

Final report reviews existing research

Inspiring Change was a year-long pilot programme of co-ordinated prison arts interventions in five Scottish prisons. It involved wide-ranging partnerships between principal sponsors Creative Scotland and co-ordinators Motherwell College and Learning Centre staff.

The initiatives included innovative interventions, six performances, a touring exhibition of art, and prison art conferences. Partners in arts initiatives included National Galleries of Scotland, Citizens' Theatre, Traverse Theatre and Scottish Opera.

The final report documents and reviews Inspiring Change. It presents a concise review of already existing and relevant research of earlier interventions.

Inspiring results from Scottish prison arts initiative

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Evaluation of a major prison arts initiative in Scotland has found clear evidence of improved literacy skills, physical and mental wellbeing, better relationships with family, peers and the community, and improvements in attitudes and behaviours that lead to offending.

Inspiring Change was an ambitious NZ\$825,000 programme of arts interventions in five Scottish prisons throughout 2010. Creative Scotland was the principal sponsor, and the initiative was co-ordinated by Motherwell College and the Learning Centre in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service and seven national arts organisations.

The authors of the final 109-page evaluation report described the creative ambition of *Inspiring Change* as "extraordinary". The artistic outputs, delivered through six projects, were impressive, and included concerts, plays, recordings, exhibitions, a graphic novel and even a fully-staged opera.

"We know of no other prison programme anywhere in the world that has attempted a co-ordinated and systematic set of interventions and creative outputs across such a range of artforms and media."

The evaluation of the programme included focus groups with prisoners during and after each project; interviews with senior prison staff; Learning Centre staff and 22 project leaders from the arts organisations; an intensive case study; questionnaires and feedback forms; data review, and telephone interviews with participants subsequently released from prison.

More than 230 prisoners were involved throughout the year.

Personal challenges valued

A strong theme to emerge was the enormous value placed by the participants on the opportunity to work with professional artists and musicians. Participants also seemed to value the personal challenges of the creative and artistic process. Many mentioned discovering their own abilities and their appreciation of having them valued.

The creative process within the arts sessions was a key part of the work, and the arts practitioners were often surprised and impressed by the high level of interest, engagement, concentration, enthusiasm and commitment of participants.

Another theme to emerge was the pride in creating a high-level artistic product that could be shared with others, and the exhilaration felt from the performance that concluded some of the projects. One inevitable consequence of such powerful performance experiences was the disappointment felt by the participants after the performance was over.

Not all artistic experiences were positive. Some participants chose to withdraw from the projects, and many arts practitioners expressed their frustrations with certain aspects of the work. These included the extended length of the sessions, the limitations of the spaces involved, security restrictions, the irregularity of attendance for many projects, and the variability of attitudes across participants and different sessions.

“What seemed to be clear across all projects, though, was that the extraordinary and challenging nature of the artistic process, leading to a final high-quality artistic product, was both powerful and rewarding for all concerned.”

Commitment from prison managers

Senior management staff were interviewed in each of the five prisons before and after the arts projects.

“We found clear expressions of commitment to *Inspiring Change* from managers. In some instances this went beyond the general Scottish Prison Service mandate to deliver rehabilitative services towards a deeper personal commitment to arts activities on the part of some staff.”

Participating in the *Inspiring Change* projects built an active learning culture and motivated offenders to improve their skills. Offenders learned to work together more effectively. They were more trusting and supportive of each other, “rather than bringing each other down, which had been a more apparent mode of behaviour in other settings”.

Bringing the qualitative and quantitative data together showed that participation in *Inspiring Change* had the capacity to build confidence through prisoners' growing sense of their potential and ability to achieve. Working in teams and in intense projects that had a performance element was particularly effective.

“While participants tended to stress that desisting from crime was a matter of personal choice, and that successful desistance relied on personal motivation and commitment, the arts projects helped people to realise that leading a different life might be a viable possibility; that they might have a chance to change and the ability to do so.”

Encouraged to reflect

Many participants were encouraged to reflect on the impact of their offending and imprisonment on their families. Performing or exhibiting their work – and better aspects of themselves – to and for their families was very important to them.

Some acquired skills they felt they could use for work or develop further in training. Others identified life skills they had developed, and some planned to develop new and more positive social networks linked to arts organisations or activities in the community.

The report authors said further research would be needed to properly measure the cost-effectiveness of *Inspiring Change*. They pointed out, however, that the overall budget for the programme, including the evaluation, equated to the annual cost of about 10 prison places but delivered interventions to nearly 240 prisoners. On a per capita basis this was comparable to the costs of other constructive prison-based activities.

The authors recommended that future arts interventions in prisons emphasise:

- the high level, professional nature of the work
- the unique value of contributions by external arts organisations
- the intense benefits of a final artistic product or performance that can be shared with family, friends and guests
- the importance of the positive and creative nature of the process, including self-expression, real skill acquisition and positive social interactions
- the crucial importance of budgeted communication and planning sessions between organisations, and
- the need to schedule the final performance, exhibition or event several weeks before the end of the project.

A copy of the evaluation report can be downloaded from the research and evaluation section of the *Inspiring Change* project website.

(<http://www.motherwell.ac.uk/inspiringchange/research.aspx>)

The projects

Music for Change involved 25 young men working alongside a Scottish Ensemble artist-in-residence and music tutor, learning how to play and record music over four months.

Voice Male was a two-month weekly workshop project with 16 young offenders. It included song writing, group singing and vocal training from the National Youth Choir of Scotland.

The Citizens Theatre led 16 women in a six-week intensive project called *A Woman's Place* in which the prisoners explored their role in society through drama, music and song writing, textiles and design.

Traverse Theatre's *OpenWrite* project allowed seven prisoners to work closely with a professional playwright for 15 weeks to write, develop and produce their own plays.

Scottish Opera and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra collaborated in a six-month project, *From Start to Finish: How to Build an Opera*, with 25 prisoners. All aspects of the opera from the original story to the music were written, developed and performed by the prisoners.

The National Galleries of Scotland worked in all five prisons with an overall theme of self-portraits, which was explored through different mediums and led by professional artists. A selection of pieces was chosen for a final exhibition, *Mirrors: Prison Portraits*, at the National Gallery Complex in Edinburgh.