

“It’s not somebody coming in to tell us we’re so uneducated we need to draw pictures”\*

\* Corby resident and participant in audience voice workshop

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“They’ve invited us into it, haven’t they?  
It’s saying ‘Look at what can be enjoyable’.  
‘Would you like to participate in this? This is your opportunity’.  
‘You are invited’.  
It’s that welcome and offer, isn’t it?\*

\* Audience voice participant for Made in Corby

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## Introduction

Creative People and Places (CPP) is a national action research programme funded by Arts Council England that aims to increase arts participation in places where historically there have been fewer opportunities for people to get involved with arts and culture. The programme comprises a network of 21 independent projects across England, and there were three initial rounds of CPP funding from Arts Council England starting in 2012. Each CPP is led by a consortium which must include at least one non-arts partner, and each CPP has created their own ten-year vision for their place.

There is strong evidence<sup>1</sup> that CPP Places are successfully reaching communities that are usually considered to be amongst the least engaged in arts and culture, and this research aims to map and analyse the approaches that are being used across the network of CPP Places that are enabling this to happen.

## Methodology

A variety of sources have fed into this research:

- Desk research provided background on the impacts and learning already gained from the CPP programme, as well as themes, models and approaches to engaging 'new' arts audiences from other programmes and research.

<sup>1</sup> [www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/audience-profiling-and-mapping-2014-2016](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/audience-profiling-and-mapping-2014-2016)

- Semi structured telephone or skype interviews using a standard set of questions around approaches, activities and learning, with a representative from every CPP Place (mainly directors)
- A workshop and mapping exercise with CPP teams at a CPP network peer learning gathering.
- Audience voice group discussions with self-identified 'new' audiences at three CPP Places.

## Findings

### 1: Principles – the values and beliefs that underpin this work

#### **An authentic, meaningful and ethical approach**

Many people leading these programmes are driven by strong ethical principles around social justice, democracy, and developing social and cultural capital, and they ascribed their success in reaching new audiences to these principles.

#### **Reject the 'deficit' model**

CPP areas have low levels of arts engagement, primarily because they have very limited arts provision, not necessarily because people who live there aren't interested in arts and culture. A number of CPP Place directors spoke eloquently of not ascribing to a 'deficit model' in which communities are considered to be 'lacking' in some ways that the provision of arts and culture will solve.

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### **The power of the personal**

The power and impact of individuals and personal relationships came through in all of our conversations with both CPP directors and with audiences. The personal attributes that make these individuals effective include empathy, patience, persistence, vision, enthusiasm, responsiveness and flexibility.

### **Sharing power**

Collaborative decision-making and sharing power with communities (in a whole range of different ways) was mentioned time and time again as a critical success factor in our interviews. Being ready to share decision-making, to collaborate, give some things up, be flexible and adaptable, and meet people where they are, are fundamental principles to engaging new audiences.

### **Rooted stories**

Creating new artistic work – music, performance or visual arts – that tells stories of, or is inspired by, the people and the place, is a key part of most CPPs programming approach. For many CPP communities, shining a light on their histories and their stories – which have been invisible and untold – has been a transformational experience. Directors talked about the power of working in this way that is both hyper local and connected outwards to artists and ideas beyond the local community.

### **Participation works**

Participation within CPP is a broad term, encompassing public involvement at various stages and various levels of artistic activity, from singing in a community choir to commissioning artists; from taking part in a practical workshop to joining a ‘Go See’ trip; from signing up as a community connector to working with an artist to co-create work. All CPP Places are committed to providing participation opportunities at some level and both audiences and professionals are clear about the value and impact of these experiences.

### **Listening**

CPPs are using a variety of creative methods to have meaningful consultations with their communities. At Appetite in Stoke, their Supper Club is a mechanism for feedback as well as programming, at Back to Ours in Hull they use ‘Programming Poker’ to find out what people are interested in, and at LeftCoast an inflatable sofa and the lure of an ice-cream van encouraged conversations with residents of a local estate.

