



Policy Submission

**Submission to the
Arts Council**

February 1994

1. BACKGROUND

The Combat Poverty Agency welcomes the invitation from the Arts Council to submit proposals for inclusion in the Council's three year plan to be submitted to the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. In making this submission the Agency outlines key areas which it recommends that the Arts Council prioritise over the next three years.

At the heart of this submission are the Agency's views that access to, and participation in, the arts is a basic right and necessity for everyone and that the arts have a major role to play in tackling poverty. Thus, in making this submission the Agency is primarily concerned with how the Arts Council's three year plan can take on board concerns about exclusion, poverty and inequality of access to the arts. This is in the context of somewhere between 20 and 30% of the population living in poverty.

While the Agency acknowledges that the Arts Council alone cannot address all the issues concerning cultural and artistic policy and provision for those who are affected by poverty and disadvantage, it does believe that the Arts Council has a significant role to play in this. This submission primarily focusses on the role of the Arts Council in this respect and does not look in detail at the wider role of the statutory sector.

In writing this submission the Agency has drawn from its direct experience of community arts and other programmes and from its discussions with arts workers, community groups, and a specialist advisory group (1). In this submission the key lessons arising from this experience are highlighted.

As a result the Agency is concerned to address a broad range of arts access and participation issues which affect those experiencing poverty and disadvantage through changes in policy, provision and structures.

2. THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

The Combat Poverty Agency is, like the Arts Council, a statutory body. The Agency has a number of key functions set down in legislation:

- advising and making recommendations to government on social and economic planning in relation to poverty;
- the examination of the nature, causes and extent of poverty and for that purpose the promotion, commission and interpretation of research on poverty;
- the initiation of measures aimed at overcoming poverty and the

evaluation of such measures;
- the promotion of greater public awareness of the nature, causes and extent of poverty and measures necessary to tackle it.

3. POVERTY

Poverty, in the Agency's view, is best understood as exclusion from the general standard of living and way of life prevailing in society. Thus, tackling poverty is about much more than just ensuring that everyone has access to an adequate income. It is about addressing exclusion and inequality so that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities of society. Poverty is thus as much about social and cultural inequality and exclusion as about economic deprivation.

The consequence of poverty and unemployment is that many people feel marginalised and powerless. Many experience real pain and hardship and lead bleak and restricted lives. Combating poverty involves overcoming such powerlessness and marginalisation. It means responding to people's sense of alienation and rejection which often results in feelings of hopelessness, failure and inadequacy. It involves rebuilding self-confidence and overcoming dependency. It means ensuring that those affected by poverty have access to the basic services and opportunities that the rest of society enjoys.

For people living in poverty services such as education, health, housing, transport and legal services are often lacking or provided in an inferior way. This is also true of the arts.

Thus, tackling poverty requires a multi-dimensional and holistic approach that involves changes and actions in many different areas and at many different levels. Changes need to occur in national policies and programmes but interventions at a local level aimed at disadvantaged individuals and communities are also needed.

4. ROLE OF THE AGENCY

The scale of poverty is such that it is necessary to mobilise the commitment and resources of the whole of Irish society to address it. It involves bringing about major changes in the distribution of resources and opportunities. This requires difficult decisions about priorities and direction. Such action needs to be based on open debate and discussion leading to carefully formulated policy proposals.

As a relatively small organisation with limited staff and resources the Agency cannot itself run major programmes to tackle poverty. Its role is to act as a catalyst and as a partner so as to stimulate and mobilise all sectors to play their part in addressing poverty. In doing this it aims to provide a focal point for much anti-poverty activity and seeks to work in partnership with Government agencies, the social partners, and with the many individuals, groups and institutions concerned to combat poverty. It is in this spirit of partnership that the Agency makes this submission to the Arts Council.

5. THE ARTS, CULTURE AND POVERTY

The Agency believes that the arts must be seen not as a luxury but as a basic right and should be open to everyone in society. The Agency welcomes the new Arts Council's Mission Statement and, in particular, its explicit commitment to address the entitlement of "everyone in Ireland .. to have meaningful access to, and participation in, the arts".

The economic poverty and disadvantage which so many in our society suffer from is added to by the cultural poverty experienced. Available models of arts practice usually exclude specific considerations of poverty and disadvantage despite the fact that between 20-30% of the population live in poverty.

