



North Lanarkshire Council  
Co-Produced Arts Strategy

**A constructive approach to  
creativity in North Lanarkshire**

2023 - 2028

# Contents

<b><u>In Summary</u></b>	3
<b><u>Case Studies</u></b>	5
<u>Case Study 1: Importance of Partnership Working</u>	7
<u>Case Study 2: North Lanarkshire’s Creative Pathways</u>	13
<u>Case Study 3: Social Impact of All Ability Community Classes</u>	19
<u>Case Study 4.1: Impact Analysis of Community Classes: Creative Writing</u>	27
<u>Case Study 4.2: Impact Analysis of Community Classes: Drama</u>	32
<u>Case Study 4.3: Impact Analysis of Community Classes: Music</u>	39
<u>Case Study 4.4: Impact Analysis of Community Classes: Visual Arts</u>	45
<b><u>The Strategy</u></b>	50
<u>Our Vision</u>	50
<u>Who We Are</u>	50
<u>How will we achieve this?</u>	52
<u>Core Values</u>	55
<u>Background/ Context: Reimagining North Lanarkshire’s Future with Creativity at its Heart</u>	57
<u>What is Art is Everywhere?</u>	59
<u>The Policy Landscape</u>	61
<u>Art as Evidence</u>	62
<u>Our Intention</u>	63
<u>Human Learning Systems</u>	65
<u>Our Strategic Aims</u>	66
<u>DELIVERY – Strategic Aim 1</u>	67
<u>INTEGRATE – Strategic Aim 2</u>	68
<u>RELATIONSHIPS – Strategic Aim 3</u>	69
<u>GROWTH – Strategic Aim 4</u>	70
<u>MEASURING &amp; EVIDENCE – Strategic Aim 5</u>	70
<u>PROMOTION &amp; COMMUNICATION – Strategic Aim 6</u>	71
<u>SUSTAINABILITY – Strategic Aim 7</u>	72
<u>How will we know we have been successful?</u>	73
 <u>Appendix 1: Action Timeline</u>	 74

# In Summary

- The Arts Development team at North Lanarkshire Council is committed to using *the arts* to tackle inequalities within the region taking a sustainable approach to working to reduce the department's carbon footprint.
- The team has a vision of integrating creativity into the heart of the council's multi-sectoral strategic planning.
- To achieve this vision, the team will focus on increasing its visibility, developing effective impact reporting mechanisms, securing budget autonomy, understanding, and applying the social prescribing model, utilising its digital creative assets map, and embodying an ethos of co-production, co-design, continuous learning, and experimentation.
- The team believes that creativity is essential for the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, and that it can be used to tackle a wide range of social and environmental issues.
- The team is committed to working with local communities and partners to create a greener, more inclusive, and creative North Lanarkshire.

**Here are some of the specific actions that the Arts Development team plans to take to achieve its vision:**

- Work with councillors, internal and external partners, and stakeholders to raise awareness of the team's work and its impact.
- Develop a new impact reporting mechanism that captures the financial, social, and environmental value of the team's services.
- Secure budget autonomy so that the team can target areas most in need of arts provision.
- Collaborate with partners to develop a social prescribing model that uses the arts to improve people's health and wellbeing.
- Create a digital creative assets map that identifies and connects people with creative and green-space resources in the region.
- Work with communities and partners to co-produce arts projects that address local needs sustainably.

The Arts Development team is confident that by taking these actions, it can make a real difference to the lives of people in North Lanarkshire, now and in the future.

---

# Case Studies

The subsequent case studies offer invaluable insights into how our vision and strategy are being implemented, by documenting the profound impact of creative opportunities on communities. In the context of North Lanarkshire, a region renowned for its industrial heritage, creativity has consistently played a pivotal role in enhancing the well-being of its residents.

The seven case studies that follow provide a vivid and comprehensive overview of the transformative impact that the North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team has had on the lives of North Lanarkshire residents over the past three decades. These case studies showcase the diverse and multi-faceted ways in which the Council's initiatives have enriched the cultural landscape, fostered community engagement, and empowered individuals through creative expression.

From supporting schools, local artists, and cultural organisations to facilitating innovative community arts programmes, the North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team has consistently championed creativity as a means of promoting social cohesion, enhancing quality of life, and fostering a sense of pride and identity among residents. These case studies highlight the tangible and lasting benefits that have been realised because of the Arts Development Team's vision, demonstrating the enduring value of investing in the arts as a driver of positive change.

### [Case Study 1 – Importance of Partnership Working](#)

A look at the value of partnership working, co-production and co-design, with testimonials from St Timothy's Primary School, NLC Community Learning and Development, and Scottish Opera.

### [Case Study 2 – North Lanarkshire's Creative Pathways](#)

Based on interviews with three young creative professionals who credit their success to NLC creative programs, this case study delves into the pathways to a life of creativity.

### [Case Study 3 – The Social Impact of All Ability Community Classes](#)

Examining *NLStudio* and *All Ability Music*, this study explores how inclusive creative opportunities can foster community cohesion, offering a safe environment for self-expression and skill enhancement.

### **Case Studies 4.1 – 4.4 – Impact Analysis of Community Classes**

These four case studies delve into four distinct art forms (creative writing, drama, music, and visual arts) and how the accessible community arts class format offers more than just turning up.

#### [Case Study 4.1 – Creative Writing](#)

#### [Case Study 4.2 – Drama](#)

#### [Case Study 4.3 – Music](#)

#### [Case Study 4.4 – Visual Arts](#)

# Case Study 1:

# The Importance of

# Partnership Working

By Deborah McArthur

## Introduction

The Arts Development Team intend to lead the way in ensuring sustained, and sustainable access to creative activity for all community demographics. This goal can be achieved by increasing our visibility, impact reporting, budget autonomy, understanding and applying a social prescribing model, utilising our Digital Creative Asset Map, embodying a conscious sustainable approach and ethos of Co-production, Co-design, and Continuous Learning & Experimentation as stated in our strategy document. But at the heart of everything is partnership working.

The strength of our partnerships enables us to develop engaging and meaningful projects, advance the role creativity has to play across the council, and support the health and wellbeing of the communities involved.

## Background

Until April 2021, the Arts Development team was part of an ALEO of North Lanarkshire Council known as Culture NL. In this period, work was split into two categories: "Arts & You," a community class programme; and a 'Buy In' service, whereby schools and other external groups bought in 'as' and 'when.' Both strands had a price tag which, through research and daily practice, we found created barriers to marginalised groups accessing our creative offer, often being unable to progress past the point of inquiry.

## Methodology

The studies below are from three different partnership projects the Arts Development team has delivered and shows the importance of the work the Arts Development Team does and how it supports the communities of North Lanarkshire to explore their creative health. It also enables external partners to reach communities of North Lanarkshire they would not normally be able to engage with.

All partners gave consent for their feedback to be part of this document and all of them champion the work the Arts Development team delivers and believe in the transformative power of *the arts*.

## Case Study Findings

### Study 1: Marie Walsh, St Timothy's Primary School

*"Our aim in St Timothy's in using our colleagues in the Arts Development Team is to provide a range of high-quality experiences for all our children while focusing on reducing stress, building confidence, and promoting wellbeing by learning what brings them pleasure and joy in the hopes that the experiences will stay with them throughout life. The arts also provide opportunities for pupils to understand more about their peers, manage conflict more successfully and build positive relationships.*

*We know too that staff get a great deal out of these sessions too, as they see specialist staff working with children and this provides great opportunities for continued professional development. I know when the Arts Development staff are timetabled to come in both staff and pupils are excited on those days."*

St Timothy's utilise their Pupil Equity Fund to engage the Arts Development Team. In doing so we worked together to design projects that support pupils' health and wellbeing, deliver aspects of their school improvement plan, and offer invaluable upskilling for teaching staff. The Arts Development team's engagement offers a new and exciting approach to learning for pupils and ensures sustainability once the project ends.



## Study 2: Joanne Boyle, Development Officer (Parenting and Family Learning), Community Learning and Development.

*“The CLD Family Learning team have had many opportunities to work in partnership the Arts Development Team. This engagement has brought around some meaningful projects and events, one being our very first Family Fun Day hosted at Summerlee Museum. We supported families from across North Lanarkshire to attend this event and they were able to participate in a range of activities. Our evaluation outlined families top three activities as:*

- 1. Summerlee museum activities*
- 2. STEM activities*
- 3. Creative play*

*Two of the activities above were supported by our Active and Creative colleagues, days like this can have such a positive impact on the wellbeing of children, young people, and their families. This partnership helps both our teams to blend the Arts with Family Learning and provide new experiences for some families.”*

Community Learning and Development approached the Arts Development team at the planning stage for this event. This ensured creative activity was woven through all aspects of the day. By partnering with Community Learning and Development we were able to offer a variety of creative play activities and engage attendees in new ways.

Community Learning and Development fully understand the role creative activity can play in engaging community members and when combined with CLD approaches the impact on people is extremely positive.

## Case Study 3: Jane Davidson Director of Outreach and Education at Scottish Opera

*Scottish Opera has been delighted, over many years, to partner with the Arts Development team at North Lanarkshire on a number of projects. The longest running and most successful collaboration was The Memory Spinners, which we*

*jointly delivered for almost 4 years (a total of 11 blocks of weekly sessions). This was made possible due to additional resources from Charitable Foundations which enabled Scottish Opera to cover a significant proportion of the delivery costs - however a really vital part of the partnership was the input from The Arts Development team at North Lanarkshire Council. Not only were they able to support the programme artistically (through the secondment of Deborah McArthur as stage director) but also via in-kind sources such the provision of (the outstandingly beautiful) Airdrie Town Hall for the sessions and performances and also excellent logistical support in reaching out to a wide range of service user groups within the local authority to ensure that the project was made available to those most likely to benefit from participation.*

*It was this combination of artistic and logistical skills, as well as a keen understanding of the diversity of social capital and community make-up present across the authority as a whole, which was demonstrated by the North Lanarkshire team (notwithstanding committed support from senior Council officers to engage with us) that contributed so positively to the success of The Memory Spinners project in Airdrie. All the NL personnel - from Arts Development to Airdrie Town Hall staff - were dedicated, knowledgeable and motivated towards providing the best quality experience possible for the participants. Indeed, a final aspect of the project's efficacy that should not be underestimated, was the huge benefit of being able to meet, rehearse and perform in the Town Hall. I appreciate that not every local authority has access to such a wonderful venue, but the fact that was allocated for The Memory Spinners spoke volumes to us about the desire of the Arts Development team to ensure an outstanding quality of experience (visually stimulating and uplifting as well as the musical and social elements) for the participants.*

The Arts Development Team plays a pivotal role in engaging national and international companies to work with North Lanarkshire communities. The team's firm understanding of their respective industries ensures NL residents have access to high quality experiences.

## Impact Analysis

Partnership working enables the Arts Development team to further their vision of fully integrating *the arts* into the heart of North Lanarkshire Council multi-sectoral strategic planning, ensuring the Arts Development team is included, and a key player across all council sectors to tackle key social issues and inequalities within North Lanarkshire. It is clear how important collaboration and partnership working is in moving forward the Arts Strategy.

