

PARAGON ENSEMBLE

END OF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT – Go & See Grant

Visit to Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

11th-16th November 2013

In November I travelled to Belfast, Dublin and Cork, on behalf of Paragon Music (paragon-music.org), to look at good practice in inclusive arts. As well as meeting with arts organisations, I also met with development and resource organisations, which provide support to organisations in becoming more inclusive. I also attended the Music Education Expo, to gain a better picture of practice in the UK as a whole.

During my trip I made contact with the following individuals/organisations:

Belfast:

Open Arts – www.openarts.net; Eileen Branagh (Chief Executive), eileenopenarts@gmail.com

Adapt NI – www.adaptni.org; info@adaptni.org

Arts and Disability Forum – www.adf.ie

Grand Opera House – www.goh.co.uk; Aine Dolan (Community & Education Manager),

ADolan@goh.co.uk

Dublin:

Music Matters – www.musicmatters.ie; Grainne O’Grady, grainne@musicmatters.ie

The Ark – www.ark.ie; Aisling O’Gorman (Music Programme), aisling@ark.ie

Create – www.create-ireland.ie; Katherine Atkinson (Project Support), support@create-ireland.ie

Arts and Disability Ireland – www.adiarts.ie; Pádraig Naughton (Director), Padraig@adiarts.ie

Centre for Creative Practices – www.cfcip.ie; Iain Oliver, iain@cfcip.ie

Arts Council Ireland - www.artscouncil.ie; Sheila Gorman (Arts Participation Officer),

sheila.gorman@artscouncil.ie

Cork:

Evelyn Grant – evelyngrant09@gmail.com

Cork School of Music, CIT – Caoimhe Conlon (Community Music), caoimhe@musicalive.ie

Music Alive – www.musicalive.ie; Kevin O’Shanahan, Kevin.OShanahan@hse.ie

Music Generation Cork City – www.musicgenerationcorkcity.com; Margaret O’Sullivan,

margaret.osullivan@corketb.ie

Cork Academy of Music – www.corkam.com; corkacademy@gmail.com

SoundOUT – Grainne McHale, grainnemchalemusic@gmail.com

Music Education Expo

Chris Barr – Music Learning Producer, Glasgow Life

Douglas Lonie - Research & Evaluation Manager, National Foundation for Youth Music, London -

<http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/>

Sing Up – Primary music curriculum specialists – www.singup.org

Kaos Organisation – Signing choir for deaf and hearing children -

<http://www.thekaosorganisation.com/>

Drake Music Scotland - Emma Lines (Programme Manager), emmalines@drakemusicscotland.org

Paragon's key questions to address were:

1. What does “inclusive practice” mean, and how do we achieve it?
2. How do inclusive arts organisations fund their long-term programmes?
3. How do inclusive arts organisations deliver CPD and train practitioners?

The key themes of this report are:

- What does “inclusive practice” mean?
- Funding
- Partnership and collaboration
- The importance of strategic documents and advisory services
- Training and CPD
- Visibility

What does “inclusive practice” mean?

My own perception of what inclusive practice is has evolved through the people I’ve met on this journey. Being inclusive is about providing opportunities to include those who have been excluded, although from the outside this may seem exclusive in itself. At the same time, being inclusive means more than just having people from excluded groups be involved – good inclusive practice involves a blank-slate approach where everyone enters the creative space as equals, and movement and sound is not restricted by pre-conceptions and training.

Paragon’s vision in moving forward with inclusive practice is to endorse Koch’s Universal Design of Instruction model, and to discuss accessibility for all: physically; emotionally; socially; culturally; attitudinally; financially. This ties in with discussions that took place at a HEA symposium in 2013 surrounding the implications of inclusive arts practice for Higher Education. In order for the arts to be inclusive, we must be prepared to adapt, or even abandon, existing traditions and create new art forms that are inclusive and fully accessible from their inception.

There is a difference between inclusive practice and integrated practice; Inclusive practice has become heavily focussed on disability arts, but the trip has exposed me to socio-cultural inclusive work and cross-religious work. In Cork, the focus is on socio-economic inclusion, providing opportunities for young people from deprived areas through Music Generation Cork City.

Funding

Creative Industries is the second biggest revenue stream in the Republic of Ireland. In Dublin I visited the Centre for Contemporary Practice (CFCP), advertised as a socially inclusive centre. Their remit is to support migrant artists, providing a space to bring together likeminded creative artists to collaborate on a professional level. As a social enterprise, they offer a space to curate exhibitions, with accessible rates and keeping commission rates as low as possible for them to remain financially sustainable. Their work is in line with Dublin's role as a member of Intercultural cities, and CFCP's events calendar includes talks on inter-culturalism. Their model of self-sustainability allows them to offer a socially inclusive service to creative artists without relying on grant-funding and the criteria sometimes imposed by external funders. CFCP have just announced a new funding initiative, 20 4 20, to encourage investment of €20K (€1K each) in a year, from 20 individuals and organisations, aiming to relieve the burden placed on traditional arts funding organisations. CFCP are also hosting a music business course, to encourage entrepreneurial development by their service users. The social enterprise model is one of interest to Paragon.

