



THE MAKINGS

FOSTERING YOUTH CREATIVITY

A report commissioned by Offaly County Council Arts Office
Supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon
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FOREWORD

The timeline for this review was between the period 2011-2017, therefore it should be acknowledged, that since the initial commissioning of the report, there have been a number of changes within the Arts Office of Offaly County Council; changes that have occurred in terms of personnel, but also changes that have taken place, which have and will continue to have a very positive affect on Youth Arts in the county.

In terms of policy, a major impact has been the development and implementation of the Arts Council / Offaly County Council Framework Agreement. Under this agreement it is stated that the framework will aim to 'develop and sustain a new model of arts provision for young people in Offaly'.

With the shared outcomes under the partnership agreement including:

- ***Developing a youth-centric approach to arts provision for young people in Offaly by involving young people as decision-makers in every stage of the process.***
- ***Testing, monitoring and evaluating the process of developing such a bespoke youth arts programme incrementally.***
- ***Aiming to devise and secure a multi-partnership approach towards the successful implementation of a sustainable model for arts provision for young people.***



It was through the development of this framework that this report was initiated. As a result of the benchmark of aims, which are continually under evaluation between the Arts Council and Offaly County Council Arts Office collaborative partnership, mechanisms have been put in place to measure the impact of these policies into the future. Another development, which has had considerable impact, has been the increase in partnerships with external agencies with the aim of delivering meaningful arts programmes for young people. The first of these to mention would be Music Generation Offaly|Westmeath, which is now firmly embedded within the Arts Office of the county council. While this programme was in place at the research stage of this report, the developing partnership and growing programme has made significant impact on delivering high quality music tuition to school children and young people throughout Offaly.

The programme's original focus on primary school children developed to include of older children and youth choirs. In 2019 there were 7,689 engagements with children & young people with roughly 50% of them coming from Offaly and this continues to grow on an annual basis.

Another welcomed partnership came through collaboration with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB). LOETB were selected by Creative Ireland for inclusion as part of the Local Creative Youth Partnership (LCYP) pilot initiative. The partnership, which includes Offaly and Laois County Council's Arts Offices, Creative Ireland Programme and Music Generation representatives; has the objective to develop a baseline for the development of a sustainable Local Creative Youth Partnership, with a focus on the inclusion of the voice of young people, in all's its endeavours.

More recently, and as a direct outcome of the findings of this report, Offaly County Council Arts Office commissioned the Youth Arts Facilitator, Oisín Robbins, to carry out the delivery of a pilot project, which will explore a new model of youth arts provision, the focus being: enabling young voices in the initiation, development and delivery of youth arts programming. This pilot programme is intended to complement and work in conjunction with our existing youth arts programme, which are described in this report. The aim of the pilot programme will be to facilitate a mechanism whereby the voice of young people can be heard in terms of arts development for their county. While these changes have been taking place, the findings of the report are the excellent foundation from which to continue to strive to ensure the young artists' voice is loud and clear into the future.

*Sally O'Leary, Arts Officer,
Offaly County Council, 2020*



'WORDS THAT BIT, SHOES THAT KICKED'

In the spirit of acknowledging the importance of the youth voice in this research, an open call was held to invite a young person to write their account of what youth arts meant to them. Olivia Minnock is a former member of an Offaly County Council Arts Office initiative for young people - Offaly Youth Theatre. Below is her account of how youth arts shaped her life, whilst growing up in Offaly.

Why Youth Arts is important: Offaly Youth Theatre stopped me feeling sick!

"I feel like I'm going to throw up," I'd tell my mum before school. Pre-youth theatre, I'd sit in the car on the way to school swallowing back sickness, afraid of what would meet me there. Words that bit, shoes that kicked. Post-youth theatre, I didn't feel so sick. I stopped shrinking into corners and started taking up space. I fought back, my insistent voice ringing out.

Apart from the confidence to stand up for myself that really shaped my last two years in school, theatre also opened my eyes to a wider world. There was life outside school, friends to meet from all over, a bigger group to depend on, as well as the tools to ask for help from those I'd known all along.

Confidence is the most common thing to gain, and vital for sure. Whether it's the confidence to stand up on a stage pretending to be a crocodile, or that subtler, trickled-down confidence to raise your hand

in class and say, "actually, I don't get it". I think the latter, that person-to-person contact, is vital in all aspects of life, from job interviews, to work meetings, to approaching that person who seems cool and telling them they seem cool - perhaps they'd like to grab a coffee? Verbal and physical communication skills are gradually being lost as society becomes more anxious about tasks as simple as ordering pizza by phone, but these develop the moment you join a drama group, long before you set foot on stage.

More uniquely, Offaly Youth Theatre specifically offered children from a rural, isolated community a chance to be part of something bigger, and to meet a plethora of new and different friends and indeed adult influences who weren't scary teachers or well-meaning but clueless parents. It taught us that there was more than one type of community and if you just asked to be included, you could be. In a globalised world, it's more important than ever that young people are aware of everything that's out there and that there's a much grander scheme of things than their own front door.

Olivia Minnock





INTRODUCTION

Context, Objectives and Methodology

'Makings': the necessary characteristics that make something able to be or become, as defined by The Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary © Cambridge University Press

Young people's arts provision has been a central component of Offaly County Council's Arts Programme over many years. Offaly's 2012-2016 Arts Plan articulated the need to develop "a number of accessible, high quality and structured arts projects, which allow for young people to shine individually and as ensembles, and to be the source of their own ingenuity and creativity". Offaly County Council continues its commitment by exploring a new model for young people's arts provision and taking account of how young people create and engage with contemporary arts and culture.

This is a stated objective of Offaly's arts strategy: Inspire-Imagine-Involve [2018-2022] Goal 1.2. Furthermore, young people's arts provision is one of four strategic actions of Offaly County Council's new multi-annual funding agreement with the Arts Council, which forms part of the Framework for Collaboration with The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon (2018-2025). The framework agreement states that:

"Having previously played a role as 'provider', Offaly County Council would like to shift the focus of its provision to being more youth-centric and youth-led. This aligns with the objectives of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making, 2015-2020, most particularly that: 'Children and young people will have a voice in decisions made in their communities'... we wish

to progress an innovative arts programme, shaped by young people; one that is open, inclusive and welcoming to all.” (Offaly Framework Agreement 2018-2025)

The process of constructing a new model for young people, within the 13-24 age cohort, will, in part, be informed by this preliminary research that Offaly County Council has commissioned; looking at models of good practice elsewhere and ensuring an active role in decision-making by young people, from the outset, and tested by young people in its delivery.

The Brief

For the purposes of this report, the focus will be on young people aged between 13-24 years of age, living in Offaly. This age group has been identified as one which engages less with Offaly County Council Arts Office funded programmes. This category was also selected in line with the classification by the CSO (Central Statistics Office) which was the reference point for population density and breakdown in Offaly.

- **Conduct an audit to take account of all existing youth programmes developed by Offaly County Council with Arts Council funding, covering all ages, such as Offaly Youth Theatre; Mini Movies; Hullabaloo! Offaly’s Children’s Arts Festival, and of any other public and private services for young people’s interest in the arts.**
- **Conduct an audit of youth arts programmes for those aged 13-24 in County Offaly, either provided by Offaly County Council Arts Service or other youth services.**
- **Take account of opportunities for partnering with existing youth services within the county, such as Education and Training Board/Youth Reach, Youth Work Ireland.**
- **Explore other models of youth arts provision in Ireland.**
- **Develop a framework for a future strategic approach for youth art provision that takes account of contemporary youth culture and creativity.**
- **Formulate recommendations for greater engagement with communities for whom access to the arts is difficult, which would address the growing demographic of culturally diverse young people in Offaly.**

Methodology

The methodology of the research has been a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods which involved desk research on current relevant policy and reports on arts and youth sectors and close examination of Central Statistics Office (CSO) findings. Consultation took place through structured and semi-structured interviews with 27 individuals who have a vested interest in the target group in a professional capacity. Where possible, interviews took place in person at the workplace of the interviewee. Some 40% of the interviews took place by telephone and followed the same interview style as in-person interviews, with set prepared questions, followed by written communication and longer discussions where appropriate and fitting. Focus groups were facilitated with young people in the three municipal districts of Edenderry, Tullamore and Birr, with groups of between 5 and 20 participating in an exploratory session examining interests, trends and ambitions of young people with regard to youth arts. Online surveys collated data from young people, artists, adults working with

young people in a professional capacity, and parents of young people. Case studies were prepared through desk research, structured interviews and site visits. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative research informed the shaping of a set of recommendations for a new model of youth arts for Offaly County Council. All collected data is available in the appendix.

Deliverables

- *A mapping of current provision for young people of all ages in Offaly, plus a focus on the 13-24 year cohort.*
- *A report outlining a framework, with timelines for developing a new strategic model for provision for Offaly.*





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over a nine-month period, the provision of youth arts across all ages in County Offaly was examined. In total, 239 people fed directly into the consultation. This diverse group have expressed their passions, frustrations, hopes and anticipations with great integrity. Harnessing this data has confirmed that Offaly has 'the makings' - the potential to deliver a strong youth focused policy for engagement. The purpose of this report is to map Offaly County Council's engagement with young people through the arts, to highlight any gaps in provision and offer recommendations to develop new models based on research from national case studies.

