

# Case Study (1) *“Everybody is an Artist”*

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## Lisnafin Ardnalee Trust Cross Community Development Association – *Strabane Memories in Ceramic*

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)

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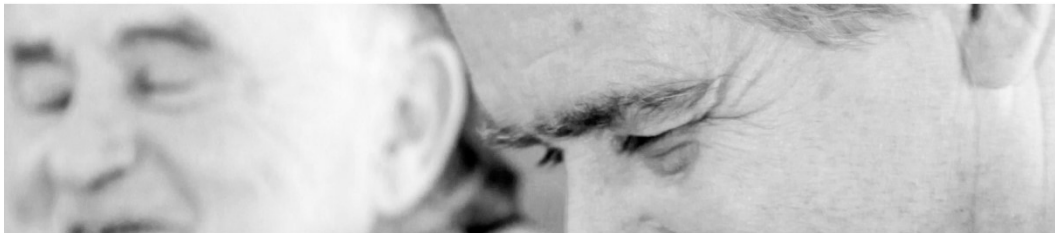




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## 1. Introduction

The Arts and Older People's programme (AOP) is an innovative collaboration between the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)<sup>1</sup> the Baring Foundation and the Public Health Agency. The AOP is aimed at harnessing the power of the Arts to promote the health and wellbeing of older people.

Established in 2009 as part of the ACNI five-year strategy *Ambitions for the Arts* the AOP is now in its third phase. Activities and priorities within it are directed at five areas: isolation and loneliness, social inclusion, poverty, health and strengthening the voice of older people. In September 2016 a total of £127,000 worth of funding was allocated to 20 organisations across Northern Ireland. The value of the grants allocated ranged from £1,025 to £9,055.

Lisnafin Ardnalee Trust Cross Community Development Association<sup>2</sup> was the recipient of the smallest grant (£1,025) and the money was used to help deliver a six-week ceramics class for older people. The purpose of this case study is to illuminate

how the arts class impacted on the lives of the people who participated in it. It draws on interviews with participants, the artist, a member of the Trust board and centre manager and information collected from an audience feedback form that was completed by people who attended a public showcasing event at the end of the programme.

The ceramics class was judged to be a very positive experience by all who were involved in it. It is telling that the programme had a 100% completion rate (N=17). Participants talked fondly of the friendships that had been forged and enthusiastically about how the experience had enriched their lives. They all also spoke openly about their personal experiences and observations of loneliness, isolation and poverty. The results are set out under the following headings poverty, social isolation, promoting participation, health, the Arts and economic development.

Photographs taken during focus group interview are used throughout this report to help illustrate the passion, enthusiasm

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<sup>1</sup> Big Lottery funding

<sup>2</sup> Lisnafin Ardnalee is used in the report as an abbreviation for the Trust

and excitement with which people spoke about the impact of Art on their lives.

## 2. Context

Lisnafin, Ardnalee Trust Cross Community Development Association is based in Lisnafin Park, Strabane. Located in the West Electoral Ward of Northern Ireland (NI), the area has a long history of economic and social disadvantage. Of the 580 electoral wards in N. Ireland 522 have better employment rates than West Ward (table one).

*Table (1) West Ward - Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010<sup>3</sup>*

	West Ward
Multiple Deprivation Measure	113
Income Deprivation	102
Employment Deprivation	60
Health Deprivation & Disability Deprivation	119
Education Skills and Training Disability	205
Crime and Disorder	227

(Source: NISRA website October 2017)

The causative relation between economic poverty and the non-

random distribution of heart disease, cancer and premature death generally is well documented (Marmot, 2010). A monitoring report on health and social care inequalities (DoH, 2015) revealed that life expectancy for women in socially disadvantaged communities was 4.4 years less than that of their more affluent peers and the difference between men was 7.5 years. It is worthy of note that life expectancy for people in NI is lower than that of people in England and the South of Ireland. (ONS, 2017) The umbilical link between poverty and health has been recognised by the NI. Assembly:

“The main social determinant of health is poverty.” (NIA, 2013).

