



Policy Brief

Looking Beyond Lockdown: How UK Arts Organisations Can Continue to Support Young People's Wellbeing During COVID-19

Professor Paul Heritage, Queen Mary University of London (PI)
Dr Victoria Jane Bird, Queen Mary University of London (Co-I)

KEY INFO

Research questions:

1. What are the consequences of lockdown and social distancing measures on how arts organisations support the development of young people (16-29)?
2. What are the critical challenges arts organisations are facing in transitioning from physical to digital and other social distancing measures? What can they learn from this experience?
3. How are young people coping with the emergency situation and what role can the arts play in building resilience?

Policy area or themes

- Places and Communities
- Creative Industries
- Arts & Health and Social Prescribing

Methods: qualitative interviews, quantitative survey, applied arts workshops

Geographical area: London, Wales, Manchester

Research stage: In progress [finishing data analysis]

Summary of the research

We know that young people's participation in the arts has a positive impact their mental health and wellbeing. COVID-19 forced arts organisations to move their activities online, radically changing the ways in which they support young people. This study examined the impact of a shift to the digital on arts workers and young people. The study is critical as many stakeholders ask why we should go back to the physical, when the digital space has been so successful in increasing reach and reducing costs. The study used mixed methods, combining a survey, arts-workshops and semi-structured interviews with young people (aged 16-24 years), staff and stakeholders. The programme is led by People's Palace Projects and the Unit for Social and Community Psychiatry, Queen Mary University of London, in partnership with five arts organisations in the UK: Contact Theatre, Battersea Arts Centre, Theatre Royal Stratford East, National Theatre Wales and Dirty Protest.



Policy recommendations

Arts organisations have an essential role to play in the care structures of young people in England and Wales

Scaling-up/replication:

Arts organizations are well placed to occupy a social care function (rooted in communities; well connected with young people beyond the reach of other social services)

- **Recommendation: build capacity/connectivity between arts organizations and other parts of the care system**
- **Recommendation: national arts councils to create and coordinate national strategy for artists and creative practitioners to receive training in mental health and wellbeing to build skills/capacity.**

The research revealed high levels of digital inequality as well as lack of expertise/resources for arts organizations to develop digital programme delivery

- **Recommendation: build capacity for creative organisations to develop new forms of virtual activities/offering for young people (including ways to address digital poverty in their target population)**
- **Recommendation: dcms/national arts councils to highlight best practice, setting standards and enabling sector-led knowledge transfer.**

Value for money?

- Arts organisations play a key role in building resilience and supporting recovery for young people in negotiating risks of mental distress during the pandemic. Let's maximise this resource.

Key findings

From Interviews conducted between March and May 2021:

- Many young people turned to creativity as a coping strategy.
- Cultural institutions shifted into survival mode and focused on caring for young people, providing support to tackle digital poverty and modifying programs to include wellbeing check-ins.
- Young people needed more support because of lockdowns: creative self-development programs helped establish structures and stability keeping them driven and motivated.
- Connecting online presented significant difficulties but wasn't all negative for young people.

From survey conducted with 141 young participants from arts organisations, July and August 2021:

- For 52% of respondents contact with arts organisation increased during the pandemic.
- 43% of young people found out about online activities through organisations' social media and 25% through email marketing.
- For the young people that participated in online activities during the pandemic (44 out of 141), activities supported improvement of skills (75%) and pursuing a dream/career (58%). Reported benefits related to doing something beyond their routine (30%), feeling encouraged (23%) and less bored (23%).



Please note that these are preliminary findings. Full report will be published at <https://peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/projects/far-apart-uk/>.

Further information

<https://peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/projects/far-apart-uk/>

<https://www.stratfordeast.com/news/fantastical-futures>

Contact details:

Renata Pepl (Project Manager) – renata.pepl@qmul.ac.uk

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