I noticed both in Belfast and in the Republic of Ireland, that support needs were being met in a way different to similar situations I've experienced at home – in Ireland the support workers come with service-users and participants, as opposed to being provided by organisations running projects. Therefore the costs associated with support needs are removed from organisations' budgets. Open Arts' weekly classes are filled by groups of adults who come in from day centres, and the venues are often community centres and spaces. There is a surplus of well-resourced, accessible community centres – for every one centre we might have in Scotland, Belfast has two.

From my experience with Paragon, and also with pro-am ensembles based in central Scotland, we are very limited with regards to affordable, accessible arts spaces for rehearsals and performances – sufficient community spaces are few, and ideal venues in terms of size and accessibility are simply unaffordable for many groups. The community spirit and goodwill experienced by organisations in Ireland is attributed to the role of the arts in the community. In the way that the arts are an intrinsic part of rural communities in Scotland, through local traditions, the arts remain strong within Ireland's communities. I think in Scotland this is less so in the cities, perhaps because of the structure of arts provision – experiencing the arts in the city, particularly for young people, is highly structured for the most part, whether through education or extra-curricular activities, it is not as immersive as community-centred arts practice. This is an area that Paragon has considered important in shaping the Play ON instrumental instruction programme, where families become involved in inclusive musical learning in an environment away school structures.

Structure is also key to how organisations manage financially. Music Matters Inclusive Choir in Dublin run using a different structure than most of the organisations I met with in Ireland. During my visit I only had contact with volunteers who are central to the running of the choir's weekly rehearsals. From meeting members to walk in groups to the rehearsal space, to managing all online social media and email enquiries, volunteer roles are what keep the choir running. Music Matters received a large cash injection from the Secret Millionaire TV series. They also use social media to engage with businesses for fundraising and raffle prize donations. Music Matters have established a partnership with Ossia Youth Choir, with whom they are now performing regularly around Dublin, which allows them to develop their audience base and provides frequent opportunity to sell their CDs for further fundraising. Whilst on my visit I found it difficult to contact Music Matters, they seem to have really improved as an organisation in terms of visibility and communication. Paragon has online

social media presence, however I think the organisation could be more active, and perhaps engage participants further in contributing to social media activity, including blogging.

Going back to the role of volunteers in Music Matters, I think Paragon might benefit from engaging further with the voluntary sector. Partnerships with schools and further/higher education for voluntary work placements could be beneficial to all involved, as the incentive of fulfilling a compulsory module would mean volunteers from these areas are willing to commit to Paragon for the length of their voluntary placement. Also, Music Matters use volunteer-pools through employment agencies – people looking to commit to voluntary work experience while they are out of paid employment. In these situations, the volunteers are incentivised, and are therefore perhaps more reliable. Also assigning particular roles or responsibilities to volunteers, such as social media officer or marketing officer, gives a specific remit to each individual so that they understand their importance within the organisation.

Partnership & Collaboration

Partnership and collaboration has been a prominent feature of my observations, and has been highlighted to me as a solution to funding issues – sharing of people and resources, widening reach and strengthening funding applications.

Like many Scottish cities, Cork is small enough to get about on foot, and especially in the arts, everyone knows everyone. I was lucky to have Evelyn Grant, who is well known in music circles here, guide me around the city and tell me about inclusive practice in Cork. I also met with Music Generation Cork City and Music Alive. I left Cork with lots of evaluations and reports that not only highlight and evaluate inclusive arts work, but that have brought together organisations, enabling them to draw on each other's knowledge and resource bases. There is a strong emphasis on community, something I noticed throughout my trip - good will, community spirit and support contribute to how arts organisations survive. Communication and partnership between inclusive arts practitioners is the key to creating widespread change, and from seeing the level of interaction between organisations in Cork, and also Belfast, I think we can learn from them and do more.

Strategic Documents and Advisory Services

One of the key elements that drew me towards Ireland when looking for places thriving with inclusive arts activities was the ease with which I found organisations online, strategic documents at various levels, and the visible presence of specialist organisations. Patrick and Bowditch (2013) have highlighted the importance of support for professional equality from the top of hierarchy in the arts sector in Scotland, but I feel as a newcomer to the field that specialist organisations to support inclusive arts still have a place, and are rather missing in Scotland. Meeting with Adapt NI and Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) filled me with confidence that freelance artists wishing to start up inclusive groups for, for example, young people, had access to knowledge, advice, resources and support to help them contribute to the inclusive arts sector. The island of Ireland has four significant disability arts-centred organisations, which are now connected through the 2007 publication *Face On: Disability arts in Ireland and Beyond*. This publication called for these organisations, and individual artists, to take steps towards a “top down” structure of change for disability arts, the infrastructure for which was already in place.