Arts Development partnerships benefit the council by:

- **Strengthening Relationships:** Collaboration enables us to build trust and strengthen relationships with our partners, which is highlighted by Marie Walsh from St Timothy's Primary. As we work towards common goals and overcome challenges together. This leads to long-term partnerships and greater collective impact for North Lanarkshire residents over time.
- **Expanded Reach and Impact:** Partnerships help us reach new audiences and geographic areas that we may not have been able to access on our own, thereby increasing the overall health and wellbeing impact for council residents. This is evidenced by our work with Scottish Opera on Memory Spinners and subsequent work for people living with Dementia.
- **Improved Service Delivery:** By combining our strengths, we can improve the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of council services provided to NL communities. Our continued work with Community Learning and Development is an example of this.
- **Resource Mobilisation:** Partnerships can facilitate access to funding, resources, and support from multiple sources, allowing the Arts Development team to achieve more than we could independently. Our partnership with Scottish Opera enabled us to build the most effective project team for Memory Spinners.
- **Capacity Building:** Partnerships often involve knowledge sharing, training, and capacity-building activities, which strengthen the skills and capabilities of the Arts Development team. Our colleagues in Community Learning and Development

have delivered several upskilling sessions to enable the Arts Development team to incorporate accreditations such as Dynamic Youth awards.

## Conclusion

The NLC Arts Development Team has a proven track record of delivering high quality creative activity. This is enhanced through partnership working as evidenced above, and demonstrates profound impacts on communities across various domains, including **education & lifelong learning, healthy aging, community safety, and social justice,** within North Lanarkshire. By providing partnership opportunities the Arts Development team is forward thinking, innovative and able to quickly adapt to changing environments, ensuring the residents of North Lanarkshire have continued access to creative activity to support their health and wellbeing.

---

---

# Case Study 2:

# North Lanarkshire's

# Creative Pathways

By Aaron Hawthorne

## Introduction

The North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team have been instrumental in fostering creative pathways for individuals in North Lanarkshire for over three decades, leading to North Lanarkshire residents having successful careers in the arts.

This case explores the journey of two brothers, Scott Fleming, and Stuart Fleming, who have been positively impacted by the council's arts initiatives. Additionally, the experiences of Mhairi Gilmour will be examined to highlight the broader impact of the council's programs on youth development and community engagement.

## Background

The Arts Development team sits within the Active and Creative Communities department of North Lanarkshire Council, covering the whole of North Lanarkshire. The small team has operated for over 30 years, successfully delivering a range of creative activity for children, young people, and adults across a varied demographic of people, working on local and regional projects, within schools and the wider community in partnership with local and national organisations.

Regular participation in creative activity has helped our residents to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence to establish a healthier, more open, inclusive, and resilient society. Until April 2021, the Arts Development team was part of an ALEO of North Lanarkshire Council known as Culture NL. In this period, work was split into two categories: "Arts &

You,” a community class programme; and a ‘Buy In’ service, whereby schools and other external groups bought in ‘as’ and ‘when.’

## Methodology

The studies below are informed by three separate interviews conducted with young creative professionals who owe much of their success to attending one of our community classes. Stuart Fleming and Mhairi Gilmour were interviewed by way of email discussion, and Scott Fleming took part in an oral interview.

All case study participants were provided with background about the case study and gave written consent for their information to be used.

## Case Study Findings

### Study 1: Scott Fleming

Scott Fleming's creative journey began at the age of 10 when he joined the North Lanarkshire drama group in Shotts. Scott participated in weekly classes and various performances and developed a passion for acting and performance. This initial exposure laid the foundation for Scott's future career in the arts. He pursued a degree in musical theatre from New College Lanarkshire and eventually became a professional actor, alongside working for the Arts Development Team as an artform tutor. Scott's journey illustrates the council's role in providing accessible and quality arts education, which led to a successful career in the arts.

*“I've always wanted to be an actor and I've always wanted to perform, and I've always loved the creative arts having some sort of impact in my life. Obviously at that age I wasn't sure what having a career in it meant. I just knew that whatever that would be, I wanted to be involved in it. At that time mainly I liked performing just because it was fun. At that age, all you want to do is just go on stage and just have fun with your pals and perform. And so that's what that class was for me. That's why I ended up going to*

*it. I actually left another drama group to go to this one because of the positive feedback that my brother had shared."*

Scott shared that North Lanarkshire sometimes has a stereotype of being an industrial-only place, but this has not hindered his career journey as a professional creative.

*"I've never moved out of North Lanarkshire and I've never needed to. I've still managed to be creative; the idea that you can't be creative and can't have a career in the arts here is just not true. The theatre and creative opportunities I've engaged with in North Lanarkshire is fantastic and no one should ever hold its location against it. Just because it's not Glasgow or Edinburgh, does not mean that quality of arts opportunities is any lower."*

Scott also went on to talk about the moment when he felt things had come "full circle" when he had a successful audition that landed him the role of a lead character in Motherwell Theatre's pantomime.

*"The Motherwell Panto is huge every year. So many people go and see it; it's a staple of the community. As an audience member, I've been going to see it since I was a child, it's always been a constant in my life; Motherwell Theatre is where I saw my first show. To have been cast as Prince Charming in the panto in 2022, was incredible. It felt very full circle; I was standing as a professional on the very stage I had first encountered theatre on as a child. Doing any sort of acting job anywhere feels great, but to do it in Motherwell, it was fantastic."*

## Study 2: Stuart Fleming

The journey into the arts for Stuart Fleming (Scott Fleming's older brother) in the arts began with his involvement in local amateur operatic shows, where he learned about backstage work, which inspired him to join the NLC drama classes in Shotts, New Stevenson, and Airdrie, gaining valuable experience and skills. Stuart pursued a career in technical theatre, working at Motherwell Concert Hall and Theatre, and later moving to London to work on major productions like "Phantom of the Opera" and "War Horse." Stuart's journey showcases the council's role in providing diverse opportunities in the

arts, including technical and backstage roles, which are often overlooked but crucial for the industry's success.

*"I've always had a love of theatre and [the NLC classes] simply enhanced that. Everyone was really passionate about what they were teaching, and I always had loads of fun. The classes were full of great people, and I always looked forward to it, and when I've done stuff with drama classes as a professional, I've always tried to make them as enjoyable as I found them."*

Stuart provided some insight into how his active participation in NLC arts opportunities had an influence on his own personal and professional development.

*"When I was younger, I played drums, guitar, went to the local drama class, went to community run sports events, and I feel all of that had a say in who I am, and I still have a lot of those passions today. It'd be such a shame if young people today missed out on the same opportunities I had for whatever reason."*

Stuart owes much of his professionalism in the industry today to the close relationship of the NLC Arts Development Team with Motherwell Concert Hall and Theatre, spotlighting the value of having such facilities and opportunities available in North Lanarkshire.

*"I had such a great time in the North Lanarkshire drama groups and would recommend it to anyone. I met loads of great people and had some brilliant experiences. A favourite memory was performing on the Motherwell Theatre stage, and when I worked on the drama shows in my time as a venues technician, I always tried to give it all my all and treat as professionally as I could as felt I had to give something back and wanted the kids in the show to experience the buzz I felt. "*

### Study 3: Mhairi Gilmour

Mhairi Gilmour remembers her first encounter with the arts at age 10 when she joined the NLC Intermediate Drama group, ending up in Airdre Youth Theatre at aged 18. Over the years, she worked on her professional development as she volunteered as an assistant in classes and eventually became a lead facilitator on ""Arts & You"" class



programme, as well as going freelance as a community arts practitioner. Mhairi credits Airdrie Youth Theatre for providing a safe and creative space, which helped her develop confidence and social skills. She pursued a degree in performance and has since worked with various theatre organisations, including the North Lanarkshire Council, YTAS, and Ayr Gaiety Theatre. Mhairi's journey highlights the council's impact on youth development, providing a nurturing environment for personal and professional growth.

*"From a young age I knew that I wanted a career in the theatre industry. Being a part of Airdrie Youth Theatre gave me that confidence to pursue that dream. I went into higher education and got a performance degree. Whenever I talk about my journey and career path, I always say it started on a Monday night at Airdrie Youth Theatre."*

Mhairi also spoke about how participation in drama classes were also crucial in processing some difficult times in her life:

*"It was always a safe space for me. When I was a part of Youth Theatre my Gran become ill. A Monday night then became my space to escape from home, I could hang out with my friends, let go of the negative emotions I was feeling and turn it into to some theatre. I also learned how to become a facilitator through the leaders that I worked with as a participant and an assistant. I would now consider them good friends and they treat me as an equal."*

## Impact Analysis

North Lanarkshire Council's Arts Development Team has played a significant role in promoting **lifelong learning** and **career pathways** through its diverse programme of work. Scott, Stuart, and Mhairi's experiences demonstrate how early exposure to the arts can shape career paths and foster a lifelong love for creativity and learning. The Arts Development Team's creative offering across the authority provides opportunities for individuals to explore different art forms, develop skills, and pursue further education in the arts.

""Arts & You"" community classes, such as drama classes and youth theatre, provide a creative outlet for individuals, promoting emotional expression and social interaction.

Mhairi's story of finding solace and support in the youth theatre during a difficult period underscores the positive impact of arts engagement on mental health.

## Conclusion

The North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development Team has been instrumental in providing accessible and diverse opportunities for individuals to engage with the arts. Through the comprehensive "Arts & You" community class programme, and education outreach, the Council has fostered creativity, supported talent development, and promoted social inclusion. The stories of Scott Fleming, Stuart Fleming, and Mhairi Gilmour highlight the positive impact of the Council's influence on education, health, community, and social justice. North Lanarkshire Council has a crucial role in shaping the future of the arts industry and nurturing the next generation of creative talent in North Lanarkshire and on a national scale too.

---

# Case Study 3: The Social Impact of “All Ability” Community Classes in North Lanarkshire

By Aaron Hawthorne and Laura McIver

## Introduction

The Arts Development Team within North Lanarkshire Council has been instrumental in fostering inclusive creative opportunities that cater to diverse communities. Through initiatives like the “Arts & You” community class programme, the team strategically endeavours to advance principles of lifelong learning, promote well-being in aging populations, fortify community resilience, and advocate for social equity. This case study delves into the impact of two of our “Arts & You” classes which promote mixed ability participation: *NL Studio* and *All Ability Music*.

This case study is informed by oral interviews conducted with participants, support workers, and class facilitators.

## Background

According to a Scottish Government publication in June 2022 titled “People who Access Social Care and Unpaid Carers in Scotland”<sup>1</sup>, an “estimated 1 in 25 people of all ages in Scotland (231,925 people) were reported as receiving social care support and services at

some point during 200/21". And "in 2020, it was estimated that there were around 839,000 adult carers living in Scotland."

*NL Studio* originated from a partnership project with the *Tron Theatre* in Glasgow. Initially nurtured by *Tron Theatre*, this weekly class has been an independent group within North Lanarkshire for over 18 years. *NL Studio* has had the opportunity to work with industry professionals such as the *National Theatre of Scotland*, *Forward Role Theatre*, *Storytellers Scotland*, and *Laughter Yoga*. The group encourages creativity through a drama lens, as sessions cover everything from cognitive and physical warmups to interpreting and devising plays. Participants are aged 16+ and pay £6.50 per 90-minute session and carers and support workers go free. Sessions currently run in Bellshill, Coatbridge, and Cumbernauld.

*All Ability Music* is one of many weekly opportunities the NLC Arts Development Team offer as part of their "Arts & You" community class programme and is one of the longest running classes, dating back to the early 2000s. Participants are aged 16+ and pay £5 per session, and carers and support workers go free. Sessions currently run in Cumbernauld, Wishaw, and Bellshill.

Although both classes are advertised as inclusive for all, they predominantly attract attendees who identify as having additional support needs, some of whom may be accompanied by support workers, carers, or family members. Groups from nearby specialised schools and residences, such as Stanmore House Residential.<sup>1</sup> On average, 60-70 participants and support workers attend *NL Studio* and *All Ability Music* classes each week.<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

The study of *NL Studio* is informed by an interview with one of the long-term participants of the Bellshill group, Robert Lucas. The interview took place on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 before the beginning of the class and was facilitated in a recorded

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.capability.scot/services/25-stanmore-house-residential>

<sup>2</sup> This is based on statistics collection over Term 3 of Classes, Jan-March 2024.

relaxed conversation-format by Arts Development Officers, Laura McIver, and Aaron Hawthorne.

