

# Working with communities on creative inclusive cultural programming: case studies from charitable trusts



*Culture, Health and Wellbeing International Conference | 22 June 2021*

## Introduction to Charitable Trusts

Charitable trusts are not your local authority managing your local library or theatre.

Many trusts have been established because the local authority may have decided to transfer the community assets to an independent trust who can then fully focus on just providing the services that come with the assets, leaving the local authority some breathing space to focus on the variety of other statutory obligations they have.

A trust is therefore independent from the local authority in its decision-making and the development of the services. Yet they still work closely with the local authority in providing an accessible and relevant overall cultural portfolio within their communities.

Because trusts are independent in their decision-making they can fully focus on creating quality programmes and services and take more risk in trying out new programmes to engage a wider audience.

Being charitable organisations, they also have access to specific pots of funding and can make use of income streams not usually available or used by private organisations or local authorities, such as Gift Aid.

Being rooted in their communities, trusts pick up on community needs as and when they arise and, being independent, can make agile decisions in response to those needs.

Perhaps most importantly, trusts are charitable organisations which means they have a clearly defined charitable purpose and identity. This purpose clearly comes before profit as one of our members described quite powerfully in this quote:

*"A Trust will align itself with the cultural strategy of the local authority putting purpose before profit. The Trust will actively seek ways to engage with stakeholders and the community. Profit is a byproduct of this collaboration and not the reason for it."*

One final thing to highlight is that as our members are all non-profit distributing organisations, every penny of profit is reinvested back into the trust. The model of trusts is founded on cross-subsidy to ensure those communities who are in most need of inclusive activities and services, can access them. Trusts:

- cross-subsidise services i.e. more profitable activities will subsidise some health, community, and other free activities;
- cross-subsidise individuals i.e. using income from those who can afford to pay, to support reduced cost or free activities for those with less disposable income

## What do we mean by 'culture' and how do charitable trusts manage it?

The type of cultural assets and services that they manage is vast – you will find that many trusts manage anything from a museum or gallery to theatres, town halls, or libraries.

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Besides managing their own facilities, trusts engage in community outreach work where the cultural services are delivered outside of trusts' facilities. This is delivered most frequently in schools, and nursery, care and residential homes, but also on our high streets and in parks.

Importantly, trusts do not work by themselves. Local authority and development bodies fund aspects and programmes of work. Trusts further partner with a wide range of organisations to jointly deliver programmes or to deliver programmes for them – such as for schools or in collaboration with local health boards.

They have a key role as community anchors for the delivery of culture at a local authority level, providing space and support for other organisations, artists and performers.

## **Trusts Working With Communities**

That was on what charitable trusts are and how they work. As you can probably tell, the foundation of the trust model makes for a unique delivery of cultural services, activities and programming.

The cultural programming and services culture trusts run from their physical assets are not limited to their traditional usage, and in support of national public policy objectives and community needs.

Here are a few short examples of how culture trusts' work with their local communities has contributed to improving health and wellbeing.

### *High Life Highland, Highlands, Scotland*

High Life Highland is a charity registered in Scotland, formed on the 1st October 2011 by The Highland Council. They develop and promote opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure, health and wellbeing across nine services throughout the whole of the Highlands, for both residents and visitors.

As part of their library service, they run the Bookbug programme, which is Scotland's universal early years book gifting programme and aims to inspire a love of stories, songs and rhymes from birth. The programme is funded by the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland and delivered in partnership with the Scottish Book Trust. Bookbug Bags are supported by free Bookbug Sessions, where parents and carers can enjoy sharing stories, songs and rhymes with their little ones.

HLH's libraries have adapted Bookbug sessions to meet changing customer needs and demands. Working closely with the Highland community, they identified shortly before the pandemic that they needed to adapt the in person Bookbug Sessions to be more inclusive of those with hearing impairments. During lockdown, the team took the opportunity to upskill a member of staff, by training them in Makaton signing, enabling their ongoing Bookbug sessions to become more inclusive.

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The unique circumstances of lockdown prompted another adaptation, namely the delivery of the Bookbug Sessions online via Facebook Live rather than in-person sessions. The Trust, like many others, ran online Bookbug Sessions to improve engagement with families during lockdown. During 2020/21 these sessions accumulated a total of over 70,000 views.

Customer feedback proved very positive, with one mum commenting;

*'As you can imagine this has been a very difficult time trying to provide home school and nursery for a 3 year old and a 5 year old who are at different stages of learning. The Bookbug sessions help to bridge that gap for a short time and provide relief and enjoyment for all of us in our household, as we try to watch them as a family. Both my children benefit as they are learning whilst having fun and the burden of 'teaching' is lifted from myself '*

High Life Highland shared how they were adapting their practices with their partners, which resulted in positive benefits across the wider Highland Community, with local schools and nurseries adapting their own online Bookbug sessions.

Summer 2020 also saw the Trust deliver an online Bookbug session at Belladrum Live 2020, a local music festival. This enabled the Trust to bring Bookbug to a new customer base who potentially were not already engaged in using library services and who would benefit from the Bookbug programme, not only because of the promotion of literacy skills and children's learning, but because of the social interaction for families and carers through the fun and safe environment provided by the Trust.

