



Cartwheel Arts Artistic Policy

Development through art ∞ Participation in practice

Cartwheel develops high quality creative collaborations between communities and experienced, talented artists using a range of artforms to engage people actively and make a difference to their lives, and communicates that positive impact and the learning involved.

Cartwheel is a leading participatory arts group in the North West, with nearly 30 years experience of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, diversity and regeneration through community participation in vibrant, innovative, and often challenging arts projects - we do not shy from confronting difficult or sensitive subjects.

Our focus is on participation and excellence, enabling people who may have had little experience of the arts to explore and develop their creativity and talents.

The company has built a particular reputation in the communities we serve for tackling issues such as equality and access, health inequalities, adult and family literacy, young people placing themselves at risk, safer environments and territorialism.

The company employs a wide range of artforms to create memorable, enjoyable, high quality programmes and projects. These involve people of all ages - and from diverse backgrounds - in making exciting, innovative work, helping to build stronger, safer, healthier communities.

We evaluate, evidence and quality assure our work through an Artistic Panel, composed of artists, creative professionals, academics, social commentators, journalists, and activists and professionals in the fields of regeneration, social inclusion and youth work.

We share the learning from our work with our partners and stakeholders and, where appropriate, with other agencies who should consider using the arts to address issues in their sphere of influence. We plan research programmes dealing with possibilities for joint working.

Our values and ethos

Our core values are creativity, our passion for the arts and for social justice, our commitment to equality and the inclusion of all sections of the community – including groups regarded as 'hard to reach', our integrity and belief in the importance of trust, our commitment to collaboration and our pursuit of excellence. We wholly endorse Article 27 of the declaration of human rights, which states that 'Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community'.

Our values are given practical expression in our methods of working, which include:

- Encouraging participation in the arts, especially in low income neighbourhoods and among vulnerable and marginalised groups
- Developing distinctive work with communities based on original concepts and writing
- Promoting community cohesion, building safer, stronger communities
- Building capacity in communities and leaving a positive, lasting legacy
- Preserving our integrity and building trust through openness, honesty and confidentiality
- Inspiring, valuing and empowering participants, instilling ownership and pride
- Ensuring the highest artistic quality of process, product and representation - and sharing our vision of quality with funders, partners and all who work on behalf of the company
- Widening access to the cultural life of the region and promoting equality
- Breaking down barriers between and within communities
- Celebrating diversity through the communities we work with and artforms we use

Artistic principles

Cartwheel Arts aims to

Develop a lively, progressive, accessible and professional visual identity for the company.

Keep ourselves informed of current thinking, initiatives and issues in the arts and society.

Increase access to the arts for communities and individuals who may not otherwise have the confidence or opportunity to take part in arts activities.

Ensure that all our work offers a clear benefit to the communities we serve and/or a significant development opportunity for staff, Trustees, freelance artists, trainees or volunteers.

Raise awareness throughout the organisation of the importance of equality issues in developing Cartwheel's programme for the future.

Provide challenges, pose questions and provoke debate, while remaining attuned to sensitive issues in communities.

Be ambitious, confident, and innovative – and inspire ambition and excitement in our users.

Base our work on identified needs and to do the creative groundwork necessary to ensure the widest participation.

Encourage participants to acquire new artform skills, offer opportunities for learning and inspiration, stimulating understanding and communication through hands on creative involvement.

Enable participants to reflect on and explore issues in their lives within a safe environment.

Wherever possible, involve participants and user groups in devising projects and developing our programme.

Work with skilled, experienced and knowledgeable artists, specialist makers and professionals across all media.

Devise projects which are innovative and take creative risks – and are also repeatable.

Make a life enriching impact on participants and audience members, and where possible a positive environmental impact.

Ensure wherever possible that longer projects are sustainable and leave a legacy, for example an independent cultural organisation controlled by local people to take the project forward.

Provide good working project environments meeting the needs of artists and participants and (if funding can be raised) a permanent centre of creative resources.

Use multi-agency partnerships (eg Arts and Health) in order to develop joined-up practice.

Develop a distinctive, memorable, challenging body of work with a strong regional profile and ensure that it is seen and valued more widely.

Although we are not currently an Arts Council England NPO, we support the goals of Achieving Great Art for Everyone Arts Council:

- Talent and artistic excellence are thriving and celebrated

- More people experience and are inspired by the arts

- The arts are sustainable, resilient and innovative

- The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

- Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts

Artistic practice

Cartwheel Arts works across artforms and we often combine artforms within a project, providing a challenge for artists and participants, and a catalyst to bring communities together, celebrate difference and aid cultural understanding.

We involve participants working alongside professional artists on an equal footing. The aims and aspirations, hopes and fears of participants will directly inform the content of the work.

We enable participants to draw on everyday life, tackle complex and emotional issues, and engage with local and national stories.

Our work is always participatory and collaborative, and encompasses visual arts, written and spoken word, celebratory arts (festivals and carnivals), music, new media, dance and drama – roughly in that order of magnitude, viewing our work as a whole.

Our projects are original and can take place in a variety of contexts, ranging from schools to galleries, wasteland to theatres, offices to community centres, trams to shopfronts. A single project could take place in all of those contexts and more.

Artists who work for us (certainly those who work for us more than once) will be skilled in a variety of artforms but will also be good at listening, will be non-judgmental, will encourage people to explore their own creativity, to contribute and share their ideas freely, to identify common problems and to work together to solve them.

We do not always have complete control over resources or facilities, so we expect artists to be flexible and inventive when necessary, creating opportunities and virtues from limitations!

We believe in a reciprocal approach where artists enrich the life of the community and the community enriches the artists' practice.

We measure our impact by looking at people's artistic development in terms of 'distance travelled', because outcomes can be subtle and unpredictable, and process and product are closely intertwined.

Collaborative working means building and maintaining groups that share common objectives, skills and involvement in the creative process.

Attention to detail is vital at all levels - researching, establishing and communicating the reason for, and aims of, the project - selection of artist, artform, venue, timeslot - meeting particular needs - the quality and enjoyment of the process - the development and distribution of original, high quality end products - evaluation of the project and dissemination of findings.

Our programme

Our artistic programme for 2013 -14 groups projects and initiatives into four broad headings, which naturally overlap at various points:

Stronger communities

All Well & Good

Youth and diversity

You Live & Learn

Stronger Communities, the largest section, covers a range of projects building links within and between communities. Our two largest projects currently, Darnhill Festival and Tell Us Another One, both sit in this section, but have tentacles spreading into other sections. Our partnership work in low income neighbourhoods sits here.

All Well & Good is our arts and health strand, focusing on the issue of mental health. The major project here is Art for Wellbeing, which includes our support for the user-led group Art & Soul.

Youth and Diversity brings together our work with young people and with BME, especially South Asian, communities in the region. Current projects include Attitude. A priority for the current three year plan is to secure funding for a post and a major multi annual project in this area.

You Live & Learn is our training and learning programme, which is largely focused on our own professional development and the networks we belong to.

More detailed information about our current programme is contained in our development plan. Recent projects are described on our website in glorious colour.

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