Even when efforts are made to address issues of participation in the arts it is often restricted to consumption in the form of theatre or exhibition attendance at particular centres. State funding of such centres has been based on a particular view of public benefit (2). Such views of benefit were devised in a society where constant and regular employment was the norm and where participation in the arts was largely synonymous with attendance at arts events in one's leisure time. Thus, within this when one loses one's job one loses one's opportunity to experience the arts. These changes which have occurred over the last fifteen years in employment patterns are not likely to be reversed in the foreseeable future. Therefore such notions of benefit need to change with them.

Even if such participation was acceptable as a sufficient response to social exclusion the outward growth of our cities and the poor provision of rural transport and childcare makes access to traditional centres difficult. There are also psychological factors at work - these centres provide forms of art expression which often have little in common with those affected by poverty and disadvantage.

The Agency's interest in the arts stems from its understanding of the arts as symbol systems, through which individuals and communities make images of themselves and of their world. The arts are as much about self-actualisation as self-expression. They are ways of making meaning and all sections of society have an entitlement to creation and re-creation in the arts. Such entitlement is not restricted to a few forms of expression which can, at times, be determined by a small, though culturally dominant, section of society. They embrace the forms of expression of the marginalised which are capable, like the "high arts", of constant renewal in their articulation of contemporary experience. At a time of major social and economic change in our society, characterised by changing patterns of work, leisure and family structures it is essential that forums are provided for those affected by poverty and disadvantage to explore their distinct cultural identities.

The Agency believes, as is implied in the Arts Council's Mission Statement, that it is the right of each citizen to have both a participative and experiential access to the arts because such access enables individuals to explore their own experience and reflect on that experience; it puts individuals in touch with an

aspect of their own creative abilities which can help them to articulate, clarify and, at times, solve problems; it provides an outlet for emotions and feelings which can find violent expression if denied or ignored (3).

Even when there is a willingness to address these needs careful consideration must be given to the hidden factors involved in access. Issues of access are complex and need considered debate. For example the lack of childcare provision,(4) poor transport in rural areas, admission costs and the locations of arts and theatrical centres together with psychological and educational barriers all combine to play their part in excluding those affected by poverty and disadvantage.

Most Irish adults have received little or no professional arts education in the past and this remains true in the present (5). Relatively few have much regular experience of professional arts events (6). However, to assume from this that the majority of the population are not interested in arts activity is misleading (7). The experience of the Agency is that there is a desire to both participate in, and experience, arts activity. However, exclusion, poverty and inequality of access have led to a gap between professional practice and experience of the arts and the needs of a large section of the population.

What is clear is that many thousands of people are engaged in arts activities at a local level but to date this is little reflected either in provision or policy. Much of this work emerges from arts workers working with little or no funds. While there are moves towards developing professional arts companies, community arts, youth arts, local arts centres, education, outreaches from museums, regional arts, "artsquads" and addressing the European dimension there is very little co-ordination between those involved through lack of policy or funds and a fear of acknowledging a role in case this would lead to increased expectations (8). As with Youth Arts, part of the reluctance seems to be based on an uncertainty as to whether arts at a local level is a legitimate area of arts practice (9). It is the lack of such policy, adequate and sustained resources and co-ordination which now needs to be addressed via entering a policy development process.

It follows from the above that at the very least poverty proofing should occur through arts organisations funded by state agencies being asked to consider basic questions as to how the outcomes of their activities will impact on those affected by poverty and disadvantage. The Arts Council should itself examine how it's various disciplines could approach the issues involved. In addition, a debate on the role of arts centres and skills enhancing of regional arts centres and local authority arts officers could be initiated by the Arts Council as a means of addressing these issues. A fundamental understanding of the issues involved are crucial to developing a regional arts policy which links networks to local authority Arts Officers.

6. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ARTS.

Under the Combat Poverty Agency Act the Agency has a special responsibility to support community development as a key anti-poverty strategy. Community development is a process whereby those who are marginalised and excluded are enabled to gain in self-confidence, to join with others, to participate in actions to change their situation and to tackle the problems that face their community. It is a key means of challenging powerlessness and isolation and promoting participation and involvement. Thus the Agency fosters and encourages community development initiatives.

In particular it is currently developing and evaluating a pilot initiative in the area of community arts. The Agency specifically funds these community arts projects because it believes that the arts should be an integral part of the community development process. Community arts is a process which:

- is an important method of accessing the creative artistic potential of large sections of the population;
- puts communities in touch with a creative potential to articulate, clarify and solve problems;
- provides creative media by which issues of disadvantage and poverty can be explored and highlighted;
- plays a role in empowering those affected by poverty and in the development and regeneration of disadvantaged communities;
- is able to make a major contribution to the development of more imaginative and wide ranging policies and programmes to address poverty;
- is a powerful educational tool in understanding cultural differences and similarities (10).

