



Analysis and interpretation of quantitative data
generated through the Arts and Older People
Programme
Summary Report

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Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the quantitative data generated through the Arts and Older People Programme (AOPP) undertaken by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). ACNI is the main development agency for the arts and cultural sector and is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) of the Department for Communities (DfC). Its draft strategic plan *Inspire, Connect, Lead* (2019 to 2024), provides an overview of the direction ACNI is proposing to take over the medium to long term. It sets out the range of actions to ensure its organisational objectives are achieved.

The AOPP ran as a pilot in 2009 with the aim of reducing poverty, isolation and loneliness amongst older people aged 55 years and older and was rolled out in 2010. Research, policy and practice have highlighted the rising incidence of loneliness and social isolation, especially among older people. Loneliness and social isolation can have a significant impact on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The AOPP is one of the Arts Council's core programme areas and has engaged with over 28,000 participants through over 150 artist led projects since inception. The AOPP is supported financially by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Baring Foundation. To date, nearly £2m has been invested in programme delivery. <http://artscouncil-ni.org/funding/scheme/arts-and-older-people-grants-programme>

The evaluation framework containing the questions pertinent to this report was introduced in 2012. The report provides an analysis of the quantitative data generated through the AOPP based on questionnaires completed by audience members at AOPP events, artists facilitating AOPP projects, volunteers involved in AOPP projects, and participants at the start of a project and at the end of a project.

Audience questionnaire

There were 570 respondents to the Audience questionnaire. The most common reason for attending the event was that friends or relatives were taking part (56%) followed by liking the type of event they were watching (40%). The vast majority of respondents (99%) said the event was either 'very good' (83%) or 'good' (16%), and nearly every respondent was satisfied with the event.

Just over two thirds (65%) of respondents said that the event had made them more aware of issues facing older people, while 14 per cent said they were already aware of the issues facing older people. Furthermore, 72 per cent said that attendance at the event had made them think more positively about older people, and a further 23 per cent said that they were already positive. This comment from an audience member summed up the event:

The energy buzz and skill that I saw at the concert was inspirational. The buzz amongst the audience was brilliant and infectious! I brought two older men (80 and 77yrs) with me – both widowers – they loved the evening and it seemed to give them a boost to see men of their age putting on such a good show.

Artist questionnaire

There were 46 respondents to the Artist questionnaire, of whom 43 had worked with older people before. The artists were satisfied with the practical details of the project (objectives, information, working relationships and support), and relationships with partner organisations were especially positive.

Most artists (n=43) found the older people easy to engage, and three out of four artists (n=32) said that older people contributed to the planning of the sessions. Fourteen artists said that older people were not involved in the planning process, although this was not a problem.

Overwhelmingly, the artists gave positive responses to the three questions focused on artistic practice and needs. One half of respondents said that the project increased their knowledge of older people's social issues 'a lot', and a further 20 respondents said that it increased their knowledge 'a little'. One artist said that the project did not increase their knowledge of these issues at all. Nearly three quarters of those responding to the question said that they had received training or skills development as part of the project.

The artists felt that participants in the project progressed in the nine dimensions outlined in the questionnaire. In particular, nearly all artists felt that participants enjoyed the activities. The desire to learn, and being engaged, were also perceived as having improved by most artists. All of the artists said that they would be interested in working with older people again.

Volunteer questionnaire

Thirty-four volunteers completed the questionnaire, and were involved in a wide range of activities, including general assistance or more specialist roles. When asked why they had decided to volunteer on this project, the responses fell into four categories. Ten volunteers identified specific skills, experience or projects that led them to volunteer, and a further ten said they volunteered because they wanted to help older people. The responses of eight volunteers focused on personal benefits, such as having fun, or expanding their experience. The participation of four volunteers related to their school, for example, being selected by a teacher. Two respondents identified more personal reasons relating to their family circumstances.

The respondents identified many benefits gained from volunteering in AOPP, including:

Just enjoyed time with my father enjoying our love of music and meeting the new friends he was talking about.

The programme definitely gave me a greater awareness of the need for events like this for the older people. One lady told me she loved coming every week as she normally sits alone and looks at her four walls. Knowing you are helping is very rewarding and I really enjoyed seeing all the older people enjoying themselves having a laugh.

Participant Entrance questionnaire

About the participants

Questionnaires were completed by 1804 people over the age of 55 years at the start of their AOPP project. Respondents lived in areas across Northern Ireland, and seven out of ten (69%) lived in areas with the highest deprivation. Most respondents (84%) lived in their own home, although six per cent lived in a residential home, and similar proportions lived in supported accommodation or in other types of accommodation. Two thirds (68%) were female, 24 per cent were aged 55-64 years, 42 per cent were aged 65-74 years, and 34 per cent were aged 75 years or over. Four out of ten participants (42%) said they lived alone, including 60 per cent of those aged 75 years or over.