### **Honesty, trust and transparency**

It is vital to build trust with the communities we want to engage, and many CPP communities are (justifiably) wary of another short term ‘project’. This – of course – takes time, and it also requires honesty and transparency around sharing information; not over promising; and being true to your word – delivering on what you said you would.

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### **Patience**

It isn't news that new relationships – with communities, with audiences and with partners – take a long time to build and develop, but it is worth repeating and reinforcing. Many CPP projects view themselves as agents of social change and are aware of the time – generations even – it takes to change ingrained patterns of behaviour, as one CPP director put it “It's been longer and more labour intensive than we expected, more like a social regeneration project that will take 25 years”. A number of CPP directors spoke about the “invisible ground work” that needs to happen before you even get as far as talking about how you might work together.

### **Provide a quality experience**

It goes without saying that producing and presenting the highest quality work possible is crucial. If audiences first arts experiences are mediocre or second rate, it will be hard to encourage them to return. It is also worth remembering that quality counts across all aspects of the audience experience, not just the art.

### **Engagement on their terms not yours**

A strong theme coming through our conversations was recognising – and providing opportunities for – people to ‘engage’ with arts programmes in a variety of different ways. And – this is the important

bit – viewing these different ways as a spectrum rather than a hierarchy, in which pausing to watch an outdoor arts performance whilst doing your shopping is just as valuable as joining a commissioning panel. Letting go of prescriptive ideas about what constitutes ‘depth’ of engagement and valuing people’s engagement with the arts, on their terms, not ours is a pre-requisite for genuine audience engagement.

## 2: Practice – what are CPP places doing

### **Establish authentic personal relationships**

Individual relationships are at the heart of engaging new audiences, and this relationship building is happening gradually, face to face, and in real life rather than digitally.

In terms of developing relationships directly with audiences, it involves:

- Meeting people on their patch not yours
- Skills of empathy, flexibility and enthusiasm
- Offering a proactive invitation
- Employing staff who have a real and genuine connection with the place and the people

In terms of developing organisational partnerships too, personal relationships (and cups of tea) are just as critical as aligned objectives and strategic fit.

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### Create networks, connectors and ambassadors

Much has already been written about community networks established across the CPP programme, and these groups have a dual role of both helping to shape and design the CPP programme through programming and commissioning decisions, as well as acting as advocates and ambassadors to generate word of mouth.

A key aspect of creating such networks – either formal or informal – that came from our conversations was the importance of finding the ‘right’ people, as one CPP

director described *“it’s about finding the informal hubs – hairdressers not community centres”*.

### Work with non-arts partners

Partnership is one of the principles of CPP and has already been explored in other CPP documents<sup>2</sup>, and working with non-arts partners particularly, is a key way to reach new audiences. Such partnerships can provide a ‘bridge’ to audiences both strategically and operationally and also help to support the sustainability and legacy of CPP activities.

### Word cloud illustrating the volume of work with non-arts partners across CPP Places



<sup>2</sup> Case Study: Working with Non-Arts Partners at Heart of Glass  
[http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/ScorysCaseStudyCPP\\_HeartOfGlassSt.pdf](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/ScorysCaseStudyCPP_HeartOfGlassSt.pdf)

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Non-arts voluntary and community groups – such as allotment societies, walking groups, refugee groups, residents associations, playgroups, language and supplementary schools and heritage groups – have proved effective partners for many CPP projects, and overall are the most common types of partners.

Many CPP projects name-checked a large number of other non-arts partners ranging from local authorities through housing associations, local employers and businesses to churches, libraries, the police and shopping centres.

Research undertaken by Voluntary Arts has explored the relationship between CPP programmes and voluntary and community arts groups<sup>3</sup>. Our interviews suggested that there is some work happening with these groups across the CPP network but they are, on the whole, less partnered with than non-arts community groups.

On the whole, CPPs are doing less work with the funded arts sector than any other types of partner. This is not surprising, as, by definition, many CPP places are in places with limited arts infrastructure, however, a number of projects did note the value of working with regularly funded organisations in terms of their programme legacy, and many have connected with arts organisations outside of their local area for commissions and 'Go See' trips.