The principles underlying community arts are complementary to community development and include participation and consultation. In recent years the community sector has engaged in partnerships with the state, local authorities and professionals. The Agency recognises the value of such a partnership approach and in terms of this submission this now gives rise to:

- a. increased opportunities for new partnerships between the Arts Council and other statutory and community agencies in developing access to the arts;
- b. the possibility of the Combat Poverty Agency, because of its role and experience, engaging in partnership with the Arts Council on issues of poverty and the arts.

THE AGENCY'S PILOT PROGRAMME

In its pilot community arts programme, which is jointly managed with CAFE and co-funded by E.U. Horizon programme, the Agency is demonstrating the potential of creative activity to be part of an anti poverty strategy, to enhance community arts practice, to increase the efficiency of this area of work and to identify ways in which community arts can be used to tackle issues of poverty and disadvantage.

The programme is developing innovative and creative means through which individuals can be assisted to move from a position of poverty to accessing skills and opportunities that many other people in society benefit from. The programme aims to increase expertise, skills and confidence in this area and to advocate more accessible provision of arts activity within disadvantaged communities.

The programme operates on a number of levels. On a local level five projects(11) are supported to develop innovative models of work. These projects are based in rural and urban areas and work with a number of target groups. On a regional level, a number of community arts networks are supported. On a national level information and advice is provided and the National Arts Worker Course is supported. Specific efforts are made to ensure links between the different levels of work.

The programme is now well under way and is due to finish in 1995. While we cannot speak in detail of the outcomes at this point there are a number of lessons and issues arising from the work to date (12). Chief amongst these are lessons in relation to the value of the work. A further lesson is the lack of adequate statutory funding for this type of work. At the present time any innovative work has no prospect of longer term funding.

What is clear is that resources and support need to be sufficient, and the location of projects so sited, that real access to a quality experience occurs for the participants. The Agency's programme highlights the need for secure sources of longterm funding for projects which prove themselves during a pilot phase. Government, most probably through the Arts Council, must have a role in providing and ensuring quality arts experiences at local level to those suffering exclusion in order to assist them to make and experience art. The numbers involved are considerable yet community arts is marginalised in terms of resourcing. The Council should therefore look at how core resources can be put in place to alter this. In doing this the Agency believes that the Council should look at its own role in this and how it might encourage other providers also. To fully take on the principle of "everyone in Ireland having entitlement to meaningful access to and participation in the arts" (13) the Council needs to look at both a radical re-structuring of how it funds community arts and how its various disciplines address issues of participation, access and equality. This, we feel, is a very important issue.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In making recommendations, the Agency is particularly keen to put forward proposals which would, if implemented, advance arts policy and provide a structure and framework to maximise the potential to positively impact on the lives of people who are affected by poverty and disadvantage. The Agency is also particularly concerned to highlight what it sees as the key areas which should be prioritised either through the Arts Council or through some other structure.

7.1. POVERTY WORKING GROUP

The Agency believes that the Arts Council should formulate a detailed policy statement which acknowledges the key role that the arts could play in the lives of those affected by poverty and disadvantage and therefore the importance of provision for those so affected.

Bearing this in mind, the Agency specifically recommends that the Arts Council establish a working group to draft a detailed policy paper on the role of the arts in tackling poverty. This group, while primarily made up of representatives of the Arts Council, should also include representatives of the Combat Poverty Agency, CAFE, Department of Arts, Culture and The Gaeltacht, The Department of the Environment, Local Authorities, the IMMA and the community and voluntary sector. The group should be given clear terms of reference and a timescale within which to complete it's work. (It is recommended that this work be complete within two years.) The group should produce a report from its work which would form the basis of a detailed policy on the arts and poverty including community arts. The report should also include specific recommendations for provision - by both the Arts Council and other agencies - based on this policy. This policy document should be submitted to the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht with a view to influencing government policy.

7.2. COMMUNITY ARTS

The present Arts Council should declare as a key priority its commitment to community arts practice within existing resources. Indeed there is need for specific reference to community arts both in terms of articulating a detailed definition of community arts and outlining how best it should be supported.

The Council should take a leading role in outlining structures for promoting community arts and in doing this clarify its own role and the role it sees for other agencies in this area. It is essential that the Arts Council considers the issues in terms of longterm solutions rather than short term schemes.

In an ideal world, all arts provision would be relevant and accessible to people who are living in poverty and the dependence on community arts would probably be less than is currently the case. However, community arts provides a significant access route to the arts for those affected by poverty and disadvantage and, given existing structures and existing resources, dependence on community arts is

significant. Thus, this area warrants specific attention and support. Therefore, it is vital that the Arts Council has a specific, realistic, budget to support community arts work. This should be put in place in the short term and should not be dependent on the outcome of 7.1 above. This also has implications for Arts Council staffing levels to support community arts work.