KEY FINDINGS

Offaly County Council's Investment

For the period of this review, 2011-2017, Offaly County Council's investment in youth arts was below national average, particularly when taking account of the age range 13-24, which is calculated at 15% of the population.¹ During this period there were significant changes in the Arts Office's youth provision, specifically a move from age-specific programming provision to general youth arts programming across all ages. These changes had a definite impact on youth arts in the county, particularly for older age groups; for example, Offaly Youth Theatre ceased operation in 2015, while Music Generation Offaly Westmeath's programme in schools began in 2013. As a result, there is now a

¹ Offaly Arts Expenditure Breakdown

gap in provision for young people aged 13-24 which needs to be addressed.

So while it is difficult to make direct comparisons, other local authority arts offices that participated in the consultation named their investment on this same cohort as ranging from 8% to 35% of their overall spend.² In neighbouring County Laois, there is a similar population and demographic of young people who make up 14% of the population. In 2017, Laois County Council Arts Office invested 25% of the annual budget on direct annual programming for this cohort. This figure excludes further expenditure on Laois School of Music and Music Generation project. It is noteworthy that in the compared counterparts of Laois, Kildare and Cavan, there was a larger overall arts budget, team and a dedicated officer/coordinator working on the brief. Therefore, it can certainly be argued that Offaly's commitment to young people could be improved upon with increased resources both in terms of arts personnel and funding for the delivery of any new programming.

Delivery of Programme

The capacity to deliver a programme of youth arts is also influenced by the capacity and staffing levels of the local authority arts office. Increasing budget spend alone will not allow for the rollout of a youth arts strategy in Offaly. Offaly Arts Office has a core staff of two dedicated to delivering the arts programme, while the county council also employs three staff to deliver the Music Generation programme, compared to seven personnel working in Laois County Council Arts Office. Resources in Offaly are stretched to capacity. To enact a youth arts strategy, it is recommended that staffing levels be considered and improved.

Survey Feedback

Stakeholders - young people, parents, professionals working with young people and artists - have given a rounded view of how a youth population in a rural part of Ireland can engage with the arts. This process has shown that many factors influence a young person's ability to engage with the arts.

- Socio-economic background: The majority of those surveyed engaged with the arts either at school or through private tuition and enterprises. The depth and range of the arts programme varies from school to school.
- Where one lives/ opportunity to engage: In a town such as Birr with a thriving arts centre, there is a constant evolution of programming for all ages and a strategic targeting of the youth sector, providing scope for young people to engage in quality experiences. However, other parts of Offaly do not have this opportunity. In consideration of future generations, looking at how a centre for the arts impacts on the quality of life of young people should be taken very seriously, and a measurement framework of this value should be built into any new facility's priorities. Tullamore Community Arts Centre and the proposed Edenderry Civic Centre could be the access point for young people in that area and development of a programme at those centres is a priority.
- Where the development of an arts centre is not practicable, new ways of engaging with non-arts spaces should be considered.
- The value of the arts in the personal development of young people was really emphasised in the survey feedback. Participants demonstrated significant improvements to self-confidence, social skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills with references made to the 'life changing' quality of the arts.

² Laois Arts Expenditure Breakdown



Partnership Approach

Increasing focus on youth participation in Offaly County Council Arts Office's supported programme is a multi-faceted task. Raising the consciousness of the county and bringing people together to work better for young people's needs will take structure and leadership. With the support of key figures in the Arts Council, National Youth Council of Ireland, Youth Theatre Ireland, and Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board, a new model for engagement could be examined which offers sustainable and achievable ways to improve the lives of young people in Offaly through the provision of opportunities in a variety of settings. Pooling resources such as venues, equipment, transportation and personnel can provide opportunities for collaboration and specific funding streams, not currently being accessed. Connecting the dots of youth agencies such as Midlands Regional Youth Service with a wider web of artists who are skilled and keen can allow all partners to play to their strengths.

Call for Change

Local policies and strategies, together with national strategies, acknowledge and identify that engagement in the arts is vital in the improvement of physical and mental health. These policies are examined at length in Chapter 1.

The research has demonstrated the value young people themselves place on arts engagement. Chapter 3 discusses the findings of the surveys, and the full account and feedback can be read in Appendices. Here, robust feedback shows that as a result of engaging with quality arts experiences, young people have:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing;
- Improved self-awareness;
- Avenues to further education and employment, including providing new skills and competencies in the arts;
- Improved understanding and appreciation of the arts and the creative process.

To Invest in Youth Arts is to:

- Meet young people's needs as expressed in surveys and focus groups;
- Invest in their creative potential, their critical thinking skills and their future;
- Respond to recommendations made at national and international level on best practice for engaging and supporting the development of young people through the arts;
- Place Offaly on a par with other counties in terms of investment;
- Give young people tools to mind their mental health;
- Provide opportunity for community recognition and celebration of their achievements;
- Contribute to the wider economic growth of the area by improving cultural tourism opportunities and employment opportunities for those who go on to work in the arts sector;
- Invest in and contribute to the making of new original art work;
- Support professional artists who wish to work in youth arts contexts;
- Provide opportunities to work in a collaborative, multi-agency invested way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are six recommended key areas or pillars, from which will stem a set of actions that will support and enable the identified four stakeholders: young people, artists, youth service providers and arts service providers (see Chapter 5 for full details).

THE SIX PILLARS

1

Placing young people at the centre of decision-making processes involving the direction and programming of youth arts opportunities.

Improving resources for youth arts.

2

3

Supporting those who work with young people in a professional or voluntary capacity to realise artistic potential in established youth settings.

Promoting a robust and considered programme of training and continuous professional development for youth leaders and artists wishing to engage young people in creative practice.

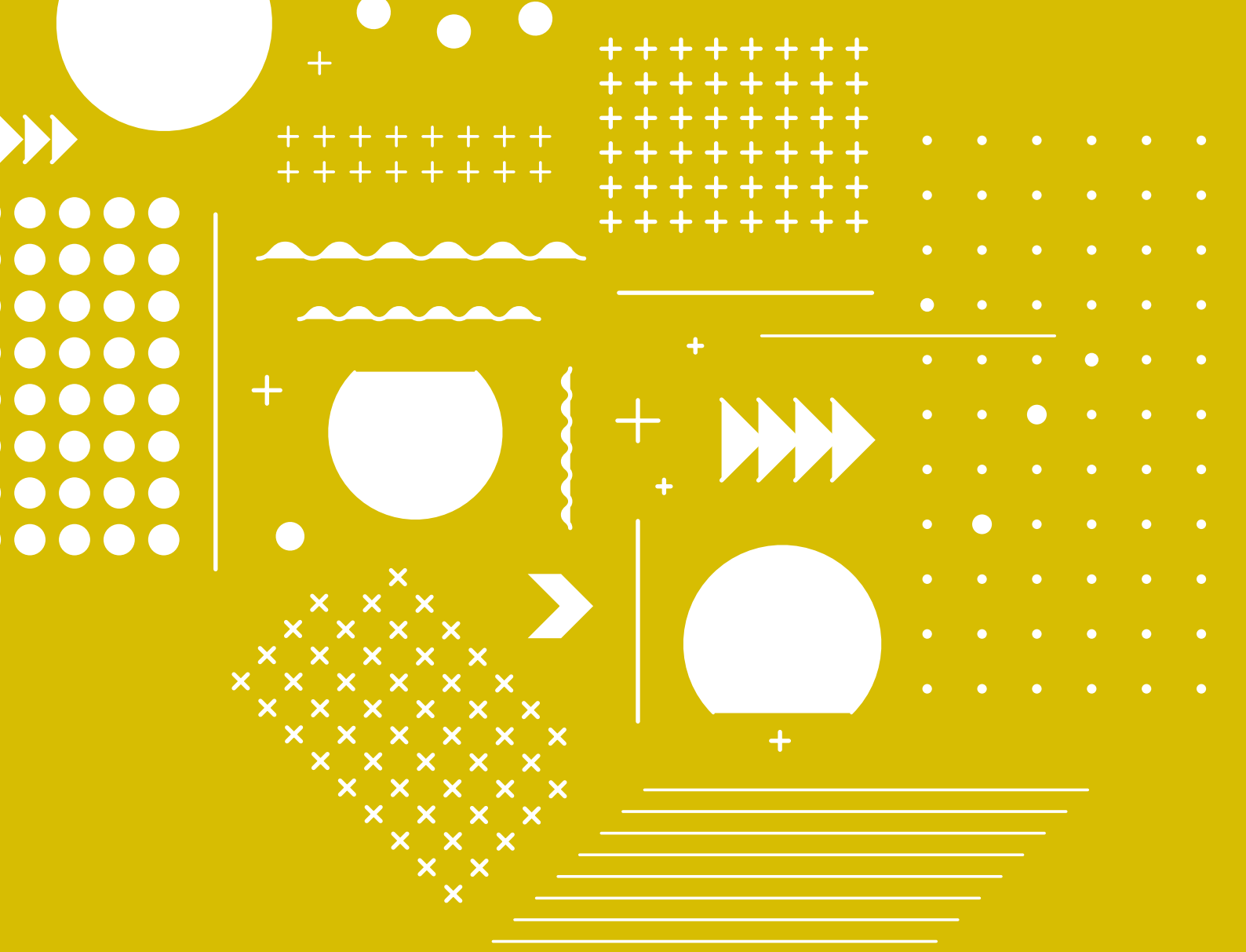
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5

Strategically tackling disadvantaged, marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.