Social isolation, characterised by the absence of social networks, is a form of poverty and like economic poverty, is also associated with premature mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). The risk to health of social isolation is likened to that of cigarette smoking, hypertension and obesity (Pantell et al., 2013; Steptoe et al. 2012). Societal

<sup>3</sup> “Electoral wards are ordered from most deprived to least deprived on each type of deprivation and then assigned a rank. **The**

**most deprived ward is ranked 1, and as there are 582 wards, the least deprived ward has a rank of 582**”. (NISRA, 2010)

changes are resulting in higher levels of social isolation and loneliness. Those people who are socially isolated are more likely to experience intense feeling of loneliness and older people are particularly susceptible. Interventions that target social isolation will likely have a positive impact on health (Pantell et al., 2013).

This case study highlights how poverty provides a backdrop to life in the area. It illustrates how the AOP intervention helped to alleviate social isolation, promoted health and wellbeing and stimulated a discussion of how the Arts could contribute to economic development in the Strabane area.

### **3. The Arts Intervention**

The AOP grant funded a six-week ceramics class for 17 older people (two men and 15 women) who lived locally. The average age of participants was 58.75 years. This figure is likely to be skewed somewhat by participation of one person aged 38 years and the fact that another participant recorded her age as '50+'. Nine of the participants were aged between 60 and 70 years. Over the course

of the six weeks each person was supported to create a small ceramic cottage. The class was tailored to meet the needs and ability of each member of the group. A participatory teaching style sought to engender confidence, encourage group cohesion and promote collaboration. A public celebratory event was held at the end of the programme to showcase the ceramic cottages, raise awareness of the reality of community arts programmes and the social benefits to be had from getting involved.

### **4. Methods**

The impact of the AOP was assessed using semi-structured interviews and photography. The Interviews explored people's motivation for getting involved in the arts class, the impact that it had, factors that had made the programme successful and people's visions and plans.

A focus interview was carried out with five participants (four women and one man) from the programme, the artist who delivered it and a member of the management board. The interview was held in the Lisnafin community centre. The manager

of the centre was subsequently interviewed by telephone.

Photography was used as a means of capturing the excitement, enthusiasm and passion with which people spoke of their experience of the AOP. The photographs also capture how people instinctually used their body – fingers, hands and arms to describe the processes involved in making the ceramics cottages.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants for audio recording of their interview and for the use of the photographs taken in all AOP publications. Anonymity of AOP participants is preserved in reporting their contributions.





## 5. Impact

This section begins by describing the impact of poverty on life of older people and their experience of social isolation and loneliness. The defining characteristics of the AOP are then outlined. The challenges and innovative ideas to engage other older people, including men are discussed and the potential of the arts as a vehicle for economic development are highlighted.

### 5.1 Poverty

The reality of living in one of the most economically deprived areas in NI was a powerful and tangible backdrop to the project.

*“Strabane has always been, for as long as I can remember, an area of severe economic deprivation and unemployment. It had the highest unemployment rate in Europe for many years. Nothing has really changed. They are doing projects here and there, but they should really be giving people jobs and employment.”*

Within this context the vital importance of the Lisnafin community centre as a meeting point and resource for people of all ages was a recurring theme.

*“I live about 50 yards from the centre. I’m unemployed – I sign on for my stamp – franking it’s called. I don’t get nothing from the government because my wife is working you know.”*  
(Man aged 62 years)

*“They spent £6,000 on a summer scheme and without that those wee children wouldn’t get out of Strabane for the day. Because of the lack of employment and the lack of money.”*

There was a sense of the community centre being the hub for the local community it made it the go to place to get information about what was going on in the area and to learn about employment opportunities.

*“Great place to get to know other people... and word of mouth you know they might find out there’s a wee job there with somebody.”*

The community centre is located in the heart of a residential area and the AOP participants expressed a strong sense of solidarity with younger people in the area and hope that things would get better for them.

*“There’s a saying here about young fellas that they go from the dole office to the post office. And what that saying is they go to the*

*dole office and never know what it is like to have a job, and then it's their pension money."*

The AOP participants also expressed major concerns for their own futures and the welfare of other older people.

*"... two other women aged 61 and 62 years and they are having to claim unemployment benefit. They should (before age increase) be getting their pension. They are getting £73.60 to live on – that's all."*

In a community where many people had a lifetime of low income and poor pension provision the idea of a leisure filled, and carefree old age was a pipe dream.