The studies relating to *All Ability Music* below are all based off interviews that were conducted at one *All Ability Music* class at Jim Foley Community Centre, Craigneuk, on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September. All participants of the class, support workers and facilitators were openly invited to take part in audio-only interviews, primarily for participation in our podcast, "Amplifying Artistry," of which the very first episode featured these interviews.<sup>3</sup>

Interviews were conducted by one of our art form tutors and "host" of the podcast, Scott Fleming, who had previously facilitated this specific group which resulted in a relaxed and established rapport with many of the participants.

All participants who took part in an interview were asked to read or listen to the terms and conditions of taking part and sign a consent form. Any participant who was unable to sign for themselves had a support worker sign on their behalf.

## Case Study Findings

### Study 1: Robert

Robert has been attending *NL Studio* for 18 years. In his relaxed interview, Robert spoke about the profound impact that *NL Studio* has had in his life over the past 18 years with much emphasis on how the class serves as a safe, creative space for skills development and peer support, which has a positive impact on Robert's life outside of the class.

**Interviewer**     *Why do you come to the group?*

**Robert**             *Getting out and helping people out.*

**Interviewer**     *What do you like to help, what do you mean by that?*

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://culturenl.co.uk/amplifyingartistry>

- Robert** *[...] I like to help people learn their lines and be confident. And I'm proud.*
- Interviewer** *Do you think [attending the class] affects your life in other ways?*
- Robert** *I feel relaxed every day, like I feel more relaxed when people talk to me.*
- Interviewer** *Because you've been with the group such a long time, lots of life events have happened. You shared previously that your parents have passed away, you've moved house, and you met your girlfriend at NL Studio. So, lots of things have happened, but the one thing you've continued to do is come to the class each week.*
- Robert** *I'm doing that because I am used to it now. I'm not going to leave at all. I tell people about drama and tell them to join in. Every day's a learning day. [...] Just now I get a taxi with my girlfriend to the class but when the weather gets nicer, I'll get the bus. I like coming to Bellshill. I feel safe.*
- Interviewer** *What is your favourite thing about coming to NL Studio?*
- Robert** *I am looking forward to doing more Shakespeare. [...] I love it when you make your own plays up, when you devise your own, 'cause we're all very clever, hardworking and are able to devise.*

## Study 2: Saffron and Maureen

Saffron is a regular participant of the Wishaw *All Ability Music* class and frequently attends with her support worker, Maureen, who also took part in the interview.

Saffron shared with us that she has attended the classes for five years and her interview captured a sense of joy and appreciation for the class.

- Interviewer** *Are you glad that you've got this class?*
- Saffron** *Yeah.*

**Interviewer** *What do you think the benefits are of having class like this in North Lanarkshire?*

**Saffron** *Yes, I feel happy, and somewhere to go.*

Saffron highlighted the importance of the class as a source of happiness and social interaction:

**Saffron** *Yeah. I like meeting the people that run the class: Karen, and yourself, Scott, and Claire and whoever else turns up. Chat yous up every week, I come in and you're asking how I am.*

Maureen shared that she frequently observes significant positive changes in Saffron's sociability and mood after attending the class.

**Interviewer** *And Maureen, what about yourself, have you noticed a difference in Saffron when she comes to the class, versus when she doesn't?*

**Maureen** *I've noticed a massive difference in Saffron. More sociable, she's more tolerant to what other people want as well. So, she'll tolerate things more, don't you?*

**Saffron** *Yes.*

Despite sometimes feeling tired after a session, Saffron acknowledges the class's positive impact on her well-being.

**Interviewer** *Do you feel happier leaving the class, versus when you came in?*

**Saffron** *Shattered, but I had a good time!*

### Study 3: Mark (On Behalf of Justin)

Mark, a support worker for Justin for over 13 years, emphasised the class's significance in Justin's life, describing it as a routine activity that greatly affects his mood.

**Interviewer** *Does Justin enjoy the class?*

**Mark** *Yeah, I would say out of all the activities we do; if this class isn't on (school holiday-wise), it does really affect him, and he will always ask for it; he will always ask for [the tutors].*

Justin's reliance on the class underscores its value as a source of enjoyment and social engagement for individuals like him.

**Interviewer** *So, do you notice a difference in Justin's mood when he's at the class?*

**Mark** *Yeah, yeah. And more so if the class is cancelled, then he's really upset.*

**Interviewer** *So, it's like a routine for him.*

**Mark** *It does affect him a great deal.*

## Case Study 4: Karen and Claire

Karen Blades and Claire Leonard are Artform Tutors for the NLC Arts Development Team and frequently deliver a wide range of "Arts & You" classes. At the time of the interview, Karen had facilitated *All Ability Music* in Wishaw for 16 years, and Claire for 1 year.

In their interview, both provided insights into the broader benefits of the *All Ability Music* class. They highlight its role in promoting mental and physical well-being, fostering social connections, and empowering participants to express themselves creatively. As an example, they spoke about an anonymous participant who had experienced a downfall in physical and mental health and how attending the class improved her condition.

**Claire** *[...] I think for someone who hasn't been here for a good few months; just the joy in her face – you know - when it's her turn to get a song, or even just joining in with all the other songs – it makes you smile.*

**Karen** *Yeah, that's one of our participants who has been off ill for more than 6 months in hospital and she's been back for the last three weeks and even her carer today was saying that she's seen a huge improvement in her in the last three weeks, just by – this is the only, I think this is the*



*only activity she's got in the week – but even just coming in the last few weeks, she's seen a huge improvement in her.*

**Claire** *And she says, to get the carers to bring her [...] I suppose, the admin behind that, just to get the carers at the right time and all that, but they're making a really big effort because they've seen what a difference it's made to her.*

The positive impact of the class is evident in the transformation of participants' moods and the joy they experience during sessions, as testified by Karen and Claire:

**Karen** *I think in terms of mental health, today is a great example because we came in this morning, and we asked everybody "How's your week been?" and the general consensus from carers and people were not that great. I think one person out of maybe about 30 had said it had been a good week. And by the end of the group, I think I – I, personally – noticed a huge difference; people were leaving smiling and were kind of more positive.*

## Impact Analysis

NL Studio and All Ability Music classes serve as an **educational** platform where participants learn new skills, express themselves creatively, and engage in meaningful experiences. Through music and drama, participants enhance their cognitive abilities, communication skills, and emotional expression, contributing to their **lifelong learning** and personal development.

The classes promote **healthy aging** by providing opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and mental stimulation. Participants, experience improved mood, increased mobility, and enhanced well-being through engaging in musical activities tailored to their abilities.

By creating inclusive spaces where individuals of all abilities can participate without judgement or discrimination, the classes foster **community cohesion** and **social**

**inclusion.** Classes challenge stereotypes and promotes equality, contributing to a safer and more just society where everyone has the opportunity and right to participate and belong.

Classes facilitate collaboration and **collective creativity** among participants, support workers, and facilitators. Through shared experiences and mutual respect, diverse individuals come together to experience performing arts, build friendships, and contribute to vibrant, creative communities within North Lanarkshire.

## Conclusion

The NLC Arts Development Team's ""Arts & You"" programme, as evidenced in the examples of *All Ability Music* and *NL Studio* above, demonstrates profound impacts on communities across various domains, including **education & lifelong learning**, **healthy aging**, **community safety**, and **social justice**, within North Lanarkshire. By providing inclusive creative opportunities that cater to the diverse communities of North Lanarkshire, Arts Development fosters personal growth, social cohesion, and cultural enrichment, improving the lives of participants and contributing to a more inclusive and vibrant society.

---

# Case Study 4.1: Impact Analysis of Participation in Community Classes – Creative Writing

By Laura McIver

## Introduction

The Arts Development team sits within the Active and Creative Communities department of North Lanarkshire Council, covering the whole of North Lanarkshire. The small team has operated for over 30 years, successfully delivering a range of creative activity for children, young people, and adults across a varied demographic of people, working on local and regional projects, within schools and the wider community in partnership with local and national organisations.

Regular participation in creative activity has helped our residents to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence to establish a healthier, more open, inclusive, and resilient society.

This case study examines the impact of participation in Creative Writing classes in North Lanarkshire, through an in-depth interview with one of the participants, Connor Blessing.

## Background

*Creative Writing* is one of many weekly opportunities the NLC Arts Development Team offer as part of their “Arts & You” community class programme. Participants are aged 16+ and pay £5 per session. Sessions run online, hosted on Microsoft Teams.

*Creative Writing* is promoted as the following: <sup>1</sup>

*This is our online creative writing class to share ideas, work in progress and enjoy penmanship in the comfort of your own home whilst being led by an industry professional.*

## Methodology

Connor Blessing attended an in-person relaxed interview on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at Bellshill Cultural Centre, facilitated by two Arts Development Officers. Connor had been emailed information and consent forms prior to attending the interview and was given the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the case study. The interview has been transcribed.

## Case Study Findings

### Study: Connor Blessing

Connor Blessing is a young creative who has been actively involved with the “Arts & You” programme in various capacities. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Connor attended an in-person creative writing class at the Bellshill Cultural Centre. Since then, he has transitioned to attending a weekly online creative writing class, which takes place on Monday evenings.

In his interview, Connor shared that participation in the class provides an opportunity to develop his creative and communication skills and that the class nurtures his artistic style, providing a platform for further learning and exploration. He shared that the skills

learned in the class have been useful in day-to-day life, including in his new full-time job.

*“Sometimes I have a bit of difficulty speaking out, especially for long periods of time, and I think [the classes have] sort of helped me get more into that mindset. I try to use [the skills] as often as I can. I kind of have to now since I’m doing call-work so I need to have that confidence when I can.”*

Connor's involvement with the online creative writing class provided an opportunity to showcase his creative writing work and spotlight his eco-conscious fashion designs through the NLC Artist Network. He was featured as one of the lead speakers at two Artist Network events. These networking and showcasing opportunities enhanced Connor's personal development and his sense of belonging in North Lanarkshire.

*“I’ve been to one or two events in the fashion industry in Scotland, but I couldn’t go to some because of weather and transport issues with getting to places like Glasgow. I thought the [NL Artists Network] was a good time to just promote what I’m doing and get people more engaged.”*

Engaging in activities like creative writing and fashion design can serve as preparation for healthy ageing. These activities provide pathways for self-expression and stress management, contributing to Connor’s overall mental well-being.

*“You just have to sort of set yourself up sometimes to actually [find the motivation to attend the class]. With writer’s block or anything like that, I think I’m definitely stuck in that quite often. [The class] is definitely something that’s motivational.”*

Connor uses his creative writing and fashion design to advocate for important social issues. His work addresses the issues of fast fashion and nature, and his social commentary through creative writing highlights the importance of creativity as a tool for social change within the community.

The transition of the creative writing classes online post-COVID demonstrates the adaptability of digital platforms as alternative working spaces. Despite not meeting in-person, the group continues to make creative work. Connor suggested that the online platform makes it accessible for those with social anxiety or mobility issues. The creative writing tutor lives outside the local authority, making the geographical reach for working with industry professionals more accessible. Digital platforms are also used to publish the creative writing work. Currently, there are two digital eBooks available in libraries through "Borrow Box," where the group has submitted short stories and poems accessible to those with an NLC library card.