As the Trust reopens library buildings and reinstates physical services, they will continue developing the online Bookbug Sessions alongside Bookbug in-person so that families can access these inclusive sessions in a format that best meets their needs.

### *Aura Leisure & Libraries, Flintshire, Wales*

Flintshire is a mixed urban/rural community in North-East Wales; flanked by the city of Chester and the holiday resorts of Prestatyn and Rhyl. The Museums Service is managed by Aura: Leisure & Libraries Ltd, formed in 2017 from the county-council run services.

Five Ways to Wellbeing was a partnership project with The Greenfield Valley Trust and KIM, an award-winning charity providing professional high-quality mental health support in the community. The project was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Through a combination of new places, new people and inspiring opportunities a group of local residents from the Holywell area learnt about themselves, their responses to situations and their place in the community. None of the participants had ever visited a museum before. There was a perception "it was not for them;" they didn't know what to do and how to behave.

Initially, the group visited the Greenfield Valley Museum and Heritage Park for half a day, weekly for an 8-week period. The first week focused on the visitor experience and feeling relaxed and comfortable within a museum environment. The group then took

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part in a range of heritage activities from rag rug making to working within the heritage garden.

At the end of the 8-week period, the group had enjoyed themselves so much they wanted to engage more with the museum site and decided to develop a leaflet for other visitors to enjoy. The Five Ways to Wellbeing highlights how a visit to a museum site can improve and protect wellbeing. It encourages visitors to:

- Notice: Using sight, touch, smell and sound
- Be Active: Walk through the site with no agenda other than being in the moment
- Give: Positive comments- what did you enjoy. Perhaps volunteer
- Learn: Focus on 3 main facts
- Connect: How have you connected with yourself and others

Recognising the importance of mental health in children, the group also developed a leaflet for younger visitors with emphasis on play and having fun.

Overall, the project was a positive experience for both parties. Although the project is now over, the group do occasionally continue to visit the site. The staff at Aura also report to be more aware of the wellbeing benefits a visit to the museum can offer and have learnt transferable skills for other locations and other projects.

### Active Luton, Luton, England

Active Luton has taken over the public library services in Luton since the start of the pandemic (March 2020). As an experienced leisure trust, they are now working on the integration of their health and wellbeing services into the library services to widen the reach of the programme, thanks to the award of a Thriving Communities grant in March 2021 from the National Academy for Social Prescribing, Arts Council England, Natural England and Historic England.

Here's what that social prescribing programme looked like during lockdown.

COVID saw a rise in referrals to Social Prescription with people facing multiple social problems and needing support to navigate local systems and sources of support. The team supported people suffering from isolation and anxiety around masks and social distancing, suffering from domestic abuse, needing practical help due to shielding and many other problems. During this time, the team received over 1,500 referrals to the service and made over 1,500 calls to arrange support and reassurance.

Total Wellbeing's Senior Link Worker, Nazima Lami, comments:

"It was both stressful and rewarding for the team to be able to offer so much support during lockdown. For many service users, the simple fact of having someone contact them made a huge difference. For others, we were able to help on a practical level and ensure that they didn't feel abandoned and alone. A lot of the calls involved listening and giving reassurance, especially around hot topics like masks and social distancing. It

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was emotionally draining for the team and they deserve recognition for the support they provided for those most in need during this strange time."

Examples of what the social prescribing team supported with include:

- Anxiety caused by isolation from shielding. Routine daily tasks become too much. One services user, for example, was unable to get food, medication or pay for gas or electricity. The team supported the service user by arranging for medication and food to be delivered, and arranged for gas and electricity to be topped up remotely through their utilities provider.
- Illness. One of the social prescribing service users was diagnosed with cancer during lockdown. She was already known to the team who had supported her with loneliness, isolation and with getting necessities including food. The team were able to put the service user in touch with Macmillan Cancer Care who allocated her a nurse who made immediate contact to talk to her about her concerns about her cancer treatment.
- Difficult living conditions made worse. One service user in rented accommodation was living with severe damp which had led to her and her children all sleeping in the living room of a 3-bedroom house. The team were able to support the service user, who suffered from depression and anxiety, with accessing housing advice for support and guidance about her home situation.

As you can tell from these examples, Active Luton's health and wellbeing team were able to provide a lifeline for many vulnerable people during lockdown, and are still following up with their service users, providing a friendly and concerned voice at the end of the telephone to help them move forwards with their lives. Now that lockdown is over many service users are being linked with local support groups and given vouchers for activity sessions at Active Luton centres to encourage them to take up healthy habits to boost wellbeing.

### **In conclusion**

To create inclusive and accessible cultural programmes that benefit health and wellbeing, it is crucial that we work in partnership; both with the community and the people the programme is for, as well as with wider health and community partners. Culture trusts' business model and charitable foundation allows them to lead by example, and exemplify this way of working.

What the work of culture trusts also shows is that co-creation plays a huge role in making public culture inclusive and accessible through adapting the delivery of the programme. Listening to the community and their feedback, having short lines of contact, both formal and informal, facilitate this co-creation.

Culture trusts further demonstrate that health and wellbeing benefits come through both formal and informal ways. Formal because it is an organised activity, programme or

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service provided by the culture trust, and informal because of the social networks that the respective activities facilitate.

Thank you for your time and interest.