Nurturing new talent.

6



CHAPTER

ONE



WHY YOUTH ARTS?

This chapter examines the rationale behind investing in youth arts. It will look to address the following influencing factors:

- Local and national policy
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Creative expression
- Economic benefits
- Human rights

Youth arts can be broadly defined as young people taking part voluntarily in creative, cultural or expressive activity outside of the formal education process. It can encompass participation and appreciation, as well as engagement with arts work specifically created by or for young people.³

Local and National Policy

The prioritisation of youth arts is a key objective and strategic action in the County Offaly Arts Strategy

³ Arts in Their Lives – A Policy on Young People and the Arts, National Youth Council of Ireland, 2002

Inspire – Imagine – Involve [2018-2022]. Young people, aged 13-24, are identified under Goal 1 of the Arts Strategy as a cohort for whom expansion of opportunity should be created, so that this cohort can engage and participate in the arts. Actions include exploration of a new model of participation and “development of a young people’s arts programme across the art forms that befits and supports shifts in contemporary youth culture”.⁴ The objectives of this plan with regard to youth arts complement the new partnership funding arrangement between Offaly County Council and The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

In the Offaly County Council/Arts Council Framework Agreement, 2018-2025, “developing and sustaining a new model of arts provision for young people in Offaly”⁵ was identified as one of four strategic actions. This emphasis on youth arts displays continuity of policy, as children and young people were identified as an area for consideration in Offaly County Council’s former Arts Plan (2012-2016): “This plan aims to encourage and validate creative interest and self-expression in our youth.”⁶

Offaly County Council’s Arts Strategy aligns with the Arts Council’s strategy ‘Making Great Art Work’ 2016-2025, a priority of which is to “plan and provide for children and young people” through the arts and education.

Furthermore, it aligns with Offaly’s Healthy Ireland Plan and Healthy Offaly Plan 2018-2020, where physical activity and mental health have been prioritised where partnership work “with Public and Private Stakeholders to develop range of recreational and amenity activities” is identified as an action.⁷ Prioritisation of youth arts also aligns with the Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021⁸ under which Objective 4 highlights the need to “increase the impact of and access to the Arts for all people and sectors and develop the cultural identity of County Offaly”. Objective 5 of the plan also identifies the following objective in the context of youth in the community: “identify and target key groups for education, training and upskilling”.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization as a “state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”.⁹ Ireland has the fourth highest youth suicide rate¹⁰ in Europe, and Offaly¹¹ has the 13th highest rate of suicide amongst young males. With these alarming statistics, mental health is a priority when we consider any policy or strategy that engages young people.

The Growing up in Ireland Study by the ERSI led to the Arts Council looking in depth at the relationship between the arts and a young person’s experience of growing up in Ireland.

“This landmark study prides open a rich window of knowledge for those of us who have long been interested in finding out more about the impact that arts and culture has on the cognitive and emotional development of our young people. Now we have a robust evidence-base which gives us deep insights into children’s engagement in a range of activities across multiple contexts – those of home, school and community – and it clearly demonstrates a strong correlation between participation in arts and cultural activities and a child’s wellbeing.” – Orlaith McBride (director, The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon)¹²

4 County Offaly Arts Strategy | Inspire – Imagine – Involve [2018-2022]

5 Offaly County Council/Arts Council Framework Agreement 2018-2025

6 Arts Plan 2012-2016, Offaly County Council, 2012

7 Healthy Offaly Plan 2018-2020, Healthy Ireland, 2018

8 The Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021, LCDC, 2016

9 World Health Organization. Promoting mental health: concepts, emerging evidence, practice. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2004

10 <https://www.unicef.ie/2017/06/19/irelands-teen-suicide-rate-4th-highest-euoeecd-unicef-report-card/>

11 <http://www.nsrif.ie/statistics/suicide/>

12 Spoken at the launch of the report, Growing Up in Ireland – National Longitudinal Study of Children, Economic & Social Research Institute, (ESRI) October 5, 2016



In a report commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland (2008), reference is made to the benefits accrued from arts participation in relation to personal development, cognitive development, social and community development, physical and mental health, rehabilitation and reducing social exclusion.

“The Arts offer a non-judgemental and un-authoritarian model of engagement, as well as a non-traditional, non-institutional social and emotional environment. Engagement in the arts assumes and requires respect and responsibility, cooperation and collaboration” - Hughes¹³

Dr Tony Bates, founder of Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health, is an authority on youth mental health and an advocate of youth arts for resilience-building. “The Arts speak directly to young people’s mental health struggles and offer a variety of platforms to ‘give their sorrow words’. The Arts bring them out of isolation into community and build their resilience. One-to-one specialist therapeutic intervention has its place, but it is a limited resource that will never solve the mental health needs of our young people. Every young person today is challenged to adapt to a rapidly changing and frightening world for which there are no clear ‘maps’. The Arts have a crucial role to play in helping them make sense and navigate these new frontiers.”¹⁴

¹³ Young People, Creative Action & Social Change, National Youth Council of Ireland, 2008 quoted from Hughes, Jenny (2005) *Doing the Arts Justice. A Review of Research Literature, Practice and Theory*. Edited by Miles, A, and McLewin, A. Unit for the Arts and Offenders and the Centre for Applied Theatre Research.

¹⁴ From a written response from Dr Tony Bates to Angela Ryan Whyte.

The opinion of Dr Tony Bates is reinforced by data collected in online surveys and interviews with adults in Offaly – people who work with young people in a professional setting such as youth workers or teachers. The average rate of improvement in self-confidence of young people, as a result of engaging in an arts project, was 80%. Professionals working with young people listed the following as outcomes of arts activities/projects, in their experience of their own contexts:

- “freedom of expression”
- “access to creativity”
- “self-reflection”
- “personal growth”
- “better mental health and wellbeing”
- “access to opportunities”
- “happiness ”
- “inner confidence”¹⁵

Creative Expression

Creativity is defined by Creative Ireland in their report Creative Youth as “...a set of innate abilities and learned skills: the capacity of individuals and organisations to transcend accepted ideas and norms and by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity”.¹⁶

The core proposition of the Creative Ireland Programme is that participation in cultural and creative activity promotes individual, community and national wellbeing. This plan – Creative Youth – is about realising this proposition and securing an opportunity for our children and young people to become creative citizens.

The arts and creative expression can contribute to the development of core skills and competencies, ensuring that young people “included in society, are environmentally aware, their equality and rights are upheld, their diversity celebrated, and they are empowered to be active global citizens”.¹⁷

To understand the creative process enables us to use these skills in our everyday lives and in the way we form relationship with others; “making music, writing stories, creating theatrical and dance expression, designing spaces are all avenues to refining and developing creative skills and capacities”.¹⁸

Economic Benefits

The Assessment of the Economic Impact of the Arts in Ireland, a report submitted to The Arts Council by Indecon in 2009, provided in-depth analysis of how the arts can impact the economy. The report addressed topics such as: the Arts and Cultural Tourism; the Arts and the Smart Economy; and the Role of the Arts in Ireland’s Image and Reputation.

The report’s focus was an analysis of direct, indirect or induced employment provided by Arts Council-supported organisations, and is useful to consider in relation to a consideration of the investment of youth arts in terms of a future economic driver. In 2006, there were 3,034 people directly and indirectly

¹⁵ Appendix 1.4

¹⁶ Creative Ireland – Creative Youth

¹⁷ National Youth Strategy 2015-2020, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015

¹⁸ Creative Ireland – Creative Youth

employed in this manner. The exchequer contribution was calculated in this report and was based on PAYE/income tax, PRSI, VAT and excise duties. "Our estimate of the total effective tax income earned by the exchequer by Arts-supported organisations and individuals amounted to €9.9m on average between 2006 and 2007. This increased to €10.4m in 2008...Our estimate of the total tax revenue earned by the exchequer by Arts Council-supported organisations and individuals, is estimated to amount to €53.7m in 2008."¹⁹

Looking broader again as to what type of expenditure is stimulated by the Arts, the report analyses spending on associated goods and services such as materials, purchase of services, computers, office supplies, rent, business services, insurance, water and waste services, to give but some of the examples quoted. The following calculation was made, which puts into context what a benefit and boost to the economy the arts sector is: "Indirect and induced expenditure impacts of the wider arts sector on the Irish economy amounted to €389m in 2006 giving a total direct, indirect, and induced expenditure impact in the economy of €1.8bn in 2006." To bring this back to Offaly and to the context of this chapter 'Why Youth Arts?', the research in relation to economic impact gives a sense of scale of how the arts can boost an economy through provision of employment and expenditure on goods and services. It is a stated economic goal of the Offaly Local Economic and Community plan: "Maximising economic activity and growth and ensuring that County Offaly capitalises on its potential to create opportunities and a suitable environment for new business."²⁰ The arts boosts cultural tourism; visitors to Offaly who attend cultural events, festivals and arts spaces contribute to the local economy, not just impacting on the arts sector, but on the wider business community providing goods and services to these visitors.