## Impact Analysis

The case study of Connor Blessing's involvement in the "Arts & You" programme highlights the transformative power of creative writing classes in fostering **lifelong learning**. Connor's participation in these classes has provided him with a platform to develop his creative and communication skills. This has not only enhanced his artistic abilities but has also equipped him with **valuable tools for navigating various aspects of his life**.

Connor's personal growth journey highlights the potential of community classes such as *Creative Writing* to foster a sense of **social responsibility and community**. By encouraging participants to use their creativity to address societal issues, such classes can contribute to a more **socially conscious and engaged community**.

By participating in community arts classes, participants become more aware of events and networking opportunities, especially in encouraging collaboration and community engagement. This involvement not only broadens their artistic horizons but also strengthens their sense of belonging within the community. These classes serve as a catalyst for creative individuals to connect with like-minded people in their community, share ideas, and collaborate on creative projects. This, in turn, encourages participants

to actively contribute to and support the growth of the creativity within the community, creating a **vibrant and dynamic cultural landscape**.

Connor's case study highlights the transformational power of community arts classes, especially in developing self-expression and stress management, contributing to overall mental well-being. There is enormous potential of such classes to promote mental well-being and resilience, which are key factors in **preparing participants for healthy ageing**.

## Conclusion

As evident in the case study of Connor Blessing's participation in the "Arts & You" programme, there are multifaceted impacts of such opportunities on **education & lifelong learning, community safety & social justice, creative consortiums, and health & healthy ageing**.

---

# Case Study 4.2: Impact Analysis of Participation in Community Classes - Drama

By Deborah McArthur and Laura McIver

## Introduction

The Arts Development team sits within the Active and Creative Communities department of North Lanarkshire Council, covering the whole of North Lanarkshire. The small team has operated for over 30 years, successfully delivering a range of creative activity for children, young people, and adults across a varied demographic of people, working on local and regional projects, within schools and the wider community in partnership with local and national organisations.

Regular participation in creative activity has helped our residents to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence to establish a healthier, more open, inclusive, and resilient society.

## Background

*Youth Theatre* is one of many weekly opportunities the NLC Arts Development Team offer as part of their "Arts & You" community class programme and is one of the longest running classes, dating back to the early 2000s. Participants are aged 13+ and pay £5 per session. Sessions currently run in Bellshill and Airdrie.



*Youth Theatre* is promoted as the following:

*Fun, weekly workshops focusing on developing creativity, imagination, self-expression, and confidence. Learn new skills, make new friends, and most importantly have fun.*<sup>4</sup>

The class attracts young people interested in theatre making and developing skills as a performer. *Youth Theatre* participants devise their own original work to perform to family and friends.

## Methodology

Lisa Givens and Finn Pearce were both interviewed via email. They were sent a list of questions to answer in February 2024. These answers make up the case study below. Lisa and Finn were given an information sheet to read, and a consent form to sign.

## Case Study Findings

### Study 1: Lisa Givens

Lisa Givens (née Mathieson) attended Motherwell *Youth Theatre* from August 2000 to June 2003. Once she graduated from university in Liverpool she moved back to Motherwell and worked for the Arts Development Team as an Artform Tutor. She also worked as an Arts Development Officer (maternity cover) before progressing her career in the Scottish Youth Arts Sector.

*"Without a doubt, deciding to join Youth Theatre was one of the most important decisions of my life."*

Lisa joined at 15 and remembers her first night so vividly.

*"I'd never felt so welcome or accepted in my life. In that moment I met people who*

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://culturenl.co.uk/arts/performing-arts/performing-arts/>

*were like me, who loved theatre, who I had a lot in common with and who were interested in getting to know me."*

Teenage years are extremely formative for young people and to carve an identity outside of school friendships is important and hugely influential. Lisa recalls joining *Youth Theatre* brought her:

*"a sense of belonging, of self-belief... I was soon part of a very tight knit friendship group."*

Lisa's experience at Motherwell *Youth Theatre* led her to university to study theatre and helped her become a much more confident person. Lisa links this experience to having a significant impact on the career she has today.

*"If I could give every young person that moment of self-belief that I got through Youth Theatre, I would, and that's why I do what I do now."*

Lisa's *Youth Theatre* experience stayed with her and several years later she was able to draw upon the skills learned to support her university project.

*"My Youth Theatre experience came back to me, and I remembered all the warmup games and exercises, which I was able to deliver confidently, bringing joy to the young people I was working with. That project allowed me to assess my skills and gave me confidence to take on freelance work as a workshop assistant and leader, which I continued with once I graduated."*

Lisa views her NLC Artform Tutor and Arts Development Officer experience as the strong foundation she has been able to build upon over the years while developing her career.

*"The range of projects, age groups and demographics that I worked with as an*

*Artform Tutor gave me amazing experience, and I learned the craft of arts workshop facilitation relatively quickly as a result. The trust put in me as an early career practitioner allowed me to become independent and gain huge confidence in my work and as a person."*

Having grown up in Motherwell, Lisa can testify to the importance of having creative activities and employment opportunities available across North Lanarkshire.

*"while it's not far from Glasgow (or Edinburgh), for many people living in these communities, it can feel very cut off and 'forgotten' about. Having creative opportunities allows for the feeling of connection and of there being hope and potential in life. Seeing the local authority as somewhere that nurtures creative opportunities as well as the traditional council set up is extremely important to residents."*

Lisa has experienced firsthand the benefits her *Youth Theatre* experience has had on her social and career development.

*"This certainly influenced my values that I hold personally and professionally. My current role as CEO of Toonspeak is fundamentally about breaking down barriers to access to allow children and young people to explore the creative opportunities that lie within the arts. I strive to make arts for everyone, as I saw as a young person myself that it was for me, which developed my confidence and self-belief."*

This study proves how important provision such as *Youth Theatre* is for community members, and it is clear to see what a pivotal role it played in Lisa's life journey.

## Study 2: Finn Pearce

Finn Pearce joined Bellshill Children's Theatre Drama in 2016 at the age of 5. Initially enrolled by his parents to boost his confidence, Finn's journey from Childrens Theatre

to *Youth Theatre* has proven to be an invaluable experience, especially in navigating challenges like the disruptions caused by lockdown.

*"I missed drama during lockdown and joined a rugby team. I have given up rugby and I am really glad to be back at drama. I have a great relationship with everyone in the group."*

*Youth Theatre* has significantly contributed to enhancing Finn's confidence and self-belief. In the face of challenges at school, drama serves as a coping mechanism, providing a creative outlet for his emotions. The nurturing environment created by the staff and peers has played a crucial role in supporting Finn's emotional wellbeing.

*"Sometimes school life can be difficult, and drama helps me cope with this."*

Finn can identify the skillset that he is developing by coming to *Youth Theatre* and his knowledge of this is what motivates Finn to continue to attend weekly.

*"I love drama and have a really good memory for learning lines. I am also very good at ad-libbing if I can't remember."*

Children's Theatre and *Youth Theatre* regularly create end of term sharing's for parents/carers and devise an annual piece of work which is performed in a professional theatre space, these experiences offer young people the opportunity to take their drama skills to the next level.

Being a *Youth Theatre* member has had a profound effect on Finn's self-esteem and understanding. Feeling included and involved in *Youth Theatre* fosters a sense of belonging that is particularly crucial during his formative years of adolescence.

*"It's important to feel part of the group and included/involved."*

Finn's journey with Bellshill *Youth Theatre* stands as a testament to the transformative power of *Youth Theatre*. Beyond honing theatrical skills, drama has helped to shape Finn's character, providing a supportive community, and instilling essential life skills.

This case study reinforces the importance of creative activities like *Youth Theatre* in nurturing the holistic development of young individuals.

*“This type of activity is really important for young people like me. It builds confidence, keeps young people talking to one another rather than on a phone or computer and opens up new and exciting opportunities.”*

## Impact Analysis

*Youth Theatre* classes serve as an **educational** platform where participants learn new skills, express themselves creatively, and engage in meaningful experiences.

Taking part in *Youth Theatre* enables participants to develop problem-solving abilities, think critically, communicate with others, collaborate, increase confidence and empathy as well as build resilience, self-esteem, and social skills all of which are vital life skills.

In 2022, [Youth Theatre Arts Scotland](#) (YTAS) and the [Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities](#) carried out research into the [long-term impacts of Youth Theatre participation](#).

Kenny McGlashan, the CEO of YTAS says, “We can see the power of *Youth Theatre* very clearly in the results of this research project. We were able to identify six key long-term impacts of participation in *Youth Theatre*.”

These are:

- Confidence
- Emotional intelligence
- Resilience
- Teamwork and leadership skills
- Emotional wellbeing
- Broadened horizons

“We also found that the combination of skills development, nurturing facilitation, and the supportive environment of *Youth Theatre* creates a system of continual positive reinforcement,” Kenny says, “meaning that these impacts become embedded as personal values throughout participants’ lives.”

Take a look at [the full report and case studies](#) for more information.<sup>5</sup>

*Youth Theatre* facilitates collaboration and **collective creativity** among participants. Through shared experiences and mutual respect, diverse individuals come together to create theatre, build friendships, and contribute to vibrant, creative communities within North Lanarkshire.

## Conclusion

The NLC Arts Development Team’s “Arts & You” programme, as evidenced in the example of “*Youth Theatre*” above, demonstrates profound impacts on participants across various domains, including **education & lifelong learning**, and **healthy aging**. By providing creative opportunities for young people in North Lanarkshire, the department fosters personal growth, social cohesion, and cultural enrichment, improving the lives of participants and contributing to a more inclusive and vibrant society.

---

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.spotlight.com/news-and-advice/young-performers/why-join-a-youth-theatre/>

# Case Study 4.3: Impact Analysis of Participation in Community Classes – Music

By Aaron Hawthorne

## Introduction

North Lanarkshire Council's Arts Development Team has played a pivotal role in nurturing inclusive creative avenues that cater to a wide range of communities. Through initiatives such as the "Arts & You" community class programme, the team is committed to advancing lifelong learning principles, promoting well-being among intergenerational populations, strengthening community resilience, and championing social equity. This case study focuses on one of the music components of the "Arts and You" programme, the *North Lanarkshire (NL) Community Choir*.

This case study is informed by email interviews conducted with participants of the *Airdrie NL Community Choir*.

## Background

It is well documented that singing and music offer numerous health benefits, improving breathing, posture, and muscle tension. Singing can also relieve pain and boost the immune system, while singing in choirs enhances cognitive function, memory, and happiness, fostering a sense of community. Music-making is an evolved behaviour for creating social cohesion, and community choirs demonstrate that most people have musical ability. Singing provides a cost-effective way to combat loneliness and improve

social well-being, regardless of musical preferences.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of this case study being written, the *North Lanarkshire Community Choir* embodies a cooperative endeavour that unites choirs from four regions of North Lanarkshire: Airdrie, Bellshill, Cumbernauld, and Wishaw. While these individual groups take place on a weekly basis within their respective locales, they simultaneously contribute to a broader, overarching collective that encompasses the entirety of North Lanarkshire, strengthened by frequent opportunities for the wider *NL Community Choir* to meet socially and/or perform across the authority.

Singing groups have been facilitated by the Arts Development Team for 15 years, with various groups and ensembles forming and disbanding over this time. It is evident that there is a core group that has remained consistent and adaptable, transitioning from the *Summerlee Singers* to the *Airdrie Community Choir*. The *NL Community Choir* format was introduced and developed by Arts Development Officer Aaron Hawthorne, who previously served as an artform tutor for NLC/CultureNL and facilitated the *Summerlee Singers* and *Muirfield Singers*.

