

Grey Paper No.4 - February 2002 – Applying to Policy Makers & Funders

The Voluntary Arts Network recently issued a Briefing document suggesting points which arts organisations should make to policy makers and funders when submitting evidence of the usefulness of voluntary arts organisations. There are two basic areas where those being approached need to be persuaded. First the contribution made to individual and social development and secondly the economic benefits. Set out below are the major points made.

1. The contribution made to individual and social development.

(a) Individual development

- Participation in theatre increases individual self confidence
- It enables people to discover new talents and ability. This is of particular value to the long term unemployed and women 'returners'
- It enables new practical and social skills to be recognised and developed.
- Youth involved in amateur theatre tend to develop better language, creative and social skills

(b) Social stability and cohesion

- Participation in theatre reduces social isolation for people of all ages.
- It is particularly important for young people in areas where there is no opportunity to participate in professionally based programmes.
- Opportunities exist for multicultural experiences which allow people to retain contact with their roots and at the same time develop feelings of community and self esteem.
- Theatre creates fruitful fusions of old and new culture. Sharing experiences through theatre promotes harmony, understanding and tolerance.
- Theatre has no age barriers. Young and old work together with mutual understanding and encourage sociability.

(c) Strengthening and regenerating urban and rural communities

- Amateur theatre allows individuals to become involved in their community.
- The management processes involved enable people to develop skills which they can use elsewhere in their community.
- Theatre encourages people to have greater control over their own lives and often leads to them having a greater participation in local affairs.
- The development of new skills encourages the creation of local projects which are of value to the community as a whole.

(d) Local image and identity

- A local amateur Theatre plays a vital role in celebrating and preserving local culture, traditions and heritage - often by preserving and maintaining an historic building for arts use.
- Involvement in local theatre increases confidence and pride in the community which the theatre serves.

(e) Imagination, vision and creative thinking

- Participating in the arts increases accessibility. It means that theatre is not seen as elitist , encourages experimentation, the development of new ideas, skills and talents
- Theatre encourages creativity, the use of imagination and the ability to visualise how things might develop in the future. This skill is valuable in problem solving and changing situations.

(f) Health and well-being

- The enjoyment and pleasure gained from participation in theatre and creative activities, creates a sense of well-being.
- It reduces stress and anxiety and improves the quality of life for people with poor health and prolonged illness. Research in Sweden suggests that participation in the arts can stimulate the immune system
- There is overwhelming evidence that people actually enjoy being involved in amateur theatre. 73% of adults and 80% of adults say that participating in the arts made them feel happier. 85% wanted to do it again.

2. The economic benefits

(a) Unpaid labour

- Amateur theatres depend on a great deal of unpaid labour and time. The true value of this is difficult to measure in financial terms but the economic impact at community level is considerable.

(b) Goods and services

- Amateur theatre spends significant sums on goods and services from books, to material for costumes, supplies for set construction, bar products etc. Much of this expenditure benefits local firms or keeps theatrical specialist suppliers in business.

(c) Wealthier communities.

- Local theatre draws on the local community. Most of the money spent is fed back into the community. Participating in local theatre gives savings to local expenditure.
- Confident creative people find it easier to get jobs and absorb less spending on health care.
- People who contribute to the artistic life of their community do not vandalise it.

(d) Quality of life and inward investment

- High quality of artistic life in an area attracts firms to invest in that area..

(e) Education and training.

- Amateur Theatres provide training opportunities for young people through their youth theatres. Links forged with local schools provide the opportunity for skills to be passed on.

(f) Lifelong learning

- Amateur theatres provide accessible, cost effective and informal opportunities for life long learning by encouraging participation and a culture of continuing education.

(g) International and European status

- British theatre is very highly regarded internationally. Amateur theatres are invited to perform at international festivals and this raises the profile of the UK and of the local community which is being represented.
- Amateur theatres are often key players in local town twinning arrangements.