

we need to
always
Celebrate
what we
do!

EMPAF National Symposium
29th November 2010

Report

On 29th November 2010 EMPAF with support from partners in the West Midlands brought together a variety of Participatory and Community Arts' Leaders, Directors, Project and Development Workers from the UK. 30 people braved the cold and snowy weather conditions to make their way to The Crossing at St, Pauls in Walsall, coming together to think collectively as to how to continue to support and develop good participatory creative practice in the current climate.

This report is based on notes taken by participants during the days discussions. The symposium was also documented by artist Paul Gent who produced all the sketches included in this report. Photographs are by various attendees.



With the following agenda as a starting point, the day was facilitated by Miles Harrison with the aim of intended for it to remain flexible as possible to respond to the ideas/needs of those who attended.

10.00am Brief Introductions followed by Open Space Debate

12.00pm Lunch

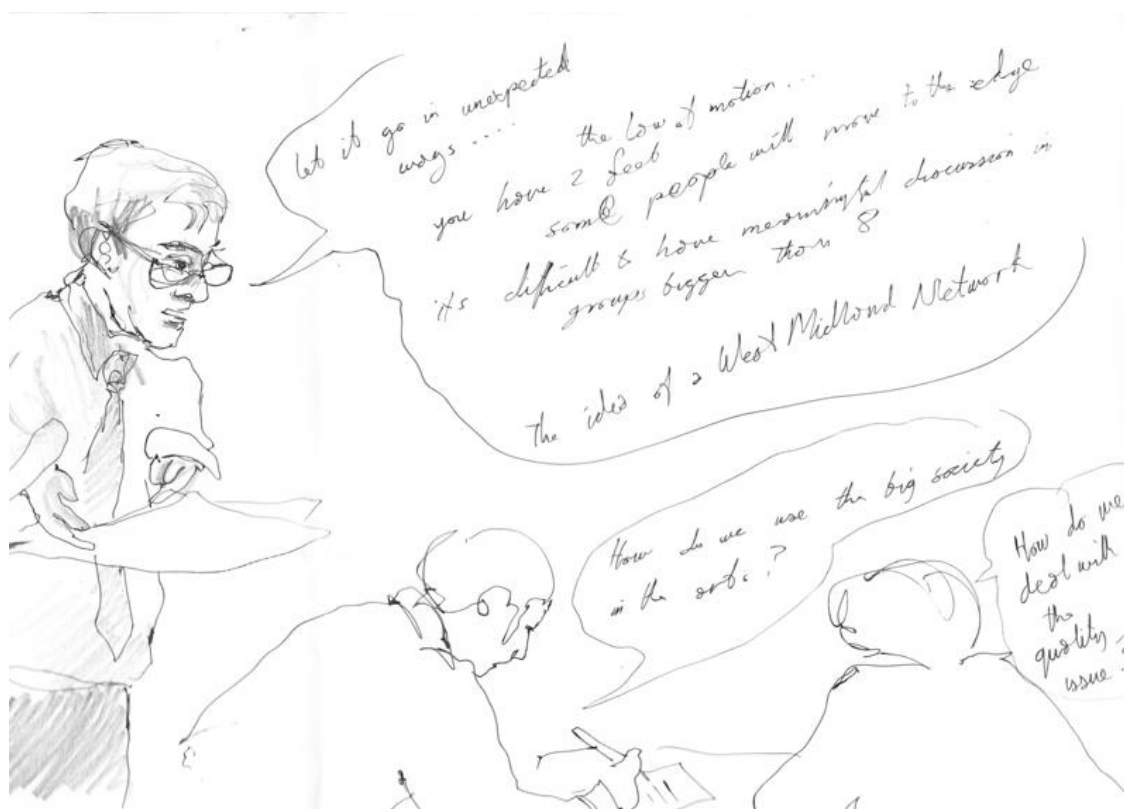
12.45pm Break out for facilitated group discussions:

- Management Approaches: the feminine and the masculine. Exploring ideas about what is unique, challenging and exciting about management approaches in community and participatory arts and how to maximise upon and share these skills.
- Networking and the West Midlands. Is there a desire for West Midlands Participatory Arts Forum and how could it develop?
- Key Issue/s from Morning Session – In depth discussion on issue identified during the open space debate (potentially more than one group)

2.00pm Break out for facilitated group discussions:

- Nurturing our Future Leaders. Who are they, where are they, are they stepping up and how can we encourage and support them?
- We already “think outside the box”! Approaches to joint working across the arts and other sectors: how to identify, nurture and promote.
- Key Issue/s from Morning Session – In depth discussion on issue identified during the open space debate (potentially more than one group)

3.00pm Round Up and Call to Action



National Symposium Open Space Discussion Topics

Topic: How can we control / use the phrase The Big Society?