*"... woman in her 60s she reared six children and her husband died ... and just like that she has had to go back to work, to just survive."*

Set against a backdrop of historical social and economic deprivation the hardship associated with changes in social policy, cuts in benefits and reduction in public funding was stark. These changes it was argued made initiatives such as the AOP crucial.

*"When I started work at 19 I thought that I would get my pension at 60. I'm 60 now ... but I now have to wait until I'm 66. I haven't been prepared for that. Because of all these changes they should be putting more money into things for older people. For your health and wellbeing. For your peace of mind."*

## 5.2 Social Isolation

The AOP participants in Strabane felt invisible and forgotten by policy makers.

*"They [politicians] don't care about this part of the world."*

In addition, they felt that the impact of their physical isolation was exacerbated by their age.

*"Older people are forgotten about. Statistics showing that people are living longer."*

Although investment in young people in the area was welcomed there was sense that older people were being forgotten.

*"They seem to forget there's another generation."*

The introduction of the new 'super council' structure was perceived as making the visibility issue more difficult.

*“.. can see that Derry has a lot more funding than the Strabane area, anything that we get is a bonus.”*

The rapid growth of new housing developments within the wider Strabane area was described as confounding the severity of the deprivation problem. The new developments include many private rentals and an influx of a population who commute to work in other areas. These phenomena, it was argued, were resulting in a skewing of statistics with regards to deprivation, making the area appear to be more affluent than is the reality.

*“With new developments making our statistics seem better than they really are.”*

Experience of social isolation and loneliness was common.

*“I don’t see anyone from morning til night. Doing the wee class, I’ve been able to meet people and you know go for a wee cuppa after. There were other people there too felt the same as I felt, which is always good too.”*

As illustrated in the dialogue between four participants in the focus group interview there was an acute awareness of the detrimental effects of isolation

and loneliness amongst people involved in the AOP project in Lisnafin Ardnalee.



**P4W:** “They say that loneliness is a...”

**P6M:** “...big killer. Thinking all the time, these people are thinking all the time”.

**P4W:** “Too much time on their hands.”

**P6M:** “Thinking all the time.”

**P2W:** “They’ve maybe had traumatic experiences; they’ve been through the troubles too, maybe that has impacted too.”

**P5M:** “It’s a long auld day sitting in the house staring at four walls and it’s the same auld thing day after day after day.”

People talked about how changes in their lives such as retirement had resulted in feelings of emptiness, loneliness and a need to ‘fill the day’.

*“I took early retirement to look after my father but then he died.”*

Strabane was described as a friendly tight knit community but making friends and social networks outside the immediate family could prove difficult and this also resulted in loneliness.

*“I’m from about 30miles away from here. I married a Strabane man. I didn’t know anybody.”*

There was a deep sense of empathy amongst AOP participants for other older people and an realisation and understanding that people often missed opportunities due to ‘not knowing’ or because they lacked the confidence to attend events or places on their own.

**P3W:** “A friend of mine lives in Omagh. She never goes to any classes and she was saying to me ‘how do I get in to do the workshops?’. She said, ‘I’d love to go I’d even travel to Strabane’.”

**P5M:** I’m sure in Omagh there’s things going on and the wee woman doesn’t even know”

**P3W:** “She’s like me she doesn’t want to go there on her own.”

**P1W:** “But she’d want the social aspect of it.”

**P3W:** “she’d want to socialise with other people but it’s just getting out there.”



### 5.3 Making Connections

The Arts were valued as a way of easing the flowing of conversation between strangers.

*“You were concentrating on it but at the same time you were having conversation with the person on either side of you.”*

The ceramics class offered an opportunity to broaden social networks, learn about opportunities and create a sense of ‘belonging’.

*“It comes to the stage then where if someone isn’t there you’re asking I wonder what’s wrong with so-and so and someone will go and check up on them and that is lovely. The companionship was there.”*

Key to the success of the class was the notion of ‘helping each other’.

*“And the other thing is everyone helped each other. Like I was the best at making wishing wells – do you remember that? I was the wishing well girl. B was good with the birds and someone else was good at something else and you know everyone just mucked in and helped each other. It was really, really good.”*

Discussion within the group, sharing creative ideas and learning from each other was credited with forging a sense of solidarity between the members.