Health

Forty-four per cent of participants said they had a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do. There was variation with age, ranging from 37 per cent of those aged 55-64 years to 52 per cent of those aged 75 years or over. Levels of long-term illness, health problem or disability were higher among respondents living in the most deprived areas (44%) compared with those living in other areas (39%). Eight per cent of respondents said they were a carer.

A total health score was created by adding together responses to the self-rated physical health, mental health and enjoyment of life questions. The data suggest that women had better health than men. The mean score also varied by deprivation, with those living in areas of most deprivation having a significantly higher mean score (i.e. worse self-rated health) than those living in areas of least deprivation.

Mental Wellbeing

Wellbeing was measured using the short-form version of the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEWMBS). The mean SWEWMBS score at entrance to the AOPP was 24.21, which is higher than the mean score of 23.97 for the same age group in the 2013/14 Health Survey (Northern Ireland), suggesting that the respondents to the entrance survey had better wellbeing than people of a similar age in the general population.

Loneliness

The three-item UCLA Loneliness Scale was used as a measure of loneliness. Based on this scale, one in five respondents could be classified as being lonely. This was higher among men than women (18% and 23% respectively), and among the respondents aged 55-64 years than the oldest respondents (25% and 17% respectively) although these differences were not statistically significant. However, there was little variation according to deprivation of area. As might be expected, levels of loneliness were higher among those who live alone (23%) compared with those who do not live alone (17%).

The arts

Approximately two thirds of participants said that they had been to see an arts event (e.g. concert, play, exhibition, music session) in the last 12 months. A lower proportion (55%) had taken part in an arts activity (e.g. poetry, painting, dance, music) in the last 12 months.

The most commonly identified reasons for not participating or attending arts activities was not knowing what is going on (31% agreed), followed by lack of confidence in getting involved (24% agreed) and not knowing anything about the arts (23% agreed). Other reasons identified by respondents for not attending or participating in arts activities include practical issues (such as lack of transport), caring or health issues, as well as personal perceptions:

Perhaps it is not reasonable but I have always believed that participation in arts activities is a middle class “thing”!

Hopes for the project

Participants were asked to identify what they hoped to get out of the project. Seven out of ten respondents hoped that participating in the project would improve their social life, including more friendships, company and fun. A similar proportion wanted to increase their skills, learn something new or try something different. Aspirations varied according to age, with a better social life being most important to those aged 75 years or over, whilst increasing their skills was most important to those aged 55 to 64 years. Respondents living in the most deprived areas were most likely to want

to improve their social life (71%), whilst increasing skills was the strongest aspiration for those living in areas of medium (71%) or least deprivation (74%).

Participant Exit questionnaire

At the exit of their project respondents were very positive about all aspects of the project, including learning new things (89%), making good friendships (86%), gaining confidence to try different things (84%) and being able to express themselves (81%). This is reflected in participants' comments, for example:

Everything, the tutor was brill and the whole project was interesting, fun and varied and I learned new skills and I am now more interested in history and the Arts.

I am very sad to see this project end. It has been a great joy. To take part in such a great scheme. Many new friendships have been formed.

The few negative comments focused on practical issues, such as noise from an adjoining room, and parking.

Participant questionnaires: Longitudinal analysis

Longitudinal analysis was undertaken to compare participants' responses at the start of their project and the end of their project with the focus on health, wellbeing and loneliness.

Health score

The data suggest an improvement in health between the start and the end of the project. This pattern was found for men and for women, for those aged 65-74 years and those aged 75+ years, for all three deprivation levels, and for those living in urban and rural areas.

Mental wellbeing

The mean SWEMWBS score for participants was higher at the end of the programme compared to the start of the programme, indicating that mental wellbeing had increased. Wellbeing also improved for men and women, for all the age groups, for all three deprivation levels, and for those living in urban and rural areas.

Loneliness

Overall, there was a decrease in the loneliness score between the start and the end of the programme. This suggests an improvement in feelings of loneliness (lower numbers mean lower

levels of loneliness). This pattern was found for men and for women, for those in all three age groups, for all three deprivation levels, and for those living in urban and rural areas.

Conclusions

The data indicate positive experiences for all four groups involved in the Arts and Older People Programme – audience, artists, volunteers, and participants.

- Nearly all audience respondents said that the event was very good or good.
- All of the artists said that they would be interested in working with older people again.
- Volunteers identified a range of benefits to volunteering in the AOPP, including greater awareness of older people's needs, new skills, friendships, improved confidence.
- At the end of their project, participants indicated that they had learnt new things, made good friendships, gained confidence to try different things, and were able to express themselves.
- The data show an improvement in health and mental wellbeing, as well as a reduction in the proportion of participants who were lonely, between the start and end of the projects.