Main Points Discussed:

- *UNCLEAR DEFINITION*
- The model of delivery – what does this devolution mean?
- How do we consult? Are ‘we’ best placed to show the ways in which this can happen?
- Need for clarity of evidence for smaller organisations
- The sector needs to clearly define its practices
- Are we already working via a ‘big society’ model?
- Voluntary sector
- Community arts – value for money

Recommendations:

1. Liaise with voluntary sector (as we are a part of the voluntary sector)
2. Work together to have conversations about how artists can take hold of the Big Society concept
3. Need to be the ‘experts’ and recognised as so

Topic: How can we strengthen the community and participatory arts movement?

Main Points Discussed:

- What happened to ‘the arts being political’?
- ‘The industry’ is the structure. The sector, the range of behaviour. The ‘movement’ is the myth that brings a collective voice
- Are we using old terminology?
- Language – internal and external
- Confidence, skills building.
- Three ways to come together: connect via network; have conversation with others; internet. (private, public, industry, sector)
- How within other sectors who have same difficulty communicating (ie – youth service workers do it)?

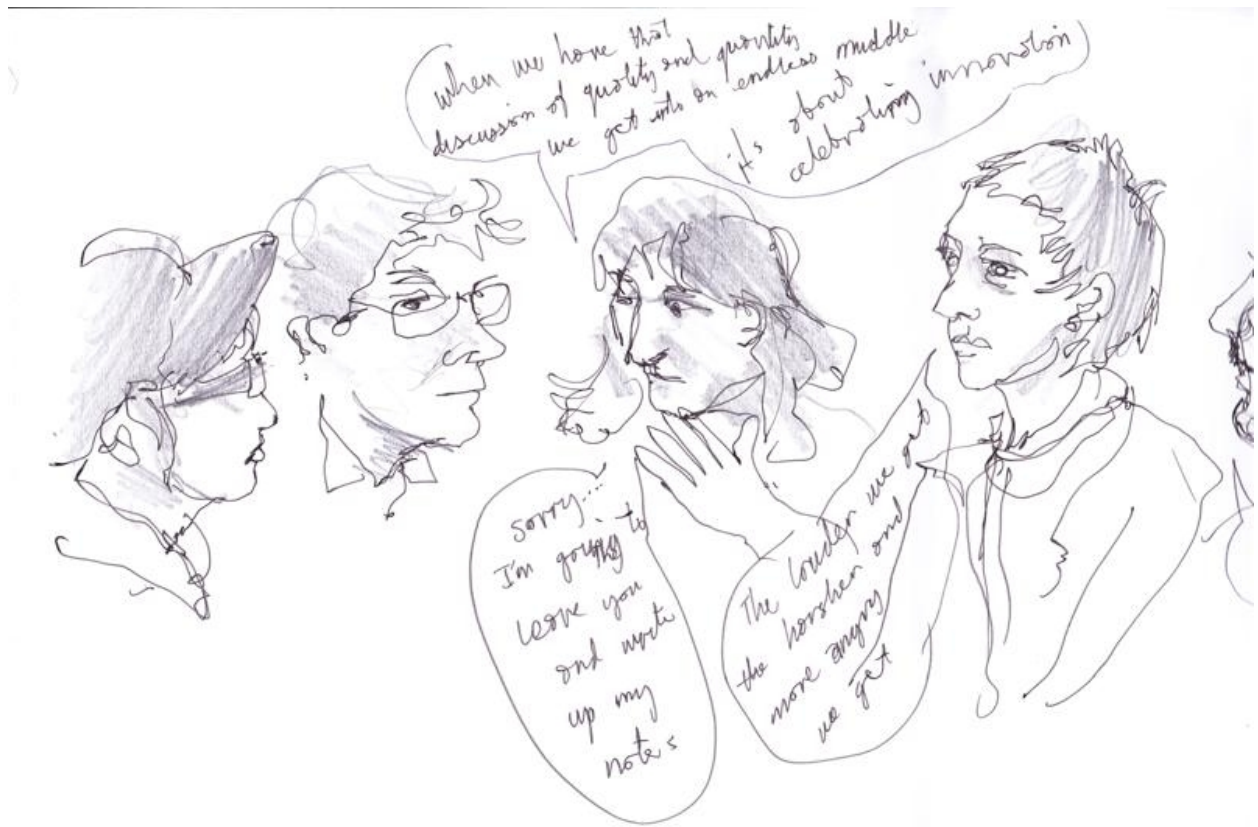
Additional Notes:

- Is movement old fashioned?
- It’s a challenge being a movement
- Is movement exclusive or about leadership – sector, industry, movement?
- To be part of a movement you need to be part of a debate, discussion.
- We need to be able to explain what we do
- Sector describes a range of behaviour and processes levels of engagement
- Has it always existed – movement?