Investing in youth arts provides pathways for further education, career opportunities and long-term employment options, and the value of creative thinking leading to entrepreneurship in later life should not be underestimated as a huge potential investment for the development of County Offaly. (See Chapter 2 for more details) Youth arts investment can contribute to direct and indirect employment, encourage entrepreneurial behaviour and create options which can offset migration trends. Long-term consideration about the connection between youth arts and the economy will not only ensure the continued revitalisation of the arts sector in Offaly, but it can boost the economy by giving future generations reasons to live, work, socialise and shop in the area.

Human Rights

According to Ireland's National Youth Strategy 2015-2020, more than 800,000 young people in Ireland are aged between 10-24 years, representing 18.3% of the population; this period of life is "acknowledged as one of the critical transitions in the lifespan, and as a period characterised by tremendous growth and changes that is second only to infancy".²¹

When we look at the rights of a child in the international context, Article 31 of The UN Convention of Human Rights states that "every child has the right to...participate freely in cultural life and the arts.... member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."²² Ireland is one of the member countries committed to this aim.

To provide the opportunity for young people in Offaly to engage with the arts is to ensure the realisation of that human right.

¹⁹ Assessment of Economic Impact of the Arts in Ireland, Arts and Culture Scoping Research Project, The Arts Council, 2009

²⁰ Offaly Local and Economic Community Plan, 2016-2021

²¹ National Youth Strategy 2015-2020, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015

²² The United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31

CONCLUSION / KEY POINTS ON 'WHY YOUTH ARTS?'

- **Offaly County Council has stated youth arts to be an objective and strategic action of the 2018-2022 Arts Strategy; Inspire - Imagine - Involve. This sentiment is reinforced by the Offaly County Council/Arts Council Framework Agreement 2018-2025. The Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 also supports these priorities.**
- **Research and guiding documents by The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs all reference the importance of the arts for creative expression and mental health and wellbeing. This sentiment is reinforced by Dr Tony Bates, founder of Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health. Provision of youth arts opportunities by Offaly County Council can ensure access to positive measures to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people in Offaly.**
- **Engagement in creative expression can ensure an individual's and organisation's capacity to transcend accepted ideas and norms by drawing on imagination to create new ideas that bring additional value to human activity, contributing to an inclusive, diverse society and active global citizenship.**
- **The arts are an important source of revenue for the local economy, providing employment opportunities, improving cultural tourism and boosting businesses that link in with arts initiatives. Young people who have been encouraged in an arts discipline have the potential to contribute to the future economy of Offaly, should they go on to be professional artists, facilitators or creators in their county of origin. To provide a supportive culture where young people are encouraged and offered opportunities to advance their skill set is to invest in Offaly's future economy.**
- **The UN states that it is a human right for all children and young people to have the opportunity to engage with arts and culture. Offaly County Council is ensuring the provision of a basic human right by investing in youth arts.**



WHERE OFFALY STANDS ON YOUTH ARTS?

This chapter examines where Offaly stands in terms of current provision and investment in youth arts. The following factors will be examined:

- The demographic of Offaly
- Disadvantage, third-level education rates, unemployment rates, ethnicity of population
- Overview of current and recent Offaly County Council-funded youth arts initiatives - (this includes an overview of provision across all age groups and is not specific to the 13-24 age group)
- Overview of private and voluntary youth arts initiatives
- How Offaly County Council's investment compares with national averages

The Demographic of Offaly

Offaly has a total population of 77,961 people.²³ Of that population, there are 11,721 people aged

²³ Central Statistics Office, 2016 Census – this does not include the rise in population of non-nationals since the census was carried out.

between 13-24, which accounts for 15% of Offaly's population.

In terms of scale, the following areas have the top five highest population concentrations:

1. Tullamore - Population 14,607
2. Edenderry - Population 7,359
3. Birr - Population 4,370
4. Clara - Population 3,336
5. Banagher - Population 1,760

Some 40% of Offaly's population resides in larger towns, with the remainder living in smaller towns, villages and countryside. Offaly remains very rural in nature. Many areas do not have regular public transport, therefore young people are dependent on parents or guardians for lifts.

In terms of connectivity to the wider world through technology, of the 19,731 households covered by the 2016 Census, 72% of households reported to have the use of broadband. Some 24% reported that they did not have access to internet at home with 2.7% not responding to same. The rural nature of Offaly could impact on engagement with the arts, as other networks that attract young people, such as the GAA and Macra Na Feirme, have a strong presence in rural Offaly.

Disadvantage, Education and Unemployment

Areas of Offaly have been identified as disadvantaged, and particular addresses/ housing estates are highlighted as disadvantaged by Offaly Local Community Development Committee. The current Rural Development Programme, administered by Offaly Local Development Company and funded primarily through Offaly County Council, cites influencing factors under which an area may be classified as disadvantaged. These factors include the following: age dependency ratio, lone parent percentage, economic dependency ratio, proportion of those with third-level education, proportion of local authority-rented accommodation, and unemployment rate.

The highest instances of disadvantage are in parts of Tullamore, Edenderry, Birr and Clara with smaller instances in Kilcormac, Daingean, Shinrone, Cloghan and Gallen.²⁴ Over one fifth of Offaly's population are living in disadvantaged or very disadvantaged areas.

Offaly has the fifth highest youth unemployment rate in Ireland. Some 16% of Offaly's population have third-level education compared to the national average of 25%. Edenderry has the lowest rate of third level education in Offaly at 13%.

According to the Central Statistics Office, the total number of usually resident Irish Travellers enumerated in April 2016 was 30,987, representing 0.7% of the general population. This figure was an increase of 5.1% on the 2011 figure of 29,495.²⁵ A total of 2.92% of Ireland's Traveller population reside in Offaly which equates with 905 people as of the 2016 Census figures, representing 1.3% of Offaly's population.

Some 9% of Offaly's population is made up of migrants from UK (2%), Poland (2%), Lithuania (1%), other EU (2%) and rest of world (2%).

Arts Programmes in Offaly 2008 - 2017; an Overview

The brief for this report was to develop a new strategic model for youth arts provision for Offaly. This requires an overview of past and current youth arts provision across all ages, and an analysis of gaps in provision. The brief highlighted that there continued to be a huge appetite for and interest in the arts within the 4-12 age range, but that there had been a fall-off in attendance among those aged

²⁴ Offaly Local Development Strategy 2014-2020

²⁵ Central Statistics Office from CSO.ie

13+. The following description of youth arts provision shows direct investment from Offaly County Council Arts Service through the Arts Programme, from providers funded by Offaly County Council and organisations providing arts independently of county council funding. The youth arts provision outlined below is for all age ranges.

Up to 2011, Offaly County Council Arts Office delivered, as part of their funding initiative, several programmes targeting young people through the following streams:²⁶

- Offaly Youth Dance Programme (for ages up to 24 years) 2003-2012 (from 2007-2012 Legitimate Bodies were the resident dance artists for this programme)
- Dance in Schools (for ages up to 12 years) 1990-1999
- Kindermusik (for ages 0-5 years) 2003-2007
- Youth Literature Programme (for ages 13-16 years) 2006-2009
- Youth Arts Grants (for ages up to 18 years) 2006-2009
- Hullabaloo! Offaly’s Children’s Arts Festival (for ages 3-12 years) 2006 to present

From 2011 to 2016, Offaly County Council’s Arts Office programmes for youth arts included:

- Offaly Youth Theatre (OYT) (for ages 13-24 years) 2011-2015
- Music Generation Offaly Westmeath (MGOW) (for ages 5-24 years) 2013 to present
- Mini Movies (for ages 5-18) 2012 to present
- Hullabaloo! Offaly’s Children’s Arts Festival (for ages 3-12 years) 2006 to present

2008-2011	
Programme	Age Group
Hullabaloo!	3-12
Kindermusik	0-5
Offaly Dance Programme	5-24
Dance in School	5-12
Youth Literature	13-16
Youth Grants	0-18

2012-2016	
Programme	Age Group
Hullabaloo!	3-12
Offaly Youth Theatre	13-24
Music Generation	5-24
Mini Movies	5-18

In 2017, Offaly County Council Arts Office began the process of reassessing youth arts activity and provision, so that from 2017 Offaly County Council’s direct youth arts provision is through Hullabaloo!, Mini Movies and Music Generation, plus one-off events with youth elements through its annual Arts Act Grant schemes, Festival Arts Grant Schemes, Creative Ireland programmes such as Cruinniú na nÓg, and Culture Night. Offaly County Council also provides annual funding to Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, which engages with children and young people through its annual programme.

²⁶ Offaly Arts Budgets

Project Details - Benefits and Challenges

Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival

Hullabaloo! Children's Arts Festival is a partnership between Offaly County Council and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. The highly popular interactive arts engagement festival engages children aged between 3 and 12 years of age. Operating as a four-day festival annually since 2006, regular Hullabaloo! attendees have participated in a broad range of arts events and workshops, year on year. The festival provides a solid grounding across art forms in the three towns of Clara, Birr and Edenderry and ultimately encourages festival participants to engage with the arts during their early years.

Benefits: A broad programme, covering a wide cross-section of art forms, gives a great introduction to arts experiences at affordable costs. It is also a potential feeder programmer for youth arts.