*“You are getting ideas from other people too.”*

This solidarity was reflected in a sense of collective responsibility for clearing up after each class.

*“Everyone gave a hand at clearing up at the end of each class – real team work and working together that was important” [lots of murmurs of agreement around the table]*

People heard about the class in a variety of ways including social media, the community centre newsletter and word of mouth.

*“I was on social media and I saw it advertised through the Lisnafin community group. I live around the corner, so I thought that it would be a good thing to do; sort of to learn a new skill which I’d not done before.”*

The community centre newsletter is delivered to every home in the area and was identified as being a great source of information about what was going on.

*“I got to know ... through the wee brochure, the newsletter that comes in the door; and word of mouth then”.*

Although people knew about the class from the newsletter, hearing about it or discussing it with another person seemed to have the greatest influence on whether someone attended.

*“Well X had told me about it and I said that I would like to try (sic) and it sounded different. I’d never done anything like that before and I thought I’d go and try it out”*

The opportunity to do ceramics was a novel experience and a major enticement for people to register for the course.

*“I heard about it from X she texted me one day. It was something I’d never done before. I love crafts myself and it was the thought of trying something different and I wanted to try it.”*

Participants talked about how their involvement with the AOP had widened their social networks and increased their awareness and opportunities for other classes and events.

*“It is amazing the number of people who ask you ‘how did you hear about these courses? I don’t*

*know maybe it’s when you start doing one thing – you hear about things that are going on.”*

Despite their own familiarity with social media, people felt that it was not an effective way of recruiting the isolated older people who would benefit most from the programme.

*“Not everybody has computers”*

Drawing on their intimate knowledge of the area AOP participants said that as there wasn’t a strong culture of newspaper reading in the area or internet use amongst older people, personal contact was the most effective way of reaching those people for whom the programme would have greatest benefit.

*“Lots of people don’t have a computer or know how to use a computer, very few get a newspaper, so they’re limited in the ways that they can find out about things – they depend on word of mouth.”*

*“and everybody doesn’t get the paper either, so word of mouth that’s how most people hear about things.”*

Pre-conceptions of what ‘arts’ meant were identified as a barrier



to older people's participation. It was universally agreed that talking with other older people about the art classes and emphasising the fun element would help with recruitment.

*".. it's about us talking to people and telling them that it's a bit of craic. You have a wee cup of tea, we chat, and we meet one another. Creating a different picture than the one that they have in their mind."*

The need to overcome ideas about the 'arts' as an elitist pursuit and notions that it 'wasn't for them' was described as being common to people throughout the area and not just amongst older people.

Drawing on past experiences with community groups the artist said, that creating opportunities for the public to see and experience the things that had been created, was a valuable way to counteract these opinions and help people to understand that art is for everyone.

*"Seeing the finished product helps they say I'd like to do that"*

A public exhibition of the cottages created by The Strabane Memories in Ceramics

group was held at an end of project. Feedback from the AOP evaluation form that was completed by 24 of the people who attended was overwhelmingly positive.

Twelve people (50%) were aged over 55 years and of this group six people were aged over 65 years. Only two of those people aged over 55 years belonged to an Art group. Two men, one aged in the 17 – 34-year age group and the other in the 65 to 74-year group completed the audience evaluation. Neither belonged to an arts group, nor had they taken part in an arts activity within the past 12 months.

## 5.4 Men

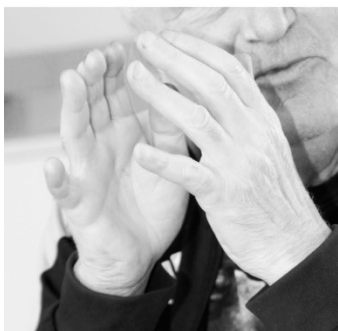
Men's health outcomes tend to be less good than women and men generally are under-represented in health promoting initiatives. The loneliness and isolation experienced by men in the Strabane area and older men especially was a source of concern for AOP participants.

*"Now there's M (rural area) he retired 10 years ago. He is 71 now and he comes in (to Strabane) every day on the bus because he is bored and he talks*

*about the same things all the time, over and over.”*

Two men participated in the ceramics class. They enjoyed the experience enormously and were recognised as being a core part of the group. There was recognition by everyone involved with the project of the benefits to be had by men through engagement with the arts. The primary challenge was identified as overcoming the disturbing culture of apathy in the area.