- Magic – myths – collective or collaborative arts
- Movement being disparate voice coming together – less institution based – growing of a voice
- A movement engine of transformation (leadership)

Recommendations:

1. We need strong leaders and advocates, not necessarily from within community arts / participatory arts
2. We need an advocacy tool? Model
3. Confidence building through CPD
4. Celebration of diversity of what happens - national campaign for community arts
5. Success look like... when arts cuts are announced the BBC does not automatically go to Royal Opera – comes to us!
6. We have a big enough voice and are recognised



Topic: How do we 'deal' with the quality issue?

Main Points Discussed:

- Setting 'Quality Marks' or code of practice? Don't want to kite mark our work
- Non participatory arts organisations undertaking participatory arts as a "supplementary" activity and often part of ticking boxes
- As participatory arts organisations artists we have principles and practice but don't want to be prescriptive
- Quality is about process and product, aims and objectives, context, group etc etc

- Are we too honest about what doesn't 'work' or meet or changed outcomes we get?
- Quality is being mixed up with performance management by funders
- We are not being 'judged' on quality same as other arts organisations i.e. galleries theatres

Recommendations:

1. Need to open a wider debate on quality
2. Look at code of practice. Would provide a basis for creating / planning a project or programme
3. Engage with new 'entrants' into participatory arts, whether artists or funders/partners

Topic: Online tools, collective collaboration and digital participation

Main Points Discussed:

- Online / offline reinforce each other – not either / or
- Tradition of using free and cheap materials – was photocopies now digital tools
- 'Participatory arts dating agency'
- Collaboration is becoming a central them across many spheres of society
- Contributory arts – new mainstreams art form emerging

Recommendations:

1. Use digital tools to ensure your investment of time and money is very effective
2. Widen your collaborative circles
3. Explore how people can contribute using online tools

Topic: What is the nature of collaboration?

Main Points Discussed:

- Sharing ideas
- Creativity crossing boundaries
- Competition
- Resources

Recommendations:

1. Take risks – persevere!
2. Networking, initiate dialogues!

Topic: How can we advocate participatory arts as an effective means / tool for social engagement?

Main Points Discussed:

- Difficulty in documenting impact and distributing widely and to the right people (locally and nationally)
- Who's commissioning?
- Arts and health sector projects very driven by outcomes → participatory arts can learn
- Websites and networks need support and facilitation – personal / individual advocacy most effective / powerful
- Wide ranging feedback from participants and stakeholders
- Use the Big Society agenda – get back to the roots of participatory arts - access for all – can community benefit on behalf of the sector? Build profile locally, sub regionally, nationally
- Utilise social media at community level
- Be affective marketers and lobbyists with MP's and media
- Need to network with other sectors and policy makers attending the meetings with the right people

Recommendations:

1. Participatory arts network can be mutually supportive and help educate and train one another to build the sector
2. Engage with leaders in each sector (e.g. health) to develop and participate in the development and delivery of projects
3. The arts as a part of the whole rather than a standalone project ... consortia approach with other sector professionals – cross sector training and empowerment (eg training health professionals to deliver basic training workshops on ward)