Challenges: Widening the geographical reach is difficult without increased resources and partners. There is no comparable experience in the county for those aged 13 and over. The decrease in attendance needs consideration as to what now attracts this target age group.

Mini Movies

The Mini Movies programme was initiated in 2012 and is funded and organised by Offaly County Council Arts Office in association with OFFline Film Festival. It aims to bring quality film production skills to primary and transition-year secondary school pupils. Film professionals engage in workshops with the pupils over a couple of days; the culminating result is a short film that is premiered at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre during the OFFline Film Festival.

Benefits: A unique, quality experience is offered with industry professionals to an art form that is youth-friendly and imaginative in its approach.

Challenges: The scope of the programme does not extend to all ages of youth profile, being offered only to those in transition year in a school setting as well as to primary schools.

Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath

Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath (2013-present) is a County Council-led music service which receives core funding from Music Generation and the Offaly/ Westmeath Music Education Partnership comprising of Offaly County Council, Westmeath County Council and Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board. The national scheme was initiated by Music Network and is co-funded by U2, The Ireland Funds, the Department of Education and Skills, and Local Music Education Partnerships. Music Generation Offaly/Westmeath is working to create an infrastructure for performance music education across the counties of Offaly and Westmeath for the benefit of children, young people (4-24yrs) and the musician workforce. The mission is to provide opportunities for all children and young people to develop a life-long love of music and realise their musical potential whilst developing their personal and social identity. Young people can choose from a broad range of progressive musical opportunities developed in partnership with organisations that are committed to the ethos and delivered by outstanding musicians. A new partnership between Music Generation and Maynooth University for an orchestral residency has opened up the age range to university-going age. In 2017, 50% of the orchestra were aged 18, and 50% under 18.

Benefits: The programme tackles disadvantage, giving equality of access, and gives children and young people access to excellent tuition and music experiences across the county.

Challenges: One challenge is the governance and sustainability of facilitators who are employed on contract basis.

Offaly Youth Theatre

Offaly Youth Theatre: An initiative of Offaly County Council Arts Office, Offaly Youth Theatre (OYT) was launched in 2012, with a view to developing a countywide, facilitated youth theatre programme for Offaly. It specifically targets 13-24-year-olds but the majority are aged up to 21 years old. OYT was governed by a voluntary board of management. It was an affiliate member of Youth Theatre Ireland, and over the years availed of their expertise and best practice implementation models for engaging OYT facilitators.

This project was supported by Offaly County Council, the Arts Council of Ireland and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre until 2015. It was deferred due to a combination of factors; low uptake of participants, difficulty in establishing programme partners in Tullamore and Edenderry, lack of funding, and facilitator unavailability.

Benefits: Young people received access to quality, expert-led, youth-centred learning in a social, and non-formal setting. Members are linked into a wider network of National Youth Theatre with opportunities to advance and travel.

Challenges: Governance falls to the local authority for management. A low uptake in some areas proves continuation in the current context problematic in terms of return on investment.

Arts organisations and festivals with youth arts initiatives funded by Offaly County Council Arts Office.

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre

This arts centre is a recipient of annual funding from Offaly County Council, Pobal and The Arts Council and this funding stream allows for a varied programme which includes much activity and opportunity for young people. Birr Theatre & Arts Centre promotes the arts, not just in Birr town but across the region by delivering an accessible, engaging high quality arts programme for young people. Its youth programme engages children from pre-school all the way up to early adulthood through Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival, Birr Young Voices, School of Rock, Scripts - Ireland's Playwriting Festival, visual arts programmes, work experience opportunities for teenagers, film, dance, traditional music, family theatre, volunteering and the coordination of The Trench Award - a bursary programme for those pursuing a professional career in a classical music field. Furthermore, the opportunity for young people to engage with the arts as audience members is a significant benefit of such a facility. In 2017, of the 15,600 audience members there were 1,062 audience members aged between 13-18 years old, which was 6.8%. A further 1,100, or 7% of the audience, was in the under-12 category.

Benefits: The commitment to nurturing young audiences is one of the strengths of this arts facility. There is a strategic commitment to giving children and young people the opportunity to imagine, explore and express themselves through arts activity.

Challenges: Funding resources limits the scope of staffing, which relies heavily on funded schemes and volunteers. Staff resources are overstretched and struggle to increase capacity in management of specific youth focused initiatives.

Festivals have been a consistent way to promote youth arts in Offaly with the following festivals funded by Offaly County Council under the Festivals Arts Grant Scheme, all with a youth arts element: Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival, Mini Movies, Singfest, Shakefest, World Cultures Dance and Arts Festival, Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Offaly Fleadh Cheoil, Scripts - Ireland's Playwriting Festival, Birr Festival of Music and Voice, That Beats Banagher Festival, Tullamore Trad Fest, Feile Éadan Doire.

Private and Voluntary Youth Arts Initiatives; an Overview

Youth Centres: one example being St. Mary's Youth and Community Centre, Tullamore, which offers a way for young people to engage with the arts in non-formal settings. "Working with young people through the Arts offers them an opportunity to express themselves creatively and authentically. It engages young people's hearts and minds and allows for young people's work to be recognised by our community."²⁷ An annual musical, run since 1971, encourages all young people to participate in a production and to develop their musical and performing talents in a fun and supportive environment. Staff have observed how the opportunity to go on stage increases young members' self-confidence and instils a passion for performance. The centre also runs workshops in different art mediums.

The Youth Café at The Acorn Project in Edenderry offers great opportunities for young people to engage with the arts, with drama workshops, themed events, musicals and a community radio all operating from the building. The centre has a strong affiliation with young people in the area, as a safe space where they can make friends and socialise.

Private Art Facilitators: A wide range of professional private arts facilitators provide opportunities for young people to train in drama, art, music and dance. There is a vibrant **amateur drama** and **musical theatre** scene in Offaly, with many young people participating in musicals in their local youth centres across the county. **Comhaltas** provides affordable opportunities for young people to train in traditional Irish music and has a high participation rate and tradition. **Drama schools** such as Midlands Drama School, Little Theatre School of Drama, Stage Star Academy, Speak Out Drama and Shockwaves Stage School are among some of the enterprises operating in Offaly. There are **contemporary and classical dance schools** across the county including Ruth Mc Dermott, Cheryl Corrigan and Cassandra Kenny schools of ballet and dance. Jasango Theatre produced **professional theatre** for both adults and young people from 2009 to 2015; it now continues to co-produce Scripts - Ireland's Playwriting Festival with Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. There are also many **visual artists** who provide classes and have run successful projects with young people. Tullamore Academy of Music and Edenderry School of Music are among some of the private providers offering expert **music tuition** in Offaly.

How Offaly County Council Investment Compares

Reviewing the budget breakdowns over six years from 2011 to 2017 gives a good sense of how provision is being met. Offaly County Council and the Arts Office invested in youth arts through Music Generation, Hullabaloo!, Offaly Youth Theatre, (until 2015), Mini Movies, Culture Night, Arts Act Grants, Festival Art Grants, Creative Ireland programmes such as Cruinniú na nÓg (from 2018) and annual funding to Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. Some funding lends itself to one-off events and workshops. There are two points that are noteworthy about this analysis.

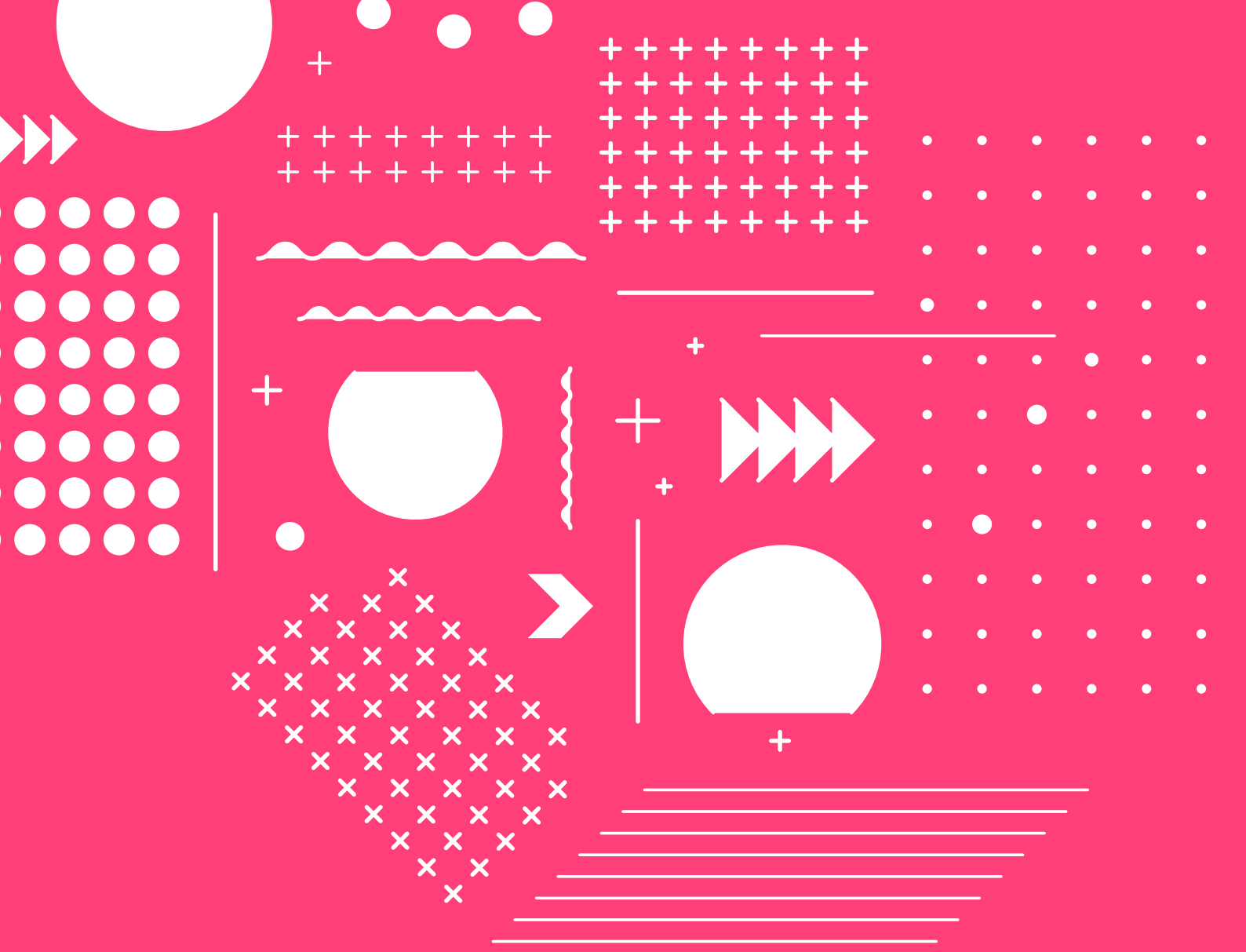
- The overall income loss and available budget depreciated dramatically in the period, with a 41.6% reduction in available funds in 2017 compared to 2011.
- Investment in dedicated age-specific programmes decreased significantly since 2011, while funding across the age spectrum was maintained, so in 2017 the main dedicated programmes for ages 0-12 was Hullabaloo! and Music Generation while all other programming serviced ages between 0-24, and no age-specific programme for 13-24 was in place.