*“A lot of ones (men) around here suffer from a heavy dose of apathy It’s just getting them out when you do they become different people.”*



Lisnafin Ardnalee that was rooted in generations of unemployment’

*“They don’t seem to have any motivation. They are letting life pass them by and that’s the truth and it’s sad to see”.*

Drawing on experience working with the Men’s Shed initiative and other groups the artist suggested that ‘men only’ classes was a good way to get men introduced to the Arts.

*“I notice that when we do projects that are just for men you get more men at them. We get great turnouts.”*



## 5.5 Creativity

Ceramics was the focus of the AOP and so enjoyable did participants find it that they continued together in a class on Paverpol making. The social element “of meeting up, having the wee cup of tea and the craic” was important but only as part of the project. The solidarity and

connections that had developed between people stemmed from their shared interest and experience of creating the ceramics.

*“The cup of tea doesn’t work. I’ve had projects in the past that ran for over a year. Before I left I stocked the place up with materials and everything they would need to continue. I knew some of them were quite artistic. But you see once I left they didn’t continue; they drifted away. Maybe one week one person didn’t come in and the next week someone else didn’t turn up. They need something to focus on every week just to keep them coming and meeting up.”*

At the end of the AOP ceramics project participants got to keep their cottage. This was viewed as an important element in the programme.

*“I think it was a good thing – at the end everybody brought their piece home. I remember when I was younger going to different classes and never finished any of them.”*

The delight and pride with which people talked about the things that they made was very apparent. The fact that pieces

were on display at home where they could be seen by family and friends was a source of solace.

*“it’s in the garden and when someone admires it you can say ‘I made that’ and it’s a lovely feeling and they say goodness I didn’t know that you were artistic, you smile and say, ‘I’m not but I made it’.”*



Each piece of art work reflected the unique creative instincts of the person who made it and the sense of self, good memories and emotion in them resulted in a sense of possessing a ‘priceless’ treasure.

*“The Paverpol statue that I made of the Spanish lady is on my fireplace and when my wee granddaughter comes in I say, ‘that’s yours love for when you*

*get older' she's dying about this – you know".*

The artist's ability to tailor the class to each person's needs, help them to relax and trust in their ability was viewed as vital.

*"She says yous (sic) will all be able to do this, yous (sic) will all make a cottage and it will be lovely and you will be proud of your work. That gave us great encouragement".*

The relaxed, learner focused approach used by the artist was judged to be crucial for older people for whom memories of school were not always positive.

*"At school the teacher would stand up at the front of the class and talk at you. But with X she came around the room and she talked with everyone individually. She was lovely."*

This approach contrasted greatly with childhood memories of what education entailed. Despite the passage of 50 or 60 years memories of school and ideas of education based on authoritarian and disciplinarian approaches were still very vivid. The AOP group suggested that these memories of school and the fear associated with them could be a barrier that needed to be

overcome to encourage older people to avail of the art classes.

*"Maybe if someone had no confidence and had had a bad experience at school they could be put off by the thought of a 'class'."*

The importance of a safe environment where people could relax was identified as being crucial to creativity. The ability to trust the artist was central to this.

*"Preparation was important too – when we arrived in every week she had the room set up and ready for us and at the end of each session she would tell us what we would be doing next week."*

## 5.6 Health

Participation in the ceramics class encouraged people to be physically active and to engage with their bodies. This fact was evident in the actions and body language that they used in the focus group interview. As people shared their stories they instinctually relived the experience of rolling out the clay and the challenges encountered when creating the "tiny roof tiles". The delicate, complex and dextrous movements used are illustrated in the photographs

*“The roof now you had to cut out all the bricks and put them all on individually you know. You need a lot of patience.”* [laughter in group]

The older people in Lisnafin Ardnalee were keen to improve their health and were acutely aware of the benefits of keeping physically and cognitively active.