*NL Community Choir* is promoted by North Lanarkshire Council Arts Development as the following:

*This non-auditioned choir is the perfect opportunity to explore and discover your voice in a relaxed, friendly environment. Whether you've only ever sang in the shower, or you think you're the next Pavarotti, you can enjoy singing all kinds of music, from Mozart to ABBA; musicals to the Charts! Led by professional musicians, you'll leave rehearsals with a new-found confidence in your vocal abilities and there are always fantastic opportunities to perform across North Lanarkshire and beyond, not to mention the numerous health benefits derived from singing in a group!*<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> University of Oxford/ "The Conversation" Research: "Choir singing improves health, happiness – and is the perfect icebreaker." <https://theconversation.com/choir-singing-improves-health-happiness-and-is-the-perfect-icebreaker-47619>

<sup>7</sup> NL Community Choir on CultureNL website: <https://culturenl.co.uk/arts/performing-arts/performing-arts/>



## Methodology

The study of *NL Community Choir* is informed by three separate email interviews with participants from the Airdrie group who have been attending the group in its various forms for an accumulative 37 years: Kathleen Gilmartin, Heather Stephens, and Sandra Watson. Email discussions were carried out over the month of February 2024 and consent was given by all three participants.

## Case Study Findings

### Study 1: Kathleen Gilmartin

Kathleen has been attending the Airdrie group of the *NL Community Choir* for over 10 years. She is a retired teacher and shared insight as to how the choir's relaxed atmosphere and diverse repertoire to be a much-welcomed platform to continue learning and developing her musical skills, as well as providing a safe, social space which connects Kathleen not only to people in her own community, but across North Lanarkshire too.

**Question**      *Why do you come along to the choir?*

**Kathleen**      *To enjoy myself through singing and switch off from other things. To challenge my skills. To catch up with friends to learn.*

**Question**      *What makes you continue attending the choir?*

**Kathleen**      *The chance to sing regularly. Learn new challenging pieces. The choir has become quite a social hub over time, and we share evenings out when we can. The last one included members from the other NLC choirs as well as former members of the Airdrie group.*

Kathleen also went on to share how attending *the NL Community Choir* has a positive impact on her health, describing the group as being "vital" to her wellbeing.

**Question** *What is the impact of coming to the class? Why is it important for you to be part of the class?*

**Kathleen** *Regardless of how I feel mentally and physically on a Thursday evening (and that's not always positive), I always feel uplifted by the choir. The musical pieces, the members and the tutors all contribute to this. Without the joy, release, and escapism of singing, I think I would feel a massive void in my life. [...] I feel singing is vitally important to my sense of wellbeing. When I don't get to sing, I miss it very much. I enjoy the company too and have developed very close, and I believe lifelong friendships with some wonderful people.*

## Study 2: Heather Stephens

Heather Stephens, a retired woman living in Airdrie is a long-time participant of singing groups in North Lanarkshire. Heather also highlights the health benefits of singing in the NL Community Choir, mentioning the positive impact on her recovery from a health hiccup, attributing it to the support and camaraderie she received from fellow choir members.

**Question** *Why do you continue attending the NL Community Choir?*

**Heather** *For me, continuing with the choir has not only allowed me to continue singing but also has introduced me to a new group of friends. I recently had a hiccup with my health and everyone at the choir helped and supported me whenever I could attend. I'm sure this has improved my recovery. [...] I do not want to ever give up singing and the Community Choir has given me the chance to continue. I look forward to rehearsals and going out in whatever dark winter bad weather nights, as I always feel so alive and uplifted at the end of each rehearsal.*

## Study 3: Sandra Watson

Sandra Watson, a 56-year-old woman from Plains, has been with the core group of singers since the *Summerlee Singers* in 2012. Sandra shared that her initial attendance at the class was in attempt to make some time for herself amidst a busy work and personal life.

**Question** *Please tell us how you came to attend the choir in the first place.*

**Sandra** *I am a woman of a certain age (56 to be exact!) and have always loved singing and music. I had done some musical activities at school (school shows and choir) and had always regretted not keeping it up when I left school – but I suppose everyday life takes over. I had gone back to work after having my family and was feeling a bit overwhelmed by everything – working, keeping the house going, looking after the kids, and making sure they got to all their activities, and I just felt I needed something for me. I heard the radio advert for a new singing group being started by NLC and the rest as they say is history.*

**Question** *What is the impact of coming to the class?*

**Sandra** *It gives me something to look forward to each week. Coming together as a choir and making a beautiful noise really gives me a great feeling and I always leave with a smile on my face.*

## Impact Analysis

The case studies of Kathleen Gilmartin, Heather Stephens, and Sandra Watson above have provided valuable insights into the diverse benefits of attending community music sessions. All three case study participants shared that the *NL Community Choir* is an invaluable weekly space to continue their own **personal growth and development**. All valued the relaxed and sociable atmosphere of the classes and welcomed the healthy challenges the choir-format provides.

It is apparent from the studies above that opportunities such as the *NL Community Choir* can act as a crucial social hub, connecting members not only to their local community but also across North Lanarkshire; there is a profound sense of **belonging and social cohesion**.

All three case studies highlight the positive impact of the choir on health and wellbeing, including how participation has played a vital part in **promoting mental and physical health** and contributing to **healthy ageing**.

## Conclusion

Community music classes, like the *NL Community Choir*, play a crucial role in providing diverse creative activities that contribute significantly to North Lanarkshire's aspiration of becoming a prominent national centre for creativity and culture, fostering thriving and vibrant communities. In case studies like this, it's evident that accessible creative community activities are not merely about participation but represent a vital component of North Lanarkshire Council's duty to offer essential opportunities for education & lifelong learning, community safety & social justice, and promoting health and well-being across various communities.

---

---

# Case Study 4.4: Impact Analysis of Participation in Community Arts Classes – Visual Arts

By Aaron Hawthorne

## Introduction

The Arts Development Team within North Lanarkshire Council has been instrumental in fostering inclusive creative opportunities that cater to diverse communities. Through initiatives like the “Arts & You” community class programme, the team strategically endeavours to advance principles of lifelong learning, promote well-being in aging populations, fortify community resilience, and advocate for social equity. This case study delves into the impact of one of our visual arts offerings as part of “Arts & You”: *Adult Drawing & Painting*.

This case study is informed by oral interviews conducted with participants.

## Background

*Adult Drawing & Painting* runs across five venues in North Lanarkshire: North Lanarkshire Heritage Centre (Motherwell), Charlotte Toal Community Centre (Coatbridge), Muirfield Community Centre (Cumbernauld), Airdrie Town Hall, and The Pivot Centre (Moodiesburn). The classes are open to adults aged 16+ and costs £7.

*Adult Drawing & Painting* is promoted as the following:

*“Arts & You” Adult Art classes are tutor led, skills based and suitable for complete beginners and/or for those with more experience. Activity is mainly drawing and painting based, using a range of materials, and focusing on a variety of subject matter. Suitable for beginners or for more advanced artists.”<sup>8</sup>*

## Methodology

The studies relating to *Adult Drawing & Painting* below are all based off interviews that were conducted at one *Adult Drawing & Painting* class at Muirfield Community Centre, Cumbernauld on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023. All participants of the class were openly invited to take part in audio-only interviews, primarily for participation in our podcast, “Amplifying Artistry,” of which Series 1, Episode 5 featured these interviews.<sup>9</sup>

Interviews were conducted by one of our art form tutors and “host” of the podcast, Scott Fleming.

All participants who took part in an interview were asked to read or listen to the terms and conditions of taking part and sign a consent form.

## Case Study Findings

*Adult Drawing & Painting* is designed to be inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of prior experience or skill level. Participants like Kirsten and Caroline, who are frequent participants of the Cumbernauld class have found these classes to be a valuable opportunity to refresh their skills and explore their creativity. Kirsten and Caroline both share how the classes serve as a platform for continuous learning and skill development, contributing to the educational and professional growth of the participants.

**Kirsten**                      *So I originally signed up to this to sort of get my confidence back up.  
[...] It’s been a while after I went off to have children and yeah, I really*

---

<sup>8</sup> Adult Drawing & Painting listing on CultureNL Website: <https://culturenl.co.uk/arts/visual-art-crafts/visual-arts/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://culturenl.co.uk/amplifyingartistry>

*feel like my confidence have grown. I've learned a lot of new techniques and starting to build a portfolio in order to be trained to be an art teacher.*

**Caroline** *The idea is that maybe it might develop into something more for me. I'm looking to set up a business, maybe in the next year. This really just to start getting my hand in again, really.*

The classes also foster a sense of community and collaboration among the participants. Participants Gail and Neil shared that they are daughter-father (respectively) and have been attending the class for over a year. They share how the classes provide the perfect platform for daughter-father bonding and how what they learn in the class doesn't stop with them, it travels through their family too.

**Gail** *For me, it's spending time with my Dad. Even though I'm in my 40s, it's nice to get some time on our own.*

**Neil** *It's allowed us to meet more people with similar interests. And every time we come, we get into conversations with people, we've been making friends.*

**Gail** *It's about our communities getting better and everybody's coming together, especially after COVID when these things were not possible. [...] It's nice because there's so many different experiences, different ages.*

**Neil** *And of course, we use the ideas with the children, the grandchildren and we get them to try different things – although they're young, they're quite creative.*

**Gail** *They always like seeing what we've done on a Tuesday and quite often ask to replicate it at home.*

Some of the participants shared that the classes contribute to the mental health and well-being of the participants, providing them with a much-needed break from their daily routines.

- Caroline** *Well, it's nice just to have a couple of hours to kind of zone out and not think about all the things you've got to do and what's waiting for you back home. So yeah, it's quite nice.*
- Sharon** *For me, it's a benefit of getting a bit of time just to try something for me and drop the 'mum' and all the stresses of work and everything and just take a couple of hours. It's something new to try and explore.*
- Kirsten** *I think it's good for mental health and I think it's actually kind of like free therapy when you come along and you can really get in, focus on something, you can just really kind of meditate; you can focus on something, and you can express yourself.*

## Impact Analysis

Community arts classes in North Lanarkshire, such as *Adult Drawing & Painting*, play a crucial role in promoting **lifelong learning**, as participants like Kirsten and Caroline highlight how these classes provide a platform for continuous learning and skill development. Arts classes, even in a community setting, can serve as a pathway to **professional growth and educational advancement**. The classes, offer opportunities for participants to acquire new knowledge, enhance their skills, and pursue their educational and career goals.

It is evident that classes like *Adult Drawing & Painting* promote **the healthy ageing** of participants, with lots of emphasis on the health benefits of the classes. Community arts classes can serve as a form of stress relief and relaxation, promoting mental well-being and reducing the risk of burnout. This social aspect of the classes can contribute to **emotional well-being** and a **sense of belonging**, which are important factors in healthy aging.

The importance of community and the positive impact of arts classes on **social cohesion** is emphasised in the above study. The arts can play a role in promoting



**cultural diversity, social inclusion, and intergenerational learning**, which are important aspects of community well-being.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, arts classes in North Lanarkshire have a multifaceted impact, contributing to **education, health, creativity, and community building**. They provide opportunities for **continuous learning and skill development**, promote **mental well-being and healthy aging**, foster creative consortiums, and contribute to **community building and social justice**. As such, these classes are **crucial for the overall well-being and development of individuals and communities in North Lanarkshire**.

---

# The Strategy

## Our Vision

By 2028 *the arts* will be fully integrated into the heart of North Lanarkshire Council multi-sectoral strategic planning, ensuring the Arts Development team is included, and a key player across all council sectors to tackle key social issues and inequalities within North Lanarkshire.