While I believe the inclusive practice happening in Scotland is innovative, forward thinking and ahead of many other places, I think there is still a lack of awareness amongst those leaving higher education and entering the profession. As an arts student I was not exposed to inclusive music until late in my studies, and only immersed myself in it after meeting Paragon. From speaking to some still in their studies, they do not know what inclusive arts is. I take comfort in knowing some of those teaching the students are embedded in inclusive practice and the message will filter through, but it is not explicitly visible from the outside that inclusive thinking is being taught. For all of the arts graduates emerging from Scottish higher education, how many will know what inclusive arts is, let alone decide to work in inclusive arts, or take an inclusive approach to their teaching and practice?

Training & CPD

Every year Paragon trains up a handful of new inclusive practitioners, some of whom have previously been involved as volunteers. It is one of few visible routes to gaining experience in inclusive practice in Scotland.

Cork School of Music, part of Cork Institute of Technology, offers an MA in Community Music. Many of the inclusive organisations I engaged with in Cork are run by people with links to this programme, showing a clear and positive impact of specialist education and training in the area of community and inclusive arts, equipping graduates with the knowledge and skills to get their own projects off the ground. Options to study arts subjects in Scotland are in decline, and with them opportunities to get involved in inclusive arts practice. Without knowledge of this area, how many would opt to do work in inclusive arts?

Open Arts' programmes are run by highly trained practitioners, maintaining a focus on high quality arts provision and output. I spent some time with the community choir, a diverse group both in terms of musical experience and as people. The standard of musical output was beyond anything I could have imagined. How they achieve this is through a unique approach of learning almost everything by ear, whether the repertoire is popular song, world music or six-part choral works by Rachmaninov. Those directing the choir are trained professionals, and this is evident in the standard of output. At the Music Education Expo, and in the online world, I have encountered the opinion that there are specific methods to teaching people with ASN. From my observations at Paragon's Play ON programme, and in Ireland, I believe it is not the methods themselves that create high quality artistic output – it is a combination of first the knowledge of professional practitioners and then their application of accessible delivery methods.

Visibility

The Music Matters Inclusive choir that I met in Dublin was inspired by the Open Arts choir, although at present their approach is quite different, as is the structure of the organisation. That said, they have a very visible online presence, and perform frequently at a range of events, including high profile ones. By maintaining an active online presence, Music Matters are seen to be an active inclusive organisation, continuing to grow and engage with other organisations in RoI.

Open Arts' are running their classes at capacity, although they see marketing as a weakness and word-of-mouth is how they have reached capacity.

Paragon is working hard to increase its profile, online through social media, and by branching out from its home in Glasgow to run programmes and perform in other Scottish cities. I think increased visibility of all inclusive arts organisations and practitioners in Scotland will help inclusive thinking and practice to spread.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

One of the most startling observations I made in London was the language with which they approach inclusive education. In Scotland, the term “Additional Support Needs” is preferred, although legislation still uses “Special Educational Needs” (Education and Training in Scotland National Dossier, 2005). This is also true of practice in the Irish Isles, where all of the organisations I engaged with spoke about the social model of inclusion. However I do not see the same presence of the social model in Scotland, aside from a few prominent organisations and individuals.

This goes against the approaches I have seen taken in Scotland and Ireland. Paragon, in particular, have outlined the following as their approach to act towards participants as:

1. People – participants are first and foremost people.
2. Artists – participants are identified as musicians, dancers, visual artists, etc.
3. Support Needs – it is only after identifying with participants as people and artists that Paragon will act towards participants based on any support needs they may have.

Sharing Practice

Following my visit to Open Arts in Belfast, they are interesting in developing an instrumental instruction programme not unlike Paragon’s Play ON, and are planning on visiting us to see our model in action.

At the Music Education Expo, I engaged with England-based organisations including the KAOS Organisation, and the National Forum for Youth Music, with a view to establishing partnerships and opening channels of communication, to open up communication between England and Scotland.

Whilst acknowledging the presence of the Creative Thinking Network (CTN) in Scotland, I don’t think organisations are engaging with this as much as possible, perhaps due to the event-based structure of it. In conversations with Drake Music Scotland, there is a desire for better communication channels between organisations like Drake and Paragon, which is perhaps worth exploring in the virtual world. I attended a CTN meeting where I discussed my trip to Ireland, focussing on my realisation that students and new graduates are ill-equipped to pursue inclusive projects without first encountering organisations such as Paragon, and the people within such organisations, in order to be exposed to inclusive work. My aim now is to establish a Scottish Music Graduates Network, combining the structure model of CTN with a more ongoing online presence, and drawing on my connections in the inclusive arts sector to set up workshops and information sessions specifically for music students and new graduates. This will also act as a vessel to get graduates from different institutions to share their learning and experiences, and communicate more.

Paragon is now exploring ideas to use their position, as a leader in inclusive and universally accessible practice and thinking, to share their knowledge and practice with other organisations, and create opportunities for organisations both in and outside Scotland to come together and share practice. This includes increasing the visibility of accessible arts provision. Taking a look at practice in other places has really highlighted the key features of Paragon’s approach, and how they enable truly inclusive and accessible creative work to take place.