for Good Practice' which was circulated to the members of the mentoring programme. This document is currently in draft form and WHAT wishes to contact groups of interest for feedback and comment. WHAT is a national Arts & Health organisation.

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Tel: 051 842664 // Email: [WHAT@hse.ie](mailto:WHAT@hse.ie) // [www.waterfordhealingarts.com](http://www.waterfordhealingarts.com)

## The Arts Council of Ireland

Arts Participation: Orla Maloney 01 6180246 [Orla.Moloney@artscouncil.ie](mailto:Orla.Moloney@artscouncil.ie)  
Arts & Health: Ann O'Connor (Adviser) 01 6197814 [ann.oconnor@artscouncil.ie](mailto:ann.oconnor@artscouncil.ie)  
Arts & Disability: Sheila Gorman (Officer) 01 6180246 [sheila.gorman@artscouncil.ie](mailto:sheila.gorman@artscouncil.ie)

## Network of Arts & Health Coordinators Ireland

This network has a membership of coordinators based throughout the country North and South. It would be well placed to contact members re. Work opportunities, professional development training etc. Contact current chairperson Mary Grehan, as above.

## CREATE

The national development agency for collaborative arts. For support to collaborative artists across all art forms and contexts. For training, networking, professional development, opportunities.

10/11 Earl Street South,  
Dublin 8

Tel: 01 4736600 // [www.create-ireland.ie](http://www.create-ireland.ie)

## Visual Artists Ireland

Variety of resources - Artist Info Pool, Courses - Peer support for collaborative artists, Accounts for Artists etc.

37 North Great Georges Street  
Dublin 1

Tel: 01 8722296 // Email: [info@visualartists.ie](mailto:info@visualartists.ie) // [www.visualartists.ie](http://www.visualartists.ie)

## Some funding sources:

**Arts Participation Project Award**, funded by the Arts Council also extends to the presentation of collaborative practice in the Arts & Disability and Arts & Health fields. This grant would enable visiting artists to travel, prepare and present their work to the network. I recommend that the coordinating group seek advice from agencies like CREATE, ADI and the Network of Arts & Health Coordinators Ireland when selecting visiting artists in order to ensure artistic merit and excellent collaborative practice. See [www.artscouncil.ie](http://www.artscouncil.ie) for guidelines and application form.

**Artist in the Community Scheme** funded by the Arts Council and managed by CREATE. Applications by artists for collaborative projects are for all sorts of groups including groups of interest. The network could apply for project funding for an artist to work with the network. See [www.create-ireland.ie](http://www.create-ireland.ie)

## Recommendations to Clare County Arts Office

It is fitting that this work is taking place now with much consolidation and opportunity for artists, particularly in the field of Arts & Health. In my view Clare County Arts Office has put it's finger on the pulse in providing a mentoring programme to draw artists together - not least to stimulate cohesiveness, building common understandings of the nature of collaborative and participant led practice in context and raising esteem and awareness in both sectors.

The work of the network while it is ambitious in terms of its effect in addressing the professional needs of artists is modest in it's financial requirements.

I do have one reservation and that is that the network area is too small. Working with other counties (I would suggest neighbouring Limerick) would provide a larger pool of artists as the group probably needs the committed participation of a core group, of >10 – 15 artists to be of benefit to members.

For its first year I suggest that Clare County Arts Office:

- Support the total funding costs of the programme which is estimated to be €1500
- Provide photocopying and postal facilities
- Assist the development of a resource library (reports, research, publications etc.)
- Maintain contact with the coordinating group re. teething problems
- Advise the coordinating group re. making grant applications
- Make available this report, or part thereof, to member artists