When researching monetary investment in youth arts, three other local authorities participated in the consultation. They were asked to produce a similar budget breakdown of their accounts for 2017, not including spending on projects with youth arts elements such as festivals or one-off events, but calculate their spending on ongoing and direct programming. The proportion of spending on youth arts varied from 10% to 35% of overall spend in these examples.

²⁷ Anita Allen, Youth Engagement Worker, St. Mary's

CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'WHERE OFFALY STANDS ON YOUTH ARTS'

- **Offaly's youth population accounts for 15% of the overall population. Offaly remains rural in nature with 60% of the population living outside of main urban areas. Offaly has the fifth highest youth unemployment rate in Ireland. Participation in third-level education is below average at 16% compared to the national average of 25%.**
- **An evolving Youth Arts Strategy has much on which to anchor itself. Offaly County Council Arts Office has laid foundations for introducing young audiences to the arts. There has been ongoing investment through the following initiatives; Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival, Mini Movies, Music Generation Offaly & Westmeath, Offaly Youth Theatre and Birr Theatre & Arts Centre. There are many individuals and groups in Offaly with the expertise to expand and grow opportunities for young people.**
- **Targeted arts initiatives for young people over the age of 21 and under the age of 25 is currently limited. This cohort can only access funding and training as adults. In terms of providing opportunities for young people, with young people defined under Irish and European Law as those under the age of 25, there is currently a section of the population being missed, which could be addressed by age-specific programming.**
- **Offaly County Council Arts Office has experienced significant cuts to funding in recent years, with a 41.6% decrease in overall budget in 2017 compared to 2011. The downturn in the economy contributed to same. This cut has been felt in the area of youth arts amongst other areas of the arts.**
- **Dedicated age-specific programming for young people fell in this period and as a consequence, monetary investment is needed for dedicated age-specific (13-24 years) ongoing programmes.**



CHAPTER

THREE



CASE STUDIES - LEARNING FROM OTHER INITIATIVES

As part of the consultation process, research was undertaken with leaders in the field of youth arts in Ireland. This chapter summarises these findings. The objective of the investigation was to examine the involvement of youth arts policy around these initiatives and explore how the successful elements of these initiatives could be applied to Offaly. The rubric of stakeholders that evolved out of survey analysis in Chapter 6 will be applied to tease out how the youth arts initiatives in these case studies prioritise four stakeholders: young people, artists, youth service providers and arts service providers.

Methodology

Desk research was completed on the case study subjects, and key figures at the organisations were identified and invited to participate in the research. Organisations provided information on values, ethos and establishment procedures. Interviews were set up and two-part semi-formal interviews were held by phone based around set questions.

Case Study A

Waterford Youth Arts (WYA) was established in 1985 as a voluntary organisation. It is a city-based model, established independently and funded as an independent organisation. WYA has a building and is a youth and community arts resource where young people participate in creative activities

like dance, drama and film production. The objective of the organisation is to provide a means of self-expression and development for young people in an environment that is safe, professional and enjoyable. WYA has a reputation as a leader in the field of youth arts and is nationally recognised for its work in the sector. Up to 400 young people take part in activities at WYA on a weekly basis. It has grown from the voluntary efforts of two individuals and 25 young people to a fully-structured organisation with a paid staff.

Producing work is a large part of the undertaking but WYA is primarily an educational organisation. Workshops in drama, dance, film, creative writing, circus, choir and visual arts are run weekly by professional tutors.

WYA see arts as a vehicle to achieve a set of stated aims, which they lay out on their website as follows:²⁸

Through arts, WYA aims to:

- Enable young people to articulate their needs clearly in a safe group;
- Enable young people to develop interpersonal skills, such as confidence, social interaction, responsibility-sharing, planning, decision-making, and problem-sharing;
- Introduce young people to new and innovative elements of the arts;
- Provide training and education in creative skills.

The principles of youth work underpin the work of WYA and there are strong working links with other youth and community groups in Waterford.

Key Learnings

- **Geographical comparison:** Waterford has a larger overall population at 116,176 compared to 77,961 in Offaly, and therefore also a higher population density in the vicinity of the venue, compared to Offaly's population which is spread across the county; ie: Waterford city has a population of 53,504 compared to Tullamore's population of 14,607.²⁹The youth population of 13-24-year-olds is 17,081, accounting for 14.7% of overall population, compared to 11,721 in Offaly, accounting for 15% of overall population. While the percentage of population made up by this cohort is very similar, the levels of arts activities are much higher.
- **Involvement of young people as partners in decision-making:** Young people are consulted on every level, from project direction to ongoing evaluation. WYA has established youth committees and had young people sit on its board. This empowerment of young people has kept the programme and the organisation relevant, authentic and accountable.
- **Partnership approach:** from the outset the organisation has achieved the buy-in of multiple partners, funders and stakeholders. This has been crucial in terms of sustainability. Funding partners include the Education and Training Board (ETB), Arts Council, Local Authority, Youth Theatre Ireland and Department of Children & Youth Affairs. WYA also receives support from the local business community.
- **Bridging the gap between youth work and artists:** WYA straddles both camps in terms of its provision of youth arts experiences. By collaborating with youth services whose staff are vetted and trained to work and engage with young people, there are more options for artists to work in the community.

²⁸ www.waterfordyoutharts.com

²⁹ Central Statistics Office, 2016 Census

- **Artists as facilitators:** WYA employs professional artists on a part-time basis to lead weekly workshops in a wide array of disciplines. This creates employment opportunities for artists engaged as facilitators. WYA also acts as a central point for networking and training opportunities for artists engaged as facilitators.
- **A visionary at the helm:** WYA owes much of its success to the tenacity, creativity and consistency of a visionary leader. Ollie Breslin has nurtured the project from embryotic stages, constantly evolving and pushing ahead in terms of professionalism and quality of experience. Good youth arts projects need leadership which is dedicated and youth-focused, as it has been in Waterford.
- **The value of a permanent structure:** a venue that is alive and vibrant with young people engaging in learning and creativity every day of the week affords a permanence and visibility to the work.
- **Changing the culture of the place:** the biggest testament to the efficacy of WYA is how its work has seeped into the culture of the city and surrounds. There is a bustling culture scene in Waterford with events ongoing constantly. Founder Ollie Breslin attributes much of this atmosphere to the graduates of WYA. Over a 30-year span, countless young people have cut their teeth producing art as part of their involvement in WYA, using shoestring budgets, learning how to create, perform and publicise their own initiatives. The impact of this training ground has tangible results; it impacts on the experience of living and working in the area, it attracts tourism, it creates an income stream, and it improves wellbeing and general health for a community that is active, connected, collaborative and committed to their culture.

“ THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY, STORY-TELLING IN ITS MANY FORMS – ORAL, LITERARY, MUSIC AND DRAMA – HAS SERVED TO STRENGTHEN OUR RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH. TELLING STORIES THAT MAP ONTO OUR LIVED EXPERIENCES VALIDATES OUR PAIN AS SOMETHING REAL AND MEANINGFUL. THEY TURN WHAT CAN BE A LONELY AND ISOLATING EXPERIENCE INTO A COLLECTIVE, ‘SHARED’ EXPERIENCE. THIS DOES NOT MAGICALLY SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS, BUT IT MAKES WHATEVER WE MAY BE STRUGGLING WITH A LOT MORE BEARABLE. AND IT CAN OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE COMMUNICATION WITH ONE ANOTHER THAT MAY BE LIFE-GIVING AND EVEN LIFE-SAVING. ”

*Dr Tony Bates
 Founder
 Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health*

Applied to Offaly

- **Young people as makers:** Young people are placed at the centre of decision-making processes at WYA and are consulted at every step of the art-making processes. This way of working can be applied to any youth arts strategy and is not dependent on the use of a building.
- **Artists as facilitators:** Offaly County Council Arts Office has a database of artists registered as working in the area. The artist survey in Chapter 6 identified an appetite amongst artists to upskill in areas like workshop facilitation to enable them to share learning with young people. Developing a strategy that links local artists with young people is an aspect that can work in Offaly.
- **Youth Service Partnerships:** When WYA was establishing, the Education and Training Board was approached and asked to match-fund a grant that had been received from Waterford City Council. This was the beginning of a long partnership with this youth service that has grown over the years. Linking in with youth services is an underutilised resource that could be further developed in Offaly.

Challenges

- **Arts services:** Founder Ollie Breslin discussed the importance of having paid staff who can find appropriate arts funding streams and advice bodies for ongoing projects and ideas that emerge. This is a difficulty in Offaly in terms of limited human resources at Offaly County Council Arts Office.
- **The operational model** requires the dedication and commitment of an individual to establish and maintain the arts organisation. Without this level of individual commitment and drive it may not have happened and grown - this needs to be acknowledged as a challenge.

Case Study B

The Grainstore is a dedicated youth arts centre, located in Cabinteely Park in the district of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. The centre has a multi-purpose studio with sprung floor, an art studio, fully equipped recording studio, music rehearsal room and computer room. A café is also situated onsite and there is free parking adjacent to the building. Workshops and classes for children and young people run on a weekly basis in term-time and include dance, singing, musical theatre, art and CoderDojo.

The Grainstore has a youth arts committee called Canvas, which meets on a weekly basis. This youth arts committee plans and runs workshops and events for young people aged 13-25 years. Once a week, young people are free to take ownership of the space and develop their own creative projects and events. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council took over programming the building in 2008 and it has continued to evolve into a vibrant, thriving hive of youth arts activities.

Key Learnings

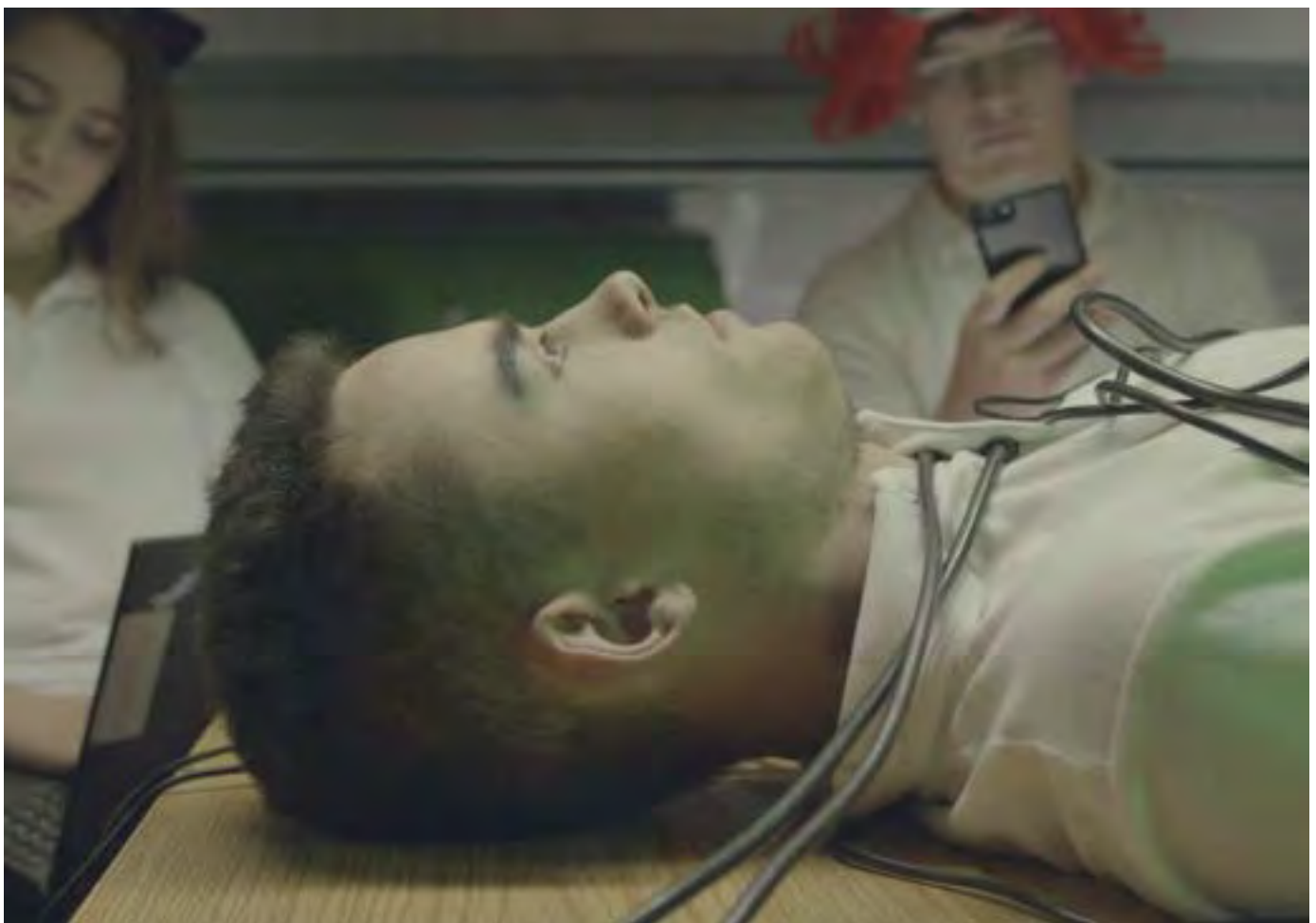
- **Geographical comparison:** Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown is a sprawling urban area with a population close to three times the size of Offaly. The total population is 218,018, of which the total youth population of 13-24 year olds is 34,739, almost three times the size of the youth population of Offaly. The proportion of the population in this cohort is similar to Offaly's 15%, at 15.9%.
- **Responding to local needs and interests:** The Grainstore reflects the interest level of the peer group for which it was initially established, and the building was kitted out for purpose. The facilities are very distinctive, enabling a quality of experience and opportunities for young people to be producers of their own destiny.
- **Partnership:** the initiative has always thrived on the culture of community and partnership. Dún

Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council took over programming when approached by the founding group of parents. A National Lottery Grant funded the furnishing of the building. The Department of Children & Youth Affairs funds key salary costs associated with having a youth arts coordinator.

- **Involvement of young people:** The Grainstore is youth-led by means of a peer committee of 13-25-year-olds who meet on a weekly basis.
- **The building:** is both everything and nothing - a key learning from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council is that, as attractive as it is to have a fixed home for youth arts, it presents its own challenges. The cost of up-keeping the building is a strain on resources that could be spent on programming arts initiatives across the region.
- **The importance of staff with specialised expertise:** The Grainstore has evolved and grown as a service for young people because, again, there is a youth arts coordinator driving the programme. Offaly County Council Arts Office would not have the funding or time to invest so steadily in the steering of youth-led initiatives without someone in a post leading the initiative.

Applied to Offaly

- **Young people as makers:** This case study presents an even more advanced level of youth participation. A youth arts committee is central to the running of the programme and a huge investment of time is allocated to engaging this committee.
- **Artists as facilitators:** The broad range of classes on offer again provide employment, training and networking opportunities for artists. This element can be applied to Offaly.



Challenges

- **Youth services:** There is not the same level of involvement with youth services at The Grainstore as seen in the other case studies. Without salaries funded to manage and coordinate the project, the Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Arts Office could not sustain governance of the centre.
- **Arts services:** Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council was approached to take on the centre when the voluntary group of parents had reached the end of their commitment. This has allowed for a youth arts policy to build around the centre, but limits the scope the Arts Office can offer to run programmes in other locations, such is the level of investment. The youth arts coordinator also taps into national advisory and funding streams for the various ongoing projects.
- **Space:** This level of input would be difficult to maintain in a non-building-based model of youth arts participation, but could be a model to aspire to when Tullamore Community Arts Centre opens in Offaly.

Case Study C

Cavan Youth Arts Lab is an initiative of Cavan County Council Arts Office. In 2017, Cavan County Council was awarded €160,000 from PEACE IV to establish the Youth Arts Lab. The project aims to “enhance the capacity of children and young people to develop awareness and respect for self and others and to form positive relationships through the arts”.³⁰ The programme sets out to enhance the capacity of young people to make and develop cultural memory through arts workshops, training and events. In total, over the current lifetime of the project – 24 months over three calendar years – there will be 210 young people involved in the project and they will each have at least 26 contact hours. The age group covered is 8-18 years. There is also an inter-generational aspect, but this is taking place more in the showcasing than the actual workshops. The art forms covered include graffiti, dance, drama, literature, craft, music (DJ skills), film-making and visual arts including sculpture, printmaking and painting. The project is managed by a project facilitator who is supported by local authority staff, a steering committee of youth and community leaders and young people from communities across County Cavan. The project coordinator is responsible for planning, managing, budgeting, reporting to the funders, and all aspects of ensuring the success of the project. Programmes have been designed to run in out-of-school contexts in a number of locations across Cavan. Aspects of future projects include a poetry project exploring identity with young Traveller women, and a youth theatre project in Ballyjamesduff which will explore social and artistic development. The initiative is funded by the EU’s PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, with support from Cavan County Council Arts Office, Cavan Local Development Committee (CLDC) and the European Regional Development Fund.