*“I watched a video on you-tube about nuns in Minnesota. They all lived to be in their 90s some over 100 and they left their brains for research. ... even if you learn something like texting or doing crosswords or something that keeps your brain ok it keeps the dementia away”.*

The health of people living in socially deprived areas like LisnafinArdnafin is known to be poorer than that of their more affluent peers. The centre manager explained that the main idea behind the proposal to the AOP was to use the Arts to combat the effect that deprivation was having on older people’s mental health.

*“There is an awful lot more doom and gloom out there. The classes take people’s minds off that. Helps to keep themselves active and it helps reduce that whole issue around depression and mental health.”*

The social interaction combined with the focus and sense of purpose that came from the ceramics was credited with lifting the mind and helping people feel better mentally.

*“Meeting up ... socially it was brilliant and making a piece of work at the end of the day. That’s what I look forward to the end piece and you see them all working on it and everybody loved it. Now I couldn’t get over that – got a good auld kick out of it. [tapping the head] I loved it”*



Participation in the ceramics class also proved successful in helping to bolster people's self-esteem and motivation to be social.

*“Doing this has definitely helped me emotionally. The motivation to just get up, and to get dressed, and to get out among people again.*

Feeling relaxed after the class and the notion of ‘clearing the head’ were commonly reported.

*“Clear the head like, clear the head. I would go for walks and stuff like that ... It's good to meet people at these groups – good auld craic.”*

The artist drew on experience, with a woman who was recovering from cancer treatment, to highlight the therapeutic benefits of participation in the arts and stressed the importance of having something positive to focus on.

*“She had been through cancer and the treatment and all that. The ceramics was something else for her to focus on. ... after that sort of treatment, you don't have the same energy and so you can't take part in anything too physical and the clay is very*

*therapeutic to work on. You just kind of get lost.”* [lots of nods of agreement from the group]

People talked about how the increased motivation to get out to the class meant that they were also more physically active and as a result felt that they had more energy. As a result, they recognised and emphasised the benefits of the Arts as a cost effective and preventive health care measure.

*“I know that I am much healthier since joining the programme. If other people were to get the same benefits it would cost the government a whole lot less money— than maybe providing medical help and hospitalisation — if they would help you to keep active”.*

## 5.7 Confidence

The process of creating something, the unleashing of hidden talents and the boost that it gave to participants' confidence were all identified as reasons behind the success of the Arts in promoting health and wellbeing.

*“at the start you were a wee bit nervous but once everyone got to know each other you didn't care if you made a mistake.”*

Ceramics was a new experience for the AOP participants and they described how initial feelings of anxiety and beliefs that *'I wouldn't be able to do that'* were overcome as they gained confidence due to the skill and patience of the artist.

*"I nearly freaked out when you she said we were going to do a garden. Cos like it was so intricate but I have to say Leona's patience won us over."*

Learning a new skill and having fun doing it engendered a sense of confidence that permeated other areas of people's lives.

*"Feel more confident and I feel that I'd be able to try something different again, anything different – aye it wouldn't bother me now."*

The exhibition at the end of the AOP project gave a great confidence boost to participants. Their appreciation of the event was primarily due to the opportunity it gave other people, including family to see what they had achieved.

*"Family was surprised, and it was lovely that they came to the night that we had to see what we had made. You were proud of what you had done."*

The impact of the ceramics class on changing people's perceptions of the arts was remarkable. The short dialogue (below) taken from the focus group interview illustrates how by gaining mastery in the ceramics people had the confidence to recognise that 'everybody is an artist'.

**P6M:** I told my sister about it but she forgot

**P4W:** Is she artistic?

**P6M:** Well she's retired now like yourself

**P4W:** But like would she be artistic?

**P6M:** Ah well aye she like ah

**P1W:** She wouldn't be as talented as you, would she?

**P5M:** Everybody is an artist – right. It's getting the talent out isn't it. There's talent in everybody

**P6M:** There is. Everyone has something in them

**P4W:** Well, I never would have considered myself an artist until I retired and joined the group.

The AOP memories in ceramics project was limited to people who lived locally and could travel to the community centre. So successful has the programme been in alleviating social isolation

and helping people feel better that similar initiatives have developed for older people who are living in residential care.

*“When we were doing this project, everyone had to travel to the centre. We’ve done another project that’s just finished there in the nursing homes. So, we took the project up there to them so that they can have a go. And we are starting another one in September.”*

The project manager reported that an unexpected outcome of the arts classes has been the potential for income generation. After the AOP the participants were so enthused about arts and the camaraderie that had been generated within the group that they participated in a Paverpol making class.