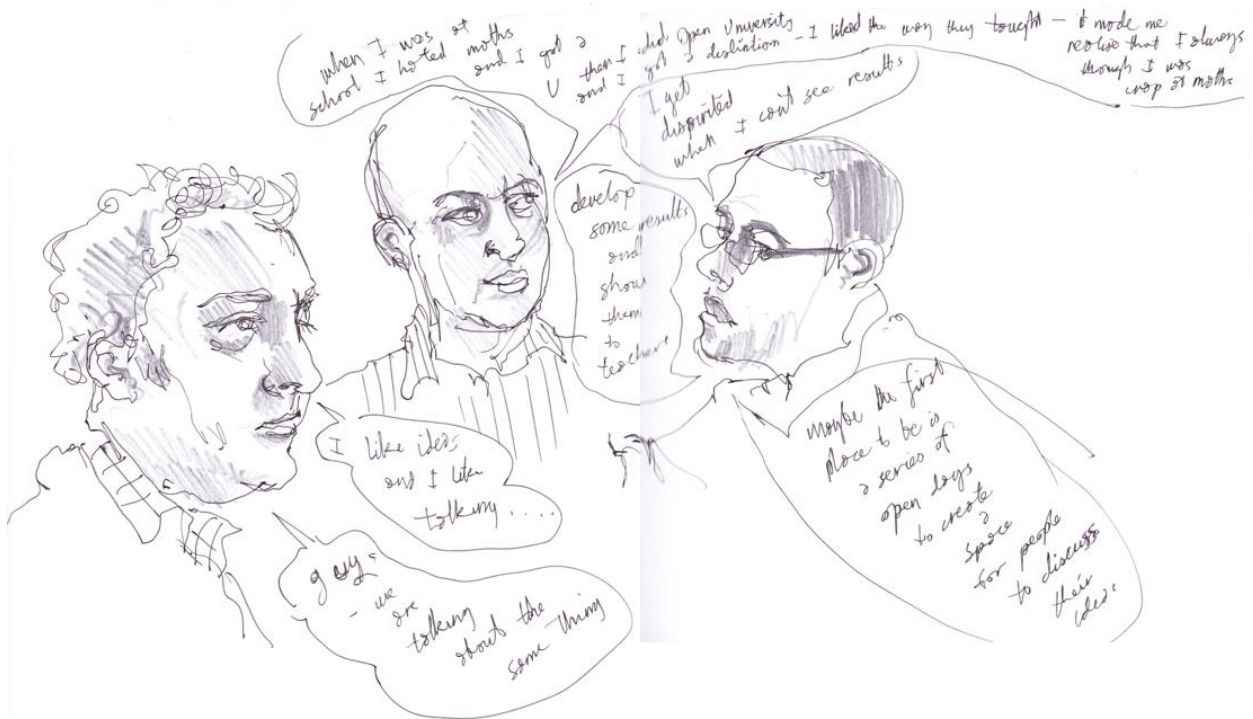
Topic: Funding – innovative models involving private sector

Main Points Discussed:

- Engage with non arts funding
- Philanthropy
- Board names skills and objectives
- Social value of the organisation
- Partnerships
- Entrepreneurial attitudes

Recommendations:

1. Create a strategy
2. Network and get out there to meet other ones
3. Thinking outside the traditional models



Topic: Our role in changing the education system

Main Points Discussed:

- Factory education system and its relevance to arts
- Creative Partnerships
- How our way of working could benefit schools and education
- Free schools?
- The Big Society is ours isn't it?
- The times when the apples have been ousted from our collective cart and we have put them back in

Recommendations:

1. Series of open days for discussing new educational ideas around participatory arts
2. 20 planned workshops to explore ideas in partnership with Northampton university
3. Look at working with teachers in schools to try it out

Additional notes:

Trying different learning environments

- Arts / creativity stimulate enquiry therefore entrepreneur industrial creatively and economic blossoming
- Arts and business growth are linked and need variety of learning

Topic: What is 'Taking Risks' in participatory arts?

Main Points Discussed:

- Challenge people / organisations that take the 'this is how we do it' stance – not tailoring their service
- Participatory organisation people are people naturally take risks / work with groups other people can't / don't reach
- Why is it that we are able to take risks? – we are independent / fairly free
- Creativity can be revolutionary – others are suppressed by time / commitments / institutions
- People need 'room' to take risks

Recommendations:

1. We should be used as a model for 'safe' risk taking in this sector – tailoring services to communities
 - Risk taking is a process to general a successful product
 - Look at your motives for risk taking
 - To find the one thing that will then support all other things
 - Risks are relevant to the life experience
2. Recognition of different understanding of risk taking – some people will be at the level of opening at a different time
3. Recognition of the bravery of 'risk-taking' – the imagining and the belief that something can happen!

In Depth Discussion Session

Following the open space debates of the morning and a review of agenda the following were decided upon by participants at the event as topics for more in depth discussion in the afternoon.

Topic: A West Midlands Participatory Arts Network – is it needed and how could it come together?

Discussion began with EMPAF and why the symposium was held in the West Midlands. In considering the development of EMPAF issues such as capacity, structure, time scale of development of current situation and purpose were considered. Discussion was also had on the benefits of EMPAF and where EMPAF membership consisted of relatively similar organisations whereas the West Midlands was potentially made up of a more diverse range.

