



PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release

New report points to the power of the arts to change lives.

The work of arts and cultural organisations is life-enhancing and delivers positive effects on people’s health and wellbeing and on the strength of their communities, a new report reveals.

But much more could be done if cultural organisations and government better understood the impact the arts make.

The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health and cultural regeneration consultancy Nick Ewbank Associates carried out research in three coastal towns where there has been significant investment in culture-led regeneration in recent years, focusing on the impacts of Turner Contemporary in Margate, the Creative Foundation in Folkestone and the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill on Sea.

The resulting report, ‘Cultural Value and Social Capital’, found that despite an intuitive feeling that there is a “connection between cultural activity and feeling good”, health and wellbeing is not prioritised as a driver of either programming or outcomes.

The three organisations were found to make a “significant, but at present largely undefined, contribution to social capital and to delivering health and wellbeing in their respective communities”, but outside the specialist field of arts in health practice “this important aspect of cultural value is currently hidden”.

Des Crilley, Chair of Kent County Council’s Strategic Group for Arts in Kent, said, “I don’t think arts and cultural organisations are able to define the impact they are able to make. They don’t trace it and make it visible... They change someone’s life and they don’t even realise.”

Speaking at the report's launch event at the House of Commons, Chair of Arts Council England, Sir Peter Bazalgette said "Fifty percent of local authorities are considering deploying health budget in the arts ... it's about the intrinsic value of the arts first, but to blind yourself to what the benefits are is ludicrous".

At the launch both Sir Peter Bazalgette and the Shadow Culture Minister, Helen Goodman MP, called for the health and social benefits of the arts to be systematised, with appropriate funding and measurement tools put in place.

Launch sponsor, Damian Collins MP, said "Just being together and doing things together is good for people."

The report proposes the introduction of guidelines with models of best practice, an idea supported by the three organisations involved in the project, who also said they would "welcome the introduction of simple-to-use evaluation tools that might shed light on levels of wellbeing generated by their everyday activities". The report also suggests that cultural organisations should do more research into barriers to public engagement with their work, and give more consideration to programming and commissions aimed at "addressing specific health and social issues".

Notes to Editors

The research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as part of its Cultural Value Project. See <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/Pages/default.aspx>

The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health has, since 2004, been committed to researching the potential value of music, and other participative arts activities, in the promotion of well-being and health of individuals and communities. The centre's research has demonstrated that group singing has positive benefits for people with enduring mental health issues and people with lung disease. It has conducted the world's first randomised controlled trial on community singing, which showed evidence of improvements in mental wellbeing.

Nick Ewbank Associates is a consultancy firm undertaking research and delivering projects in the fields of culture, learning, regeneration, wellbeing and social cohesion. Its director, Nick Ewbank, led the ground-breaking culture-led regeneration project for Folkestone from its inception in 2001 to 2010.

Both the report and a short film of the House of Commons launch event can be viewed at www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SDHR/CentreNews/AHRC-Report-published.aspx

Or at www.nickewbank.co.uk