*“I was shocked at how good the stuff was that people made. The woman who was running the class said to me – you see those items there I know from experience if I was to put those on the internet with a worldwide audience they could be making £300 each.”*

Some of the women had already starting to use their skills to fund raise for charities and were

pursuing the idea of establishing a ‘cottage industry’.

*“We are part of a group of women some of them ladies have been bereaved, others have disabilities and it is a cross community group women of different religions. So, what we have decided to do is create a wee cottage industry.”*

The new-found confidence and entrepreneurial spirit was generalised through the group and there was a realisation that the skills that have been learnt, the pieces that have been made and the networks created could be used to stimulate development of business opportunities, job creation and economic development in the area

*“The end result of projects like this could be setting up wee business and contribute into the economy.”*





## 6. Discussion

Poverty and poor health are inextricably linked. Poorer people are more likely to be born prematurely, experience ill health throughout their lives and die prematurely. Social isolation also poses a serious risk to health and therefore presents an additional threat to people living in areas of social deprivation, such as Strabane.

The stark reality of social isolation and loneliness for people in the Lisnafin Ardnalee area was made visible in this case study. The AOP proved to be a powerful conduit for the promotion of health and wellbeing for older people in Lisnafin Ardnalee. The simple Arts based intervention in the form of a ceramics class served to alleviate social isolation and feelings of loneliness.

The Arts are recognised as a powerful social enabler and way of helping people to build resilience and coping skills. The important role that the Arts play in enriching the lives of older people is well documented.<sup>4</sup> Accessing the Arts is however

often mediated by social position and financial status. Older people are amongst those least likely to access the Arts; a fact that is particularly true for older people living in areas of social deprivation.

This case study has highlighted the penurious effects that changes in social policy such as an increase in pension age are having on older people with low incomes. In such a climate self-funded participation in the Arts is nigh impossible.

Lack of resources, is usually cited as the barrier to implementing publicly funded arts-based initiatives. It is therefore very worthy of note that the cost of the six weeks ceramics delivered in Strabane was approximately £60 per person.

Furthermore, skills, knowledge and confidence developed through the AOP have whetted appetites to develop Art related businesses in the area. A legacy of generations of economic deprivation is the relative lack of experience in business and entrepreneurship locally. Investment in building business

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<sup>4</sup> <http://baringfoundation.org.uk/publications-by-topic/#Arts>

skills would compensate for that deficit. The likelihood of people realising their business ideas would be enhanced though public investment in business mentoring and development programmes

The lack of feeling, passion and interest that is associated with apathy is common in people who feel powerless and alienated from society (Freire, 1970). Significantly apathy was identified in the case study as a barrier to social engagement. Apathy is a natural response to generations of unemployment and poverty and is a major hurdle to overcome in addressing social isolation. The effects of lifetimes of poverty will not be eradicated overnight but initiatives such as the AOP have the power to make a significant contribution.

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**Ms Joan Alexander** is an innovative and award-winning photographer whose accolades include the University of Brighton Bright Spark award, the Santander Innovation award; the Danny Wilson Memorial Award for most outstanding emerging photographer in Brighton Photo Fringe. Her work has been showcased by contemporary arts organisations including Fabrica and Night Contact. In 2015 she was nominated for the prestigious Drawing Rooms London Bursary Award for creating innovative and ambitious work during Dear Serge series at the De La Warr Pavillion. An associate with Sonrisa Solutions Ltd she combines a degree in Scholastic Philosophy (QUB 2001) with an MA Photography (Brighton, 2011) and a wealth of experience photographing older people. She contributed innovative shadow to the ACNI publication 'Not so Cut Off' (Lynch & Alexander, 2016). More recently she has been developing her 'shadow boxes' as bespoke arts education package, Shadow Studio.

## **Appendix I Some Informal Photos from Lisnafin**



*Figure 1 AOP Artist Leona Devine at Lisnafin*



*Figure 3 Damien Gavigan Project Coordinator Lisnafin Community Centre*

*Figure 2 Delicious Strabane scones for focus group*



*Figure 4 Acer a core member of the team*