<sup>3</sup> [www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/role-voluntary-arts-activity-creative-people-and-places](http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/our-learning/role-voluntary-arts-activity-creative-people-and-places)

### **Free is not the answer but make it as easy as possible to pay**

Many CPPs are working in places where residents are severely economically disadvantaged, so the affordability of arts events is a key concern for both CPP directors and audiences. However, the cost of arts events is just one of a number of interconnected practical, attitudinal and psychological barriers faced by audiences, and a free experience or free tickets alone do not lead to engaging new audiences.

Many CPP Places are shifting from having 'free' as the default option for their events to more considered pricing; mindful of how price signals value and quality. Most directors noted that their audiences were willing to pay, as long as they thought the experience would be 'worth it' and our conversations with audiences reinforced this. Building trust is a vital first step towards paying for tickets.

Places are using a range of flexible approaches to payment – responsive to their local communities – to make it as easy and simple as possible for audiences to make a financial contribution, beyond the traditional 'box office' model.

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### Marketing approaches

The following were all noted by both audiences and CPP staff as important:

- Keep it personal: old fashioned – and labour intensive – talking to people face to face generates trust, enables people to ask questions and develops rapport.
- Social media: increasingly important in Places from the earlier rounds of Arts Council funding, that – crucially – have already established ‘real life’ audience relationships.
- Speak to people in their language not yours: using clear and simple language to describe events, and what to expect, helps to reduce risk and uncertainty. Focus on the experience, and don’t use ‘arty’ language, or even the word art.
- Use pictures not words: ensure you have a suite of enticing images and video content, both as promotional and advocacy tools.

### 3: Programming approaches

#### Regularity and frequency

Programming that is regular (and frequent if possible), and follows a consistent pattern of timing, makes it easy for people to get into the habit of attending.

### The value of challenge and surprise

A number of CPP directors spoke about the power of bringing audiences something amazing and out of the ordinary, that they haven’t experienced before. For a number of CPPs this means ‘taking the unfamiliar to the familiar’ – programming unusual work in familiar spaces.

#### Places and spaces

It is self-evident that arts events happening in non-arts spaces are likely to reach non-arts audiences. People can stumble across experiences incidentally; programming in places that people are already familiar with and comfortable in can remove one of the risk factors of arts going for the first time; presenting work in unusual or iconic spaces, which have a particular place in the history and memory of local people can be a powerful draw; and ‘taking the unusual to the usual’ can help residents re-imagine their local area in new and surprising ways.

#### Timing

Timing of events is a simple but important factor; thinking about the optimum timing of events for audiences – not for organisers. CPPs are mindful of bus timetables, market days and other local factors.

#### Taster sessions and ‘Go See’ trips

Many CPPs spoke about the value of offering the opportunity to ‘try out’ different arts experiences, in small ways and without a big time or financial commitment as a



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useful way to introduce and demystify different art forms. 'Go Sees' too have been used effectively by many CPPs; organising a trip outside the local area to visit a venue, see a performance or an exhibition and meet artists can provide inspiration and new ideas for programming and build knowledge and confidence as audience members.

### **Outdoor Arts**

Outdoor Arts are a key part of many CPP programmes, the benefits are perceived to be accessibility for all communities due to the visual, non-text based nature and the fact they are non-ticketed (generally free), and take place in familiar locations. However there are some places that have scaled back on their presentation of large scale outdoor arts events, for both practical reasons (budgets, weather risk and appropriate locations) and philosophical reasons (a perception that such work, whilst providing amazing one off experiences, doesn't necessarily lead to the long term behaviour change they hope to achieve).

### **Family activities**

For many CPPs family events are a key way to reach new audiences. Even if parents don't consider themselves arts goers, many are looking for, and value, activities to do with their children.

### **Working with the 'right' artists**

In places that are commissioning new work, finding the 'right' artist was a key consideration. Places talked about

the challenges that artists face working in these contexts, and the need for them to be ambitious, flexible and enabling.