Specific discussion points in relation to setting up a West Midlands network included:

- What can 'we' get out of it?

- What are others doing?
- Political clout
- Joined up thinking and to do something (s)

Key issues agreed for further consideration:

- Self elected nature of the process
- What are simple quick wins?
- Possibility of working with EMPAF to developing approach to funders / stakeholders whilst ensuring individual identity is retained according to the needs of the region

It was agreed:

- To hold an open meeting in Birmingham in early 2011
- To further clarify the benefits of a network and outline what success would look like in 1-2 years
- Use EMPAF resources and website
- Consider how "WMPAF" can also support EMPAF



Topic: Leadership and Management Styles

Discussion on issues of leadership and differing styles of management resulting in an agreement that an event was needed to explore and encourage future leadership.

Under the title of “Growing your Potential” the event will focus on leadership and positive approaches to its support and development.

EMPAF will look into the viability of organising the event with input from Julie Batten (EMPAF / People Express who has been inspired to consider this area in more depth through on-going work and a recent conference for women leaders) Kate Gant (who has undertaken women’s leadership training) and Lucy Purves (Charnwood Arts and Beyond Borders) who has agreed to help organise. A suggested speaker for the event is Ness Wilson.

It was agreed that considering management styles under gender headings was not appropriate and a suggestion was to consider differing leadership and management approaches under headings such as wolves or sheepdogs when planning the event and future discussions.

Topic: Bringing together regional networks nationally / ‘bigly’ for strength etc and linked approach in effective format / forum

Main Points Discussed:

- MailOut offer
- Meeting of network representatives
- National Portfolio bid for a network hub
- Independent regional advocacy of sector
- Support for development areas where there are gaps in networks
- A platform of celebration

Recommendations:

- Network strength - showcase

The discussion was taken further at the final stage of the symposium where the floor was opened up to consider the idea of MailOut liaising with the UK participatory arts networks to coordinate and lead on an ACE National Portfolio bid. The aim would be for MailOut to lead on developing as a hub for networks, support for the further development of the existing networks and support for networks growing in those areas currently not represented. In essence it was agreed that the idea be taken forward and MailOut agreed to set up and coordinate a meeting of network representatives in Birmingham in December 2010 to discuss in more depth and develop a proposal.

Conclusions

It was agreed that the day was successful, particularly in bringing together a diverse range of people to discuss key issues in the current climate, including representatives from various participatory arts networks in the UK.

It was agreed that to follow up:

- A meeting would be undertaken before the end of the year to bring together representatives from each of the networks, including the emerging West Midlands network, to discuss and input into the MailOut National Portfolio bid.
- An open meeting would be arranged in Birmingham early in 2011 to discuss further the development of a West Midlands Network and that EMPAF would support this in any ways possible
- The opportunity for programming a day event, exploring and encouraging future leadership, under the title of “Growing Your Potential” the event with focus on positive approaches to its support and development would be further explored.

List of Attendees:

Name	Organisation
Andy Barrett	Hanby & Barrett
Ben Hunt	Prescap /CPAL
Bonnie Mitchell	Spare Tyre
Deb Rogers	The Cultural Sisters
Fiona Waddle	Cultural Sisters and Urban Vision
Glen Buglass	Walsall Council
Jan Reynolds	EMPAF / Creative Culture Connecting Communities
Jane Millum	EMPAF
John Cocker	Telford LA
Julian Hanby	Hanby & Barrett
Julie Batten	EMPAF People Express
Julie de Bastion	Community Arts Practitioner
Kate Gant	Creativity Team
Kevin Ryan	EMPAF / Charnwood Arts
Lee Griffiths	Friction Arts
Lucy Purves	Charnwood Arts / Beyond Borders
Madeline Holmes	City Arts
Marion Sander	ArtsNK
Mark Webster	Creative Communities Unit Staffordshire Uni
Matthew Bushell	Artblast
Matthew Daniels	Sound It Out
Naomi Whitman	CPAL
Pat Dawson	Sampad
Rachel Flowers	Community Arts Practitioner
Rob Howell	MailOut
Robin Wade	Escape Community Art in Action
Scott Bushell	NAC Ltd/Fishmarket Gallery
Tina Glover	EMPAF / Junction Arts
Trevelyan Wright	b-arts
Vince Attwood	EMPAF / Soft Touch Community Arts