## Who We Are

The Arts Development team sits within the Active and Creative Communities department of North Lanarkshire Council, covering the whole of North Lanarkshire. The small team has operated for over 30 years, successfully delivering a range of creative activity for children, young people, and adults across a varied demographic of people, working on local and regional projects, within schools and the wider community in partnership with local and national organisations. Each Development Officer has a specialist area of skills. The team consists of Visual Artists, a Photographer, Theatre and Community Arts Practitioners and a Music Specialist who all believe in the transformative power of *the arts*. Each Development Officer is connected to their respective industries, enabling the department to stay up to date with current trends and initiatives.

Regular participation in creative activity has helped our residents to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence to establish a healthier, more open, inclusive, and resilient society. We see creativity as essential for our health and wellbeing and are using the arts to tackle inequalities. We believe access to creativity is for everyone, not just those who can easily access and afford it. The Arts Development team has a pivotal role in leading the way to ensure arts and culture tackle these issues and contributes to meaningful change in North Lanarkshire.

Until April 2021, the Arts Development team was part of an ALEO of North Lanarkshire Council known as Culture NL. In this period, work was split into two categories: "Arts & You," a community class programme; and a 'Buy In' service, whereby schools and other external groups bought in 'as' and 'when.' Both strands had a price tag which, through research and daily practice, we found created barriers to marginalised groups accessing our creative offer, often being unable to progress past the point of inquiry.

Those within the industry know *the arts* as activity such as drama, music, dance, visual art, film, photography, creative writing etc. but to the Arts Development team it is simply about being creative. We want the people of North Lanarkshire to have as many opportunities as possible to explore their creativity and better understand, and challenge

the world in which they live, whether that is through our [Arts&You](#) programme or bespoke projects on offer.

*There is no doubt that creativity is the most important human resource of all..... Creativity involves breaking out of expected patterns in order to look at things in a different way.*

*Edward de Bono*

## How will we achieve this?

We intend to lead the way in ensuring sustained, and sustainable access to creative activity for all community demographics. We envision creativity to be central to each sector's strategic planning ensuring the people of North Lanarkshire have sustained access to creative activity. We intend to reach, engage, and collaborate with communities to tackle the education, health, community safety, social justice, and social-economic inequalities. This goal can be achieved by:

**Increasing our visibility.** This includes working with councillors at events and ensuring they have sight of our annual reports. Inviting stakeholders of public bodies to our events to display the social impact of our work and delivery of services. Through creative projects we can work with partners and showcase our local initiatives at a national level.

Examples

- **CREATE**, Pupil Equity Funded whole school project, utilising creative activity such as ukulele, drama, percussion, and visual arts to support primary pupils' health and wellbeing. Project focused on nurture and resilience, culminating in a family learning event at Airdrie Town Hall.
- **Memory Spinners**, Partnership project with Scottish Opera for people living with Dementia. Using an Opera as inspiration, the project explored singing, drama and movement through weekly workshops leading to a performance for family and friends.
- **VACMA**, The Visual Artist and Craft Makers Awards (VACMA) scheme offers small grants to visual artists and craft makers for their creative development at all stages of their career. These awards are supported by Creative Scotland through funding from the National Lottery in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council.
- **Art is Everywhere**, A research knowledge exchange project with the University of Edinburgh. The project offered access to the arts for all ages in North Lanarkshire and helped tackle education, health, and socio-economic inequalities. With a strong focus on community engagement and collaboration across sectors, the project brought together key stakeholders and community members.

- Its successor **REALITIES**, mobilising the ecosystem of community assets for the work required to reimagine and re-invent health systems to address health inequalities, understanding the role of creative and relational practices and places in that work, and its relationship to the environment.

We intend to engage with future environmental projects such as Green Tease, Creative Carbon to ensure our work is sustainable and links to wider council policies.

Relationship building is key for future projects, working in collaboration ensures local and national partners know we exist; heightened visibility and creating connections so more cross-pollination can happen.

**Impact Reporting.** We understand how crucial measuring impact is. We will implement simple and effective reporting mechanisms, but our focus is on the 'doing' and 'experimenting.' We will cut through bureaucracy and shift attitudes towards a self-confident, valid recognition of the various elements of creativity, working towards a collective vision with aims that are capturing 'measures' and impacts, but doing so in a way that increasingly recognises the limitations of measurement and metrics in complex systems.

Our attention will be on delivery while evidencing our impact through a revised 'measuring impact' strategy – working with our partners to design innovative ways of capturing both the financial and social value of our services of which are inter-linked. We see 'creativity as a process' rather than 'creativity as an outcome.' Our approach will be more human-centred and relational.

**Budget Autonomy.** We will continue to secure responsibility over our own budget in collaboration with other partners rather than relying solely on funds coming from external people and organisations buying into us. This will mean that we can strategically target areas most needing creative provision and build a targeted approach. We will draw

on the expertise of UK-wide partners, who have transformed their approach to participatory budgeting and simultaneously tackled inequalities.

This financial model will be designed to identify funding both externally as well as internally with the aim to have control over this budget, utilising it to increase more value and impact both monetarily but most importantly societally. We will review existing budgets across Active and Creative to help support this initiative. We will document how much funding we are bringing in so we can reinvest in communities and become self-sustaining. Transparency and accountability are key.

**Understanding and applying the Social Prescribing Model.** We will utilise our services to place people on pathways for referral rather than only asking people to take part as and when. Collaborating with partners such as Community Learning and Development, NHS Health Improvement, Macmillan, and Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire (VANL), Greenspace & Country Parks, we will continue to co-develop North Lanarkshire's social prescribing model to extend social prescribing to multiple communities. This will involve plugging into new formats where Community Connectors across the authority sit on existing hubs receiving self-referrals and offering care plans/social prescribing options such as "Arts & You." Locals will also be able to self-refer without the need for a GP. We will work with VANL to promote this model to public, streamline social prescribing with other arts strategy opportunities, and capture data as we go. We will also work to conceptualise creativity as more than a hobby or activity that needs to be prescribed, but a way of being and relating that promotes human flourishing. This process will require control to ensure fairness, whilst preserving the dignity of the end user.

**Utilising our Digital Creative Assets Map.** We will continue to map places and creative assets across North Lanarkshire through the region's first interactive creative asset map made by and for local communities. This tool will showcase the creative hive North Lanarkshire is through a place-based lens. Capacity will be built by working with the University of Edinburgh to train the Arts Development Team to update the interactive map and grow and develop this resource over the coming years. Active and Creative

Communities are currently developing their new website and the Asset Map will feature heavily in the Arts Development area.

**Embodying a conscious sustainable approach and ethos of Co-production, Co-design, and Continuous Learning & Experimentation.**

Through the implementation of effective project creation methods, we will work on co-produced projects with freelance artists, community members, academics, and other multi-sectoral stakeholders. By building upon existing projects and funding and co-applying for new projects, we will create a sustainable legacy and strategize towards growth.

## Core Values

The North Lanarkshire Arts Development team embody core values in all our work.

These words resonate with our team:

- Building community
- Community focused / led
- Climate responsible
- Creative
- Diverse
- Enriching
- Environmental sustainability
- Equitable
- Fun
- Knowledge sharing
- Listening
- Meeting Community need
- Opportunity creators
- Resilient
- Robust

Relationship & Partnership Building  
Resourceful  
Social justice  
Self-promotion  
Targeted work  
Teamwork

Our team is split into two artistic disciplines: Performing Arts & Digital and Visual Arts. We strive to offer every resident access to high quality affordable creative activity, delivered by professionally trained artists. Participation provides the foundation for communities to successfully engage, feel empowered, and be the catalyst for social change.

Prescribing creativity as a vehicle to explore a variety of topics and themes is proven to be extremely effective. The Arts Development team has a depth of experience and knowledge and can tailor projects to specific client's and service's needs/wants and helping people know where to start.

We design and deliver bespoke projects for a range of council services, as well as external clients, developing partnerships and opportunities for local communities within North Lanarkshire to access support and participate in creative activity, responding to community needs and interests, and supporting local groups with the goal of building a thriving creative network within North Lanarkshire.

A comprehensive but not exhaustive list of our activities include:

- Poetry/Creative Writing
- Theatre/Storytelling/Drama/Technical Arts
- Music
- Animation
- Media/Graphic
- Design/Photography/Film/Podcasting/Visual



- Art/Pottery/Ceramics
- Digital Creative Mapping
- Textiles/Woodwork/Sculpture
- Graffiti/Drawing/Painting
- Sound Art/Performance Art
- Public Art/Site Specific Art/Murals

Through the Art is Everywhere project we delivered multiple strands of research and applied artistic practice in collaboration with multiple partners and sectors to initiate the strategic aims of this co-produced strategy.

## Background / Context

### Reimagining North Lanarkshire's Future with Creativity at its Heart

2022 was a ground-breaking year for the Arts Development team at North Lanarkshire Council. During this year, creativity became crucial in unlocking the potential of local people and places in the region. By situating creativity at the helm of multi-sectoral decision making, the Active and Creative Communities Arts Development team have contributed to efforts to tackle the socio-economic, social, and environmental challenges of our time within our local communities.

This contribution was primarily achieved through our flagship **Art is Everywhere** project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), nurturing, and increasing the visibility of artistic endeavour in North Lanarkshire with the aim of tackling inequalities. We widened access to creative activity across key demographics with the development of eleven, innovative strands of work, inspiring the development of this document - North Lanarkshire's first co-produced arts strategy with local communities and multiple partners.

This strategy is a statement of intent to build upon our promising work and widen our scope and impact by integrating creativity across targeted council services to engage and work with communities to tackle inequality. In co-designing our offer in tandem with our communities and local artists on the ground through imaginative practice and collaborative methodologies, we aspire to realise North Lanarkshire's potential as the most creative region in Scotland.

This calls for a process of multi-sectoral integration and collaboration across key North Lanarkshire Council services, nurturing existing and fostering new relationships, both internally and externally, with populations we are currently serving and working with. We have already begun this process by building upon the artists networks developed during this project and experimenting with a creative, novel model of delivery that we now seek to test with our established, valued partners in our services, schools, local organisations, local businesses, and accessibility networks across the region.

By implementing the strategic aims stated in this strategy, North Lanarkshire Council's Arts Development team will realise its ambition of becoming a fully integrated council service. It will play a crucial role in reaching and collaborating with the people and places in our region that require our support, removing barriers of accessibility to creative activity, and sustainably raising the profile of North Lanarkshire's artistic and creative endeavours.

By building on the work of **Art is Everywhere**, we will continue to evolve from a service delivered 'as' and 'when' to become a holistic, key asset in addressing inequality. Creativity, through the lens of the current carbon crisis, will be woven throughout all council services and departments and perceived as more than simply social prescription. It will become a way of connecting with our communities through our environmental, health and leisure services and within our housing, social care, social justice, families, education, employment, business, and other departments.

Community accessibility to creativity offers opportunity for us all to enjoy our hobbies and to learn new skills – but is also much more than that. Creativity has the power to change lives for the better and to highlight and encourage a collective response to the care of our planet. Through the implementation of our strategic aims, we will reach and

collaborate more effectively with the communities that our services traditionally find harder to engage with and begin to direct much needed support to all through our transformative creative approach.

## What is Art is Everywhere?

Art is Everywhere was delivered in 2022 and developed as a response to the post Covid-19 Futures Commission call to adopt a social prescribing approach to healthcare as a priority. A summary of Art is Everywhere is available [here](#), where it is contextualised alongside the other 8 AHRC place-based Knowledge Exchange awards across the UK. Using a range of arts-informed approaches (dance, theatre, photography, film, fine art, murals from upcycled materials, digital art, podcasts and more), we engaged with a range of communities in North Lanarkshire from early years to school children; college students to healthy aging demographics; multiple ethnicities; care experienced, and others to address inequalities through *the arts*. Our arts-informed work in North Lanarkshire – which posits art and creative-relational inquiry as *evidence* alongside traditional qualitative and quantitative measures of evidence – builds on an ongoing programme of research led by Dr Marisa de Andrade at the University of Edinburgh called [Measuring Humanity](#), who work to influence policy and practice at local, national, and international levels.