7.3. ARTS DISCIPLINES

In addition to making specific provision for community arts the Arts Council should allocate resources within its specific arts disciplines to address activity/work which targets exclusion, poverty and inequality of access.

7.4. POVERTY PROOFING

The Arts Council should specifically consider how "meaningful access" could be approached both through poverty proofing its own grant aiding practices of the Arts Council and through maximising the potential of the Council to have a proactive role in influencing other Government Departments and state agencies to do the same. This would result in decisions regarding funding and provision being set against clearly outlined criteria concerning the likely impact on poverty. Poverty proofing is a relatively new concept in Ireland but there are models available of this experience elsewhere e.g. Australia. The Combat Poverty Agency has some expertise in this area and would be willing to work with the Council on this.

7.5. STATUTORY BODIES

The Council should have a leading role in advocating sound arts policies in relation to poverty and disadvantage to other bodies who are part of the cultural framework e.g. local authorities and the many government departments which should be concerned with the provision of cultural programmes.

7.6. MODELS OF PRACTICE

There is a distinct need to develop models of work of relevance to disadvantaged communities, especially in the area of community arts, and to ensure that community and voluntary groups have access to these models. As part of its work the Arts Council should develop, document and disseminate information on such models.

7.7. TRAINING

The issue of training, from the Agency's experience, is vital to improved provision, especially community arts provision, in disadvantaged areas. Training is needed on a number of levels. The National Arts Worker Course, which is provided by CAFE, has made a significant contribution to increasing the skills of community arts workers. The Agency's own pilot programme also points to the need for training at a less advanced level. This is an area which requires detailed consideration by the Arts Council with specific emphasis being given to the funding required to provide such training.

The Agency supports the Arts Council's policy of enhancing the skills of County Arts Officers in the methodology of community arts as a way of linking existing work into the mainstream. It could offer skills training to qualified artists to help

them to work with groups alongside community development workers. Skills enhancement of arts centres also could be addressed. Third level institutions have a role in addressing training needs and the Arts council could influence this.

8. CONCLUSION

The Agency believes that Arts Council has an important role to play in addressing the serious socio-economic and cultural issues raised in this submission and in seeking to influence government policy in this area. If it does not give a lead on these issues it is likely that cultural poverty will continue to be one further burden for the people who are marginalised in Irish society to bear and one further indicator of the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots". Thus, the role and potential of the Arts Council is pivotal in ensuring progress on these matters. The Combat Poverty Agency, with its experience of working with groups in disadvantaged communities, would welcome an opportunity to work with the Council over the coming years in progressing work on the areas outlined in this submission.

NOTES:

- (1) The Combat Poverty Agency Advisory Committee:
 - Marie Abbott, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust.
 - Jude Bowles, Combat Poverty Agency.(Community Arts Officer).
 - Dennis Collins, CAFE.
 - Martin Drury, Researcher, Dublin Arts Report.
 - Jane Forman, FAS.
 - Hugh Frazer, Combat Poverty Agency.(Director).
 - Eilish Kelly, Combat Poverty Agency.(Community Arts Officer).
 - Barry Lynch, Kilrush Community Centre, Co. Clare.
 - June Meehan, Combat Poverty Agency.(Project Manager)
 - Niall O'Baoill, Wet Paint Arts.
 - Kieran Walsh, Arts Council. Education Officer.
- (2) The Performing Arts and The Public Purse. John W. O'Hagen and Christopher T. Duffy (1987) Dublin. The Arts Council.
- (3) Arts and Communities. The Report of the National Enquiry into Arts and The Community. (1992) London. Community Development Foundation.

Further support for this view is found in the presentation of the Chairperson of the Arts Council to the National Education Convention (1993) - "The arts derive their educational significance in part also from their value in a wider social, cultural and economic context. The societal consequences of continuing unemployment are enormous and particularly impact upon young people. The arts have an important role in meeting this challenge by virtue of the fact that:

 - (a) they contribute to economic development and, thus employment.
 - (b) participation in the arts contributes to the development of personal and social skills in young people and, thereby fosters an active role in the community.