## Things we noted

Are CPPs doing anything new? Yes, we think they are. Whilst some of the individual practices within CPP may feel familiar and tried and tested, it is the combination of the scale of investment, the local focus and the explicit principles of community and audience focus which is unique.

A number of places commented on a tension between 'new' audiences and 'sustained engagement' noting that the challenge for CPPs is sustaining and developing long-term cultural engagement in their communities.

In common with many other projects, the teams delivering CPP programmes are not always the same people who wrote the original bids, and, as befitting an action research programme projects have made significant changes to their approach, reflecting on and learning from their experience. It is credit to Arts Council England as funders that this freedom and flexibility to review and change was built into the programme.

Not all CPP places are doing all the things we list above and we think the differences are driven more by the individual

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leadership approaches and values of the project directors than the specificities of the individual places.

The CPP network is going through a period of churn at senior level, with a number of directors moving on from the programme; using the CPP Network and the lead partner at each CPP to retain, embed and sustain the knowledge and insights gained from leading a CPP programme feels important.

### Conclusions and recommendations

It feels ethically and morally right that CPP Places – which have had transformative audience impacts in some of the most financially and socially disadvantaged areas in the country – should be prioritised for long term public investment through regular funding from Arts Council England. Of course they should be held to the same high standards as other regularly funded organisations, and of course they should go through the same rigorous application process, but CPP projects can – and are – playing a key role in “helping our divided society” (Sir Nicholas Serota).

Our conversations with audiences confirmed to us the power and the benefits of including audience voice in research projects such as these. We encourage the CPP Network to continue to incorporate audience voices in research and evaluation commissions.

There is a definite sense that many CPPs are working in a particular way, with a shared set of values and approaches. It feels to us that there is significant learning from these approaches which could benefit other parts of the cultural sector that genuinely want to engage a broader range of people with their work.

We are not suggesting that CPP has a monopoly on meaningful audience engagement, but we are convinced there are aspects of the CPP approach that could be genuinely game changing for the wider cultural sector.

These are:

- **The values and principles that lay behind efforts to engage more people with arts and culture have a big impact on how this work is then carried out**, and, we would suggest, how effective it is. For leaders, making these values visible in your behaviours and practice feels like it is important.
- **If the cultural sector expects audiences to change their behaviour we need to change first**. We need to change philosophically in how we think of audiences and participants as creators and partners; we need to change what, where and when we programme; and we need to change how we find and communicate with audiences.
- **Many of the practices we heard about in our conversations stem from a belief that the arts are for ‘ordinary’ people**. If we really want a broad range of

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people to engage with the arts we need to communicate in a way that speaks to a broad range of people, not in way that speaks only to other arts professionals, to experts and to critics.

- **There are no shortcuts to genuine audience engagement.** It takes a long time and it needs serious investment – it also requires people with patience, empathy, resilience, enthusiasm, vision, creativity and genuine warmth.
- **Step away from the art.** To make connections with people who don't think the arts are for them it's vital to work with non-arts partners, to use non-arts places and spaces, to connect with non-arts individuals and to use non-arts language.
- **Whilst at the same time...** It is important to create art that is meaningful and relevant to people; that speaks of their lives, their histories and their experiences. Not art that is bounded by these factors, but uses them as a starting point to tell engaging and amazing stories.

### Further research

Working with the 'right' artists was a key theme in our conversations and further research into how these

artists work and what it is about their approach that makes the difference would be beneficial to the CPP network and beyond.

We suspect that CPPs are making a valuable contribution to Arts Council England's Creative Case for Equality and Diversity<sup>4</sup> and this could be further explored and highlighted.

More robust and sophisticated quantitative research – at a network level – could help to demonstrate the link between the CPP approaches and the impacts they are having.

The CPP Programme appears to be enabling/creating a cohort of audience focused cultural leaders, and this feels important if the cultural sector genuinely wants to expand its audience reach. Further research into these leadership behaviours could help unpick what is making this possible.

Related to this, it could be beneficial to map the trajectory of leaders who have moved on from CPP into other roles in the sector.

<sup>4</sup> [www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2016-17](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/equality-diversity-and-creative-case-data-report-2016-17)



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