Art is Everywhere is part of the AHRC's place-based research programme hub. [Here](#) we explain the integrated approach to creatively engaging in place-based work from the bottom-up – *working with* the most unequal communities in our society – rather than parachuting in from the top-down to make decisions about their towns and environment without their equal and active involvement. This [press release](#) explains how North Lanarkshire's Art is Everywhere is linked to the levelling up agenda.

In October 2022, Art is Everywhere became part of a further UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) £26 million investment on a project using the arts to tackle health inequalities. Led by Dr Marisa de Andrade and working alongside Clackmannanshire, Easter Ross in the Highlands, prison, and homeless populations, [REALITIES in Health Disparities:](#)

[Researching Evidence-based Alternatives in Living, Imaginative, Traumatized, Integrated, Embodied Systems](#) is collaborating with so-called 'vulnerable groups' to position these groups as experts of their own health and wellbeing. It is also questioning current assumptions of reality, knowledge, and morality within public health delivery.

This collaboration between North Lanarkshire Council and the University of Edinburgh was further supported by the Arts Development team providing staff time and £30,000 from a Creative Scotland Performing Arts Relief Fund towards community artistic activities. The vision was to launch new initiatives with national partners, create outcomes that maximise impact and legacy, and inform a fresh strategy to plan for a long-term sustainable funding model.

Our intention was to collaborate with Community Learning & Development, Education & Families Social Work, Social Justice, Health Improvement, and other teams across key council services. The Arts Development team co-led the project with the University of Edinburgh and allied with key strategic partners including Edgehill University, NHS Lanarkshire, Scottish Community Safety Network, Youth Theatre Scotland, Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, and Tron Theatre.

We were mindful that Art is Everywhere needed to be integrated and aligned with other sectors' priorities and targets and connected to North Lanarkshire Council's departments, schools, grassroots organisations, businesses and accessibility or transport networks for sustained access to creativity from early years through to older populations. Our aim was to target and connect varied groups that represented multiple, diverse voices both in strategic development and policy making.

The project was grounded in the region's intention to develop a social prescribing model to support the health and wellbeing of North Lanarkshire communities through creativity, identifying assets (building, cultural, human resources, community knowledge and aspirations) that could contribute to sustainable regeneration plans co-designed with North Lanarkshire residents. This included the implementation of a dignity and access fund for lower income households or those who face barriers in accessing the arts in the local authority.

Art is Everywhere worked with existing local cultural/other assets in the region that could be regenerated. The collaboration allowed for a critical exploration of 'what can be done with what already exists' in a more sustainable way than/as well as investing in new infrastructures that may not meet marginalised communities needs or wants.

As a legacy of the Art is Everywhere project, we have revised our approach to ensure our creative offer is climate and environmentally focused and interwoven throughout council services, resulting in the development of five new domains:

- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Health and Healthy Aging
- Community, Safety and Social Justice
- Creative Consortiums
- Digital

## The Policy Landscape

The Plan for North Lanarkshire provides a shared ambition where North Lanarkshire is the place to Live, Learn, Work, Invest and Visit. To deliver the shared ambition of inclusive growth and prosperity, [The Plan](#) has five complementary priorities:

1. Improve economic opportunities and outcomes.
2. Support all children and young people to realise their full potential.
3. Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.
4. Enhance participation, capacity, and empowerment across our communities.
5. Improve North Lanarkshire's resource base

Engaging in creative activity will enable the people of North Lanarkshire to better understand themselves and the areas they live in, feel empowered to make change, develop new skills, improve their health and wellbeing, and invest environmentally in

their communities. The Arts Strategy will enable the Arts Development Team to support the delivery of the priorities within The Plan.

The *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* recognises that central and local government needs to support and empower communities to create a more prosperous and fairer Scotland for everyone. It seeks to achieve this through enabling ownership or control of land or property and strengthening voices in decisions about public services. The legislation has also created new responsibilities and powers for local authorities in Scotland to help empower communities.

Creative Scotland proposed funding cuts – Following the Scottish Government's draft budget announcement in December 2022 which proposed a reduction in funding for Creative Scotland of around £6.6million (more than 10%), Creative Scotland warned it may have to half the number of organisations it provides long-term funding for. The funding body's Chief Executive Iain Munro told Scottish Parliament around 60 organisations could lose support, which could put up to 2,500 jobs at risk. This decision was reversed in February 2023 but reinstated in September 2023 in the Autumn Budget Revisions. Creative Scotland will not be able to support as many organisations on a multi-year basis as they currently do which will leave many organisations vulnerable.

Within this context, North Lanarkshire Council's Arts Development team is working with academics and other partners to change the way we think about the value of creativity in place-based settings.

## Art as Evidence

Art is Everywhere was informed by an existing research programme [Measuring Humanity](#). This work calls for a re-conceptualisation of the evidence-base to include crucial forms of creative and relational data about communities' lived experiences that cannot be accessed through biomedical, or reductionist approaches to generating and using evidence. The approach has been applied with various 'hard-to-reach' groups including the Deaf community; communities with a range of mental health conditions and addictions; several Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups including severely

stigmatised and excluded communities such as Roma/Gypsy; and school children in marginalised neighbourhoods.

Through this lens, art is evidence if it is deemed 'valid' and appropriate for communities – whether it be hip-hop, theatre, environmental art initiatives in greenspaces, comedy, music making or simply having meaningful conversations.

*The arts* and the act of humans coming together in community provide missing data that must be understood to tackle complex issues. By privileging the person's voice, a richer understanding emerges of complex, deep-rooted reasons for ill health. Connecting the individual to the system reveals how diverse subjective realities (personal and even subconscious motivations) collide with an objective reality (structural drivers of inequality). Through performance and collaboration, we hear how poverty, power, and politics make people unhealthy. The work also demonstrates how community engagements challenge policy makers and academics to reassess what counts as evidence when developing policies, practices, and recommendations.

As is entirely expected through the process of co-production, some of the milestones of Art Is Everywhere shifted as new opportunities emerged or barriers prevented us from delivering particular activities at a particular time. Through our vision and approach, there is no such thing as failure. We are experimenting – hopping over obstacles and seeking imaginative solutions when we collide with systemic or other challenges. We are focused on deep, honest learning rather than gaming targets and outcomes.

## Our Intention

To reach our vision, we co-produced seven strategic aims using the Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach designed by Professor Toby Lowe at [Centre for Public Impact \(CPI\)](#). The internationally acclaimed approach used by multiple Governments, Councils and other organisations is grounded in the belief that 'public service exists to support human freedom and flourishing.'

HLS 'embraces the complexity of the real world and enables us to work effectively in that complexity.' We know there are no easy, simple solutions and are committed to getting

to the root causes of issues by recognising that our environments are dynamic, and change is inevitable. We are all unique so our 'outcomes' will differ depending on our wants and needs at any given time. This means that measuring in a linear, target driven way will involve a certain level of gaming rather than authentic, relational learning and genuinely positive outcomes. When we get things wrong, we adapt, try something different, experiment, document the process, honestly share our learning in the absence of a blame and shame culture. There is no such thing as failure – each experiment is an opportunity for growth and wisdom.

By focusing on and understanding the processes of learning and change in North Lanarkshire Council and other organisations rather than performance measures, we will nurture relationships and healthy systems that facilitate continuous learning cycles for sustainable growth.

There are three main components to Human Learning Systems:

**Input:** This refers to the information, experiences, and feedback that individuals receive from their environment. This will be gathered by the Arts Development team as part of their daily practice in simple and accessible formats on a central database.

**Processing:** This refers to the ways in which individuals interpret and make sense of the input they receive. This includes the formation of beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about the world, as well as the development of skills and competencies. This will happen through ongoing conversations, structured and informal meetings with the Arts Development team in collaboration with community members, academics, and other multi-sectoral partners.

**Output:** This refers to the actions and behaviours that individuals engage in due to them processing the input they receive. This includes changes in attitudes, beliefs, and practices, as well as changes in the ways that individuals interact with others and with their environment.

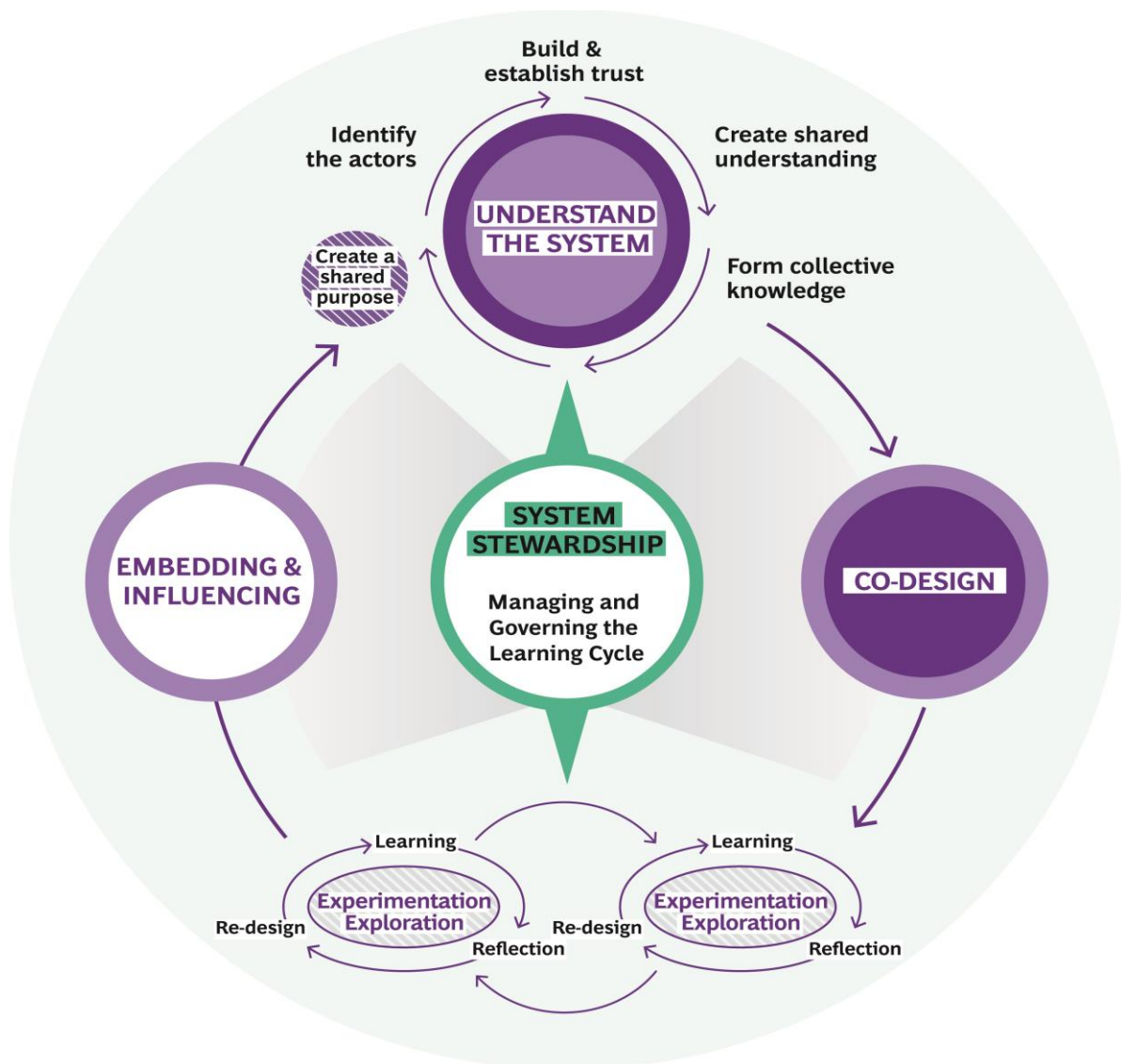
The process of learning and change in organisations is not linear, but rather is characterised by a cycle of inputs, processing, and outputs. As individuals receive new input and process it, they engage in new behaviours, which in turn bring about new input



and new opportunities for learning and change. This will lead to new insights within the team and the co-designing of community activities that support this process.