The arts, in this context, provide the possibility of substituting a culture of creativity for a culture of alienation."
- (4) Eavan Boland in a recent article in the Irish Times draws attention to narrow definitions of access which do not take into account the ability of proposed participants in arts projects to actually get involved due to the lack of creches or adequate childcare arrangements.
- (5) The Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) states that many teachers devote as little as one hour per week to Art and Crafts.
- (6) Recent statistics from the Dublin Theatre Festival indicate that only 1.1% who attended performances were unemployed while only 3.6% were unskilled workers.

- (7) The Omnibus Arts Survey. (1991 London. The Arts Council of Great Britain) indicates that such figures can be misleading. They reflect a narrow basis for the survey - when the criteria were broadened in that survey to include all types of arts experience 79% of the U.K. population were shown to have attended an arts event in the previous year and 53% had taken active part in arts activity at a local level. Where a desire to attend or participate was recorded by the survey but failed to take place the reasons given were high cost and distance from the centre. A high percentage gave a positive response to local activity as a focal point for arts involvement.
- (8) The Dublin Arts Report. Martin Drury. (1992). Dublin. Dublin Arts Report Working Group.
- (9) Making Youth Arts Work. (1993). Dublin. National Youth Council of Ireland.
- (10) Arts and Communities. The Report of the National Enquiry into Arts and The Community. (1992) London. Community Development Foundation.
- (11)
 1. Pléaráca Teo. (Rosmuc, Conamara).
 2. Balcony Belles (North Wall, Dublin)
 3. Parents Alone Resource Centre (Coolock, Dublin).
 4. Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (Dublin, Tullamore and Ennis).
 5. Knocknaheeny/Hollyhill Arts Project (Cork City).
- (12)
 - a. The importance of experience, expertise and backup.
In PARC and the Nth. Wall the programmes are building on previous work, have access to CAFE as a resource and trained workers in the Dublin area. The Cork and Conamara projects do not have such resources and it increases their difficulties.
 - b. The importance of secure funding.
The arts consultants report that, free from pursuing funding, the communities are able to reflect on the more intractable aspects of community arts and community development as they relate to access and participation. For example PARC have noted that time away from the centre can be more productive in dealing with difficult and sensitive issues than daily encounters in the centre.
 - c. Benefits of community arts.
In the Nth. Wall the arts consultant reports that as a drama programme the project has proved a good way in for those who do not respond to other methods. For example men have responded positively because the community arts programme has had a different and more public profile and most local people want to be a part of it. Also PARC and the Nth. Wall report that the programme has been particularly effective in dealing with difficult issues such as domestic violence.

- d. Lack of Irish Language community arts provision.
The Plearaca project is encountering difficulties with finding local tutors who have either community arts or community development experience and who speak native Irish. A specific access issue for this project is poor local transport as it covers a 50 mile radius.
- e. Models of action.
PARC has noted that there are a scarcity of Irish models of action from which to operate. Most models readily available are of lone artists or self-selecting groups of artists working with communities. The question which this sometimes poses is: whose creativity is being expressed - the artist through the community or the community through the artist?
- f. Suitable premises.
This group have also noted that the premises from which they operate is not really designed for an arts project despite the fact that it is a purpose built community development building with a management committee who are sympathetic to the project. This points to the rapid changes which are occurring at local level and how these outstrip even recent provision.
- g. Touring needs.
The Balcony Belles group have been considering the possibility of developing a touring community arts theatre company (in the longterm) which would establish a network with communities similar to itself. This will have implications for them in terms of transport, touring equipment and venues.
- h. CAFE.
The experience of CAFE with the programme has been that of greatly increased demand for it's services due to enhanced profile. At Regional level CAFE has encountered difficulty in getting started due to the lack of contact between local groups and the weakness of existing projects on the ground.
- i. Childcare.
One important access issue that has been tackled by the projects, because of adequate funding, is that of childcare.
- j. Amateur and Community arts.
A debate amongst participants around definitions of their activities has arisen. One major difference noted between amateur and community arts is that the latter is rooted in the participants personal and communal experience. It is not something that is imported from outside with no location in the community e.g. amateur plays or amateur art exhibitions.
- k. Training and Networking.
Training issues which have arisen within the projects concern participants who fall below the level of the NAWC. Some of this need is being met by networking between the projects and specific training programmes.
The training of arts workers for community arts is a point which particularly concerns the arts consultants. There are a number of

skills needed in community arts not all of which are to do strictly with arts. As is pointed out in "Developing Community Arts", (Jude Bowles (1992). Dublin. CAFE), which issued from the experience of the participants on the National Arts Worker Course, workers in this field need groupwork, administration, counselling, facilitation skills etc.

(13) The Arts Council Mission Statement.

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Community Arts - Finglas. Anne Foster. 1993. Dublin. The Finglas Partnership.