

# Crossing Boundaries

## An evaluation of the Greater Manchester Strategic Arts Fund



*Helen Corkery*

In 2004, the Greater Manchester Strategic Arts Fund was established. The product of a Partnership Agreement between the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and Arts Council England, North West (ACENW), the fund aims to realise growth, broaden access to, and raise the quality of the arts experience across the ten Greater Manchester local authorities.

The fund operates on a two year funding cycle. It is managed by the Greater Manchester Culture Lead Officers' Group with support from the Greater Manchester Arts Officers' Network. Both groups comprise officers from each of the ten local authorities and representatives from AGMA and ACENW.

The first funding round for 2004-2006 involved an allocation of £334,000 to eight different cross-authority projects: each meeting a number of key criteria, and each falling under one of the four broad themes of Arts and Health; Youth Arts; Research, Support and Training; and, Countywide Celebration. All eight projects involved at least two local authorities in their implementation, with several involving three or more.

### **Evaluating The Fund**

In June 2006, Arts About Manchester was appointed to evaluate the fund, to document its achievements and to provide recommendations for its development. Having developed a number of evaluation criteria, and assessed the projects against these, we found that in outputs alone, the funded projects employed more than ten staff, over 50 volunteers, 200 artists and community workers. Over 60 different events were delivered, involving 2,500 participants and achieving a combined audience of over 100,000.

### **Garden of Delights**

The most notable outcomes were the positive impacts on local communities, involving a broad range of people from different backgrounds and abilities, developing their skills and showcasing their talents at community, countywide, regional



and national events.

We also found demonstrable evidence that, together, the projects had increased the production and distribution of the arts within Greater Manchester. This is perhaps best represented in the Garden of Delights project, which showcased the achievements of the Carnival Exchange project as well as providing a platform to present a broad range of new and different works to an estimated audience of 50,000 people.

Through the projects, the fund had achieved a number of broader aims. In particular, improved joint working across authorities and between the sector and other sectors; and increased third party investment, with over £465,000 of third party contributions having been achieved.

### **Other impacts**

An unexpected, but very valuable outcome from the fund has been the purpose and focus it has

given to the network of arts officers involved, with all ten local authorities being well represented throughout.

The fund has directly benefited those involved, through information and knowledge sharing, peer support and/or formal training. It has provided an opportunity for many of the Arts Officers involved to think more strategically, and it has bolstered relationships between ACENW and the local authorities.

Finally, through our evaluation, we found demonstrable evidence that by working together in this way, the partners have not only achieved success in meeting the specific funding aims, but, together, the Arts Officers' Network, AGMA and ACENW have achieved a funding process that is transparent and equitable and which benefits the broad range of stakeholders involved. ●

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*The full evaluation report will be published on nalgaos new website in due course.*





## The Projects

### Theme: Arts and Health

*Greater Manchester Arts and Health project* to develop a Greater Manchester Strategy for arts and health, led by Wigan local authority and an appointed Project Coordinator.

This project, whilst still underway, has succeeded in developing joint working arrangements across several districts; in identifying best practice; and, in disseminating this through a number of cross sector seminars.

### Theme: Youth Arts

*Greater Manchester Youth Games' Arts Festival and Carnival Exchange* led by Bolton local authority working with Oldham and a freelance Project Manager.

*Crossing Boundaries*: a youth theatre project on diversity and difference, led by Oldham local authority and project managed by the Oldham Theatre Workshop.

*Luminocity*, involving the creation of large-scale themed lanterns led and delivered by Oldham local authority.

All three of these projects achieved success in bringing together a range of young people (of varying age and from different backgrounds and abilities) to develop their skills and showcase these at a number of events across the county and beyond.

### Theme: Research, Support and Training

*Greater Manchester Creative Industries (CIDS)* project, to build a professional network of creative industry expertise and knowledge base, led by Bolton local authority and delivered by the Creative Industries Development Service.

*Continuing Professional Development Arts Training (CPD)* programme, to develop training products and programmes that develop skills and capability, offering CPD for both gallery

staff and artists. The project was led by Bolton and delivered by Arts + Media Training Ltd.

*Arts Impact Study*, to evaluate the performance of the countywide element of the fund and develop an advocacy instrument to further promote the fund and its achievements: led by Manchester local authority and delivered by Arts About Manchester.

The CIDS and CPD projects have both succeeded in developing the capability of the sector, the CIDS project, in terms of establishing both human and systems based knowledge networks and, the CPD project, in developing the skills of arts professionals from across the county.

### Theme: Countywide Celebration

*Garden of Delights*: A district wide celebration and collaboration project led by a Cross-Authority Steering Group and delivered by Manchester International Arts.

The countywide project provided a showcase for local arts provision and succeeded in attracting significant additional investment, local and national media coverage and, audiences of up to 50,000 people.

## Some Project Feedback

*'After the carnival, the groups performed in their own communities and in other parades in their own boroughs.'*

Project Manager, Carnival Exchange Project

*'New friendships have really flourished under the banner of diverse youth arts... this is just the beginning of new collaborative partnerships.'*

Participant in Crossing Boundaries Project

*'...it felt lovely to walk around, experiencing more and varied arts, music and culture than I have ever been exposed to.'*

Member of the public, Garden of Delights Project

*'It was great to share information and skills across the boroughs.'*

Participant, Luminocity Project

*'... before, we were all more or less isolated... I don't see the fund as a burden, but a fantastic opportunity to work with other boroughs. There are advantages on very many different levels.'*

District Arts Officer



Luminocity