Our strategy outlines seven strategic aims that will realise this vision and for each aim, human learning cycles will be co-produced that will have a co-design phase, an experimentation phase, and a learning phase. That learning will then inform further co-design and experimentation phases to progress towards new opportunities for learning and change.

## Human Learning Systems



## Our Strategic Aims

### **1. DELIVERY**

Deliver comprehensive creative activity that supports North Lanarkshire in becoming a leading national, thriving, creative, cultural hub.

### **2. INTEGRATE**

Situate the delivery of North Lanarkshire Arts Development as a key multi-sectoral asset in tackling the region's inequalities by integrating a woven creative offer that can be facilitated and prescribed throughout North Lanarkshire's council services.

### **3. RELATIONSHIPS**

Utilise the value of creativity to bring people together by becoming a valuable relationship builder: strengthening links within council services and nurturing deep collaboration with residents, community organisations, public bodies, local, regional, and national businesses, academic partners, and funders.

### **4. GROWTH**

Implement a financially sustainable growth model whereby the revenue brought in through our creative activity is managed by the Arts Development team with re-investment into the staffing and materials required to support year on year growth of North Lanarkshire's creative sector into 2028 and beyond.

## **5. MEASURING & EVIDENCING**

Capture and grow both the societal and financial value of our work through innovative methods of measuring and evidencing the impact of our creative activities, working closely with our council services, collaboration with our communities and utilising the analytical expertise of our academic partners.

## **6. PROMOTION & COMMUNICATION**

Boldly promote and showcase the value of our projects and services to foster a reputation not only of service delivery but one that plays a valuable role in addressing vulnerability and tackling social inequalities within our communities.

## **7. SUSTAINABILITY**

Commitment to weaving environmental sustainability through every aspect of our work to ensure creative activity in North Lanarkshire is contributing to the council's aim of being Net Zero by 2030.

## **DELIVERY - Strategic Aim 1**

*Deliver comprehensive creative activity that supports North Lanarkshire in becoming a leading national, thriving, creative, cultural hub.*

The Arts Development team is currently in a transition phase between the previous delivery model that focused purely on 'as' and 'when' access to creative activity without a wider strategic vision as to how these activities could be connected to produce a creative

offering that sustainably grows across all places in North Lanarkshire. Art is Everywhere has led to legacy opportunities and expanded the creative potential of North Lanarkshire through co-production and collaboration.

#### Co-designing and co-producing with stakeholders

This requires the Arts Development team to collaborate with communities, other North Lanarkshire Council services and local partners to build upon the creative consortiums and artist network that emerged in 2022. For example, forthcoming project of transforming the town of Airdrie into *our town for the arts* can be viewed as an experimental hub to show how a town centre can be re-generated taking the needs and wants of local residents into consideration and become a thriving, creative, cultural hub for North Lanarkshire and beyond.

## **INTEGRATE - Strategic Aim 2**

*Situate the delivery of North Lanarkshire Arts Development as a key multi-sectoral asset in tackling the region's inequalities by integrating a woven creative offer that can be facilitated and prescribed throughout North Lanarkshire's council services*

The region of North Lanarkshire is one of the most challenging areas in Scotland in large part because of de-industrialisation and the resultant social, economic and health outcomes that have resulted within our communities. We are therefore uniquely placed to support non-traditional methods of community engagement with key demographics such as ex-offenders, people in areas of deprivation, young people, immigrants, men and women, and others across the socio-economic spectrum.

The task of utilising *the arts* as a social prescription and a vehicle to address inequalities across North Lanarkshire Council has been limited due to barriers for entry for people reaching our services from our previous delivery model. Through Art is Everywhere, we have started integrating creativity across key council services and engaging with so-called

hard-to-reach populations. Our path now is to continue to build and sustain these meaningful relationships and place social, physical, and mental health improvement at the core of our delivery.

## RELATIONSHIPS - Strategic Aim 3

*Utilise the value of creativity to bring people together by becoming a valuable relationship builder: strengthening links within council services and nurturing deep collaboration with residents, community organisations, public bodies, local, regional, and national businesses, academic partners, and funders.*

The Arts Development team have cultivated good relationships both internally and externally through cultural coordinator teams who have engaged centrally with education services and other departments in the council for over 30 years. Relationships exist between Community Learning and Development, youth, family, and adult work teams in the council, however there is yet no systematic referral process in place to ensure those who require access to creative activity can secure this. A process of integration must be employed internally and, as systematic pathways are embedded in our service, we will increase our scope of fostering collaborative relationships with community organisations, other public bodies, businesses, academic partners, and funders. We will continue to demonstrate that our creative offer is integral and multi-sectoral and position ourselves as key stakeholders in North Lanarkshire Council's vision reducing levels of inequality, aligning with Government strategies.

To do this, we will continue to co-produce and co-design new community initiatives and outcomes in partnership with other council services. We will co-design an external communication plan with existing partners to deepen and create new relationships across North Lanarkshire, and ensure links established through Art is Everywhere with the Early Learning Team, Education, Health Improvement, Social Justice, and other partners are strengthened. We will also develop an internal relationship building programme with the goal of full integration of creativity across all sectors in North Lanarkshire Council. We will inform a new experiment of plugging into national Community Learning and Development and national strategies as there is no single arts national framework.

## GROWTH - Strategic Aim 4

*Implement a financially sustainable growth model whereby the revenue brought in through our creative activity is managed by the Arts Development team with re-investment into the staffing and materials required to support year on year growth of North Lanarkshire's creative sector into 2028 and beyond.*

Our vision is to have greater control over how creative resources are allocated to increase the scope of full integration across Council services. Conversations with other North Lanarkshire Council finance teams would be a starting point to understand how we may be able to co-design an approach to budgeting that could be primarily managed by the Arts Development team in collaboration with other services and partners. We will draw from successful collaborative funding models applied using Human Learning Systems.

## MEASURING & EVIDENCE - Strategic Aim 5

*Capture and grow the societal and financial value of our work through innovative methods of measuring and evidencing the impact of our creative activities, working closely with other council departments in collaboration with our communities, and utilising the analytical expertise of our academic partners.*

We currently do not capture evidence of our work systematically to demonstrate the social and financial value and impact of our activities. We require a design of innovative, novel methods of data collection that not only demonstrates value and impact, but re-defines what value and impact is to ensure that the impact of creativity is accurately presented to other stakeholders.

The Arts Development team to work closely with their academic partners at the University of Edinburgh to co-design evaluation approaches that do not require bureaucratisation of the work. We will continue to populate North Lanarkshire's first interactive creative assets map that not only captures place-based activities, but also how the initiatives are affecting the people in each place.

North Lanarkshire Council is part of the REALITIES project that is designing novel methods of capturing artistic impact in the public sector. As a REALITIES asset hub, North Lanarkshire will be running a series of experiments to capture this through an iterative learning environment with reflection and adaptation embedded. We will use data to inform bids for new projects, supporting the financial growth of the Arts Development team.

## **PROMOTION & COMMUNICATION - Strategic Aim 6**

*Boldly promote and showcase the value of our projects and services to foster a reputation not only of service delivery but one that plays a valuable role in addressing and reframing vulnerability and tackling inequalities within our communities.*

The Arts Development team will continue to co-design a mutually agreed service offer and terminology to ensure consistency of message.

We will develop a vocabulary sheet so the Arts Development team across Performing, Visual and Digital Arts can all use similar terminology when engaging with community members and other internal and external stakeholders and design a series of templates for the Arts Development team to ensure materials go out in a similar way.

Our website will be re-designed to showcase our work and act as our 'shop window.' We will improve internal and external communication through this improved website functionality, social media, and utilising Active and Creative Communities (ACC) wider asset base.

We will offer free activities at ACC events. This strengthens the ACC brand and highlights the breadth of activity on offer.

We will work together to devise a communication plan that includes dates for events to exhibit the grassroots work going on, forward planning and resources for marketing within our revised autonomous budget. Strategic, influential attendees will be invited to key events.



## SUSTAINABILITY - Strategic Aim 7

*Commitment to weaving sustainability through every aspect of our work to ensure creative activity in North Lanarkshire is contributing to the council's aim of being Net Zero by 2030.*

Within our strategy, the Arts Development Team has a responsibility to tackle the ever-growing carbon crisis, uniting creativity and sustainability in all activity devised and delivered within North Lanarkshire.

We will take steps in response to the climate emergency to reduce the environmental impact of how we deliver our activities and help contribute towards a more sustainable future. North Lanarkshire Council has committed itself and the area of North Lanarkshire to achieving net zero by 2030. At a strategic level we will take cognisance of the council's strategies and plans in this area, for example the NLC Environmental Strategy, NLC Climate Plan, Carbon Management Plan. Our actions will focus on areas we can be more sustainable and embed these practices within NL Arts. These include -

- Using more sustainable materials, following a waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse, recycle, dispose.
- Identify relevant learning and development opportunities for staff; companies
- such as Creative Carbon offer training to organisations to be better educated and equipped in using more sustainable methods of service delivery.
- Look for ways to highlight sustainability and climate change in the delivery of our programmes.
- Working with greater intent with our colleagues in Greenspace & Country Parks, NLC - environmental art providing a wonderful opportunity to educate people on the environment and climate change, whilst direct site engagement also delivers climate positive impact, e.g. through associated habitat improvement.

## How will we know we have been successful?

Success will be measured through quantitative and qualitative methods; this guarantees we capture the true essence of our work. An action plan will be created to enable the Arts Development team to outline the key activities required to move this strategy forward. Using the Human Learning Systems the Arts Development team will pause for reflection, digest the findings, and reposition its work each year to ensure the strategy continues to tackle key social issues and inequalities within North Lanarkshire. (See Appendix 1: Action Timeline).

---

# Appendix 1: Action Timeline

**Key to strategic aims:**

1. Delivery   2. Integrate   3. Relationships   4. Growth  
 5. Measuring & Evidencing   6. Promotion & Communication   7. Sustainability

Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	
2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Continually evolve and advance community activity programme to meet the needs of NL residents <b>(1,2,3,4,6,7)</b>					
Establish and provide opportunities, platforms, consortiums, and pathways that advance the role of creativity across North Lanarkshire <b>(1,3,5,6,7)</b>					
Implement schools programme to align with Scottish Attainment Challenge <b>(1,2,3,4,5,6,7)</b>					
Collaborate and build capacity with Health Improvement to engage with marginalised groups <b>(1,2,3,4,5,6,7)</b>					
		Develop relationships, identify need, and collaborate with Restorative Justice to integrate creative activity across the service <b>(1,2,3,4,5,6,7)</b>			
Establish impact of the inclusion of creative activity in line with Community Learning and Development Action Plan <b>(1,2,3,4,5,6,7)</b>					
		Increase digital footprint of NLC Arts Development <b>(1,3,5,6,7)</b>			