Key Learnings

- This is a **non-building based model** of youth arts that engages young people in rural and urban areas across multiple locations. It shows how a policy can embrace its surroundings and is not restricted to one single location or building.
- **Collaboration and partnership** have been critical to the establishment of this project. There are a number of stakeholders committed to creating a programme for young people.
- **Young people have been placed centrally as partners** in the guiding coalition. As in other case studies, involving young people in decisions that impact on them directly is a way to achieve buy-in from the target group.
- The appointment of a project coordinator to lead the project takes pressure off Cavan County

³⁰ www.cavanarts.ie

Council Arts Office to be the operations manager. The Arts Office supports the coordinator but an expert in the field of youth arts has the skills, time and experience to build a focused youth-centred programme that involves the wider community.

"The most important factor is the employment of a committed professional who has knowledge and experience of the arts. The person acts as a champion and can help the young people find and speak their own truths, they have an understanding of the challenges for artists working with young people and can support this work; this person can identify gaps and find solutions to fill these gaps. They can support the sustainability of the work as well as ensure the quality of the service provided."³¹

- The fact that there are **three agencies** in this project makes it more likely to be sustainable into the future. The partnership was successful in their bid for Music Generation funding and this has cemented the partnership relationship giving confidence in future sustainability.

Applied to Offaly

- **Geographical comparison:** Cavan is closest to Offaly in terms of the demographic, with a total population of 76,176³² and a youth population of 13-24 year olds of 10,959, or 14.38% of overall population. Offaly has a marginally higher overall population and the proportion of young people living in Offaly is slightly higher too, by 762. Like Offaly, Cavan is quite a rural county with public transport difficulties that impact on equality of access for young people.
- **Young people as makers:** Cavan Youth Arts Lab has established a youth arts committee to guide the process. Inclusivity of access for young makers is also noteworthy in this case study. The geographical spread of the activity and engagement of marginalised communities provides improved access to the arts. This is highly applicable to Offaly's situation in terms of the demographic and geographical makeup of the county.
- **Artists as facilitators:** The initiative has offered opportunities for Cavan artists to creatively engage with young people. Elements of this model could be applied to a youth arts programme in Offaly, inviting artists to make proposals on how they could creatively engage young people.
- **Youth services:** The involvement of Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board is an aspect that could be explored with the Laois/Offaly counterparts. The Local Arts and Education Partnership has been a considerable move in Cavan, comprising membership from Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board, Monaghan County Council and Cavan County Council. There is great visibility in the work undertaken and it is highly applicable to the Offaly context. National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is facilitating a youth arts network in the area and the Education and Training Board facilitates continuous professional development for artists in the area.

Challenges

- **Funding and resources:** the project was awarded €160,000 from PEACE IV funding which was a major driver in establishing a sustainable model of youth arts provision and as an enabler in terms of attracting further funding and partnerships.
- **Arts services:** Cavan County Council Arts Office has a leading role in this initiative and has invested 35% of their overall budget showing commitment to advancement of youth arts. Some 27% of this goes directly into the PEACE IV Project, with 8% on other ongoing programmes. Monaghan County Council Arts Office is also a partner in the project. Currently Offaly County Council Arts Service does not have such resources either in personnel or funding.

³¹ Catriona O'Reilly, Cavan County Council Arts Officer

³² Central Statistics Office, 2016 Census

CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'CASE STUDIES - LEARNING FROM OTHER INITIATIVES'

The following factors have been a hallmark of all three case studies explored in this chapter:

- **Young people as partners in the project**
- **Local authority has made a commitment to youth arts, displayed by monetary investment and in a guiding/advisory/link organisation capacity**
- **Multiple partners funding the projects, including Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Education and Training Board, Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Local Development Committee.**
- **Full time project coordinator is employed in all cases, with salary funded by a partner.**



RESOURCING YOUTH ARTS - POTENTIAL PARTNERS

**“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much”
- Helen Keller**

Data gathered to date has all pointed out the rationale, advantage and need to improve investment in youth arts in Offaly. The objective of this chapter is to look at the possibility of resourcing investment through a partnership approach.

Partnerships and collaborations can be a long-term strategic means of improving quality of life for young people. There are a number of partnership opportunities that can be further explored, developed and nurtured for the provision of youth arts in Offaly.

Following research and interviews with key figures, summaries on how to consider partnerships have been included below. These agencies can serve as a way to resource youth arts in Offaly and can meet the partners’ needs in terms of their overarching vision, role and objectives.

National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

The National Youth Council of Ireland is the national representative body for voluntary youth organisations. Empowerment of young people is a key goal of NYCI and the organisation strives to provide opportunities for young people to develop the confidence and skills required to enable them

to participate fully in their communities in an inclusive way. The Youth Work Act 2001 legislates NYCI's role as a Social Partner in the Community and Voluntary Pillar.

NYCI's Youth Arts Programme promotes a partnership approach to promoting and developing youth arts in Ireland. The Arts Programme aims to support both individuals and organisations to deliver arts projects with young people by the provision of training for youth workers and youth arts practitioners. Professional arts facilitators with extensive experience of working with young people facilitate the training through the NUI Certificate in Youth Arts and other scheduled training events. NYCI also supports youth arts projects through the Artist & Youth Work Residency Scheme and their toolkit includes resources in innovating, planning and evaluating youth arts work. This scheme is an excellent fund that could be used to create quality experiences for young people in Offaly. The scheme is designed to promote innovative partnerships between youth groups, artists and (where relevant) arts organisations. A residency may take the form of an artist in residence in a youth work setting and/or a youth group in residence in an arts setting.



NYCI could help to resource Youth Arts in Offaly as follows:

Training and Continuous Professional Development

The Youth Arts Certificate is an outstanding training model for anyone who wants to work with young people through the Arts. The development of a process of Offaly County Council Arts Office nominating and supporting an artist to participate in this training could improve the quality and quantity of youth arts experiences in Offaly.

The development of a creative hub in the Midlands for networking and training days. A pilot initiative in the Northwest, NYCI Youth Arts Programme in association with Cavan and Monaghan ETB's and Cavan and Monaghan Arts Services, organised a youth arts networking day, which offered youth workers the chance to network with others doing similar work. The day also included a practical workshop with Young Irish Filmmakers. The expansion of this practice into the Offaly/Laois area to offer training opportunities for youth arts facilitators to upskill and network was an area identified in consultation. Funding opportunities - Artist and Youth Work Residency Scheme. Strand 1 - development; and Strand 2 - full residency and the financial fund offers up to €5,000 in total.

Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)

LOETB provides a further education and training service with the aim of providing quality learning opportunities for adults in the Laois/Offaly region. The service aims to "encourage, enable and support adults who wish to return to education to avail of the educational opportunities that best suit their needs."³³ Quality, ease of access, and contemporary learning programmes reflective of changing culture are all important considerations of LOETB in their bid to attend to the social, personal and employment needs of adult learners. LOETB is particularly relevant to this research given how their existing programmes have been developed in co-operation with a wide range of partners.

LOETB could help to resource Youth Arts in Offaly as follows:

- Funding - There is much evidence nationally of relationships between ETBs and local authorities. This has varied from financial backing, to the provision of salary for dedicated youth arts workers, to cooperation on networking and training events in the field of youth arts.
- Establishment of FETAC Level Training in Youth Arts in Midlands - To pilot training in arts-related disciplines for school leavers in partnership with LOETB could be the start of developing relationships. A preliminary discussion with LOETB identified the interest level amongst target group in digital media, radio production and gaming. NYCI also expressed interest in participating in a scoping exercise to flesh out the feasibility of the establishment of a certified training as a partnership with NYCI, LOETB and Offaly County Council Arts Office.

Creative Ireland

Creative Ireland is a national programme that feeds into local needs through the creation of localised plans. Creative Ireland teams at local level are led by personnel from County Council Architecture, Arts and Heritage Offices and the Library Service. It is described as a "culture-based programme designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing... The core proposition is that participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement."³⁴ There are five pillars of the programme, of which Pillar 2, 'Creative Communities - Enabling Creativity in Every Community', is mandated for delivery through the Offaly Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022, managed by the Creative Ireland team within Offaly County Council. In addition, in December 2017, 'Creative Youth - A Plan to Enable the Creative Potential of Every Child and Young Person' was launched. It aspires to act on the key goal of Pillar 1 which is to ensure that every child in Ireland has access to tuition, experience and participation in

³³ www.loetb.ie

³⁴ <https://creativeireland.ie/en/about>

music, drama, art and coding by the year 2022. The plan is very much influenced by the belief that creativity and culture are central to the education of children and young people in Ireland. There are four long-term strategic objectives and some of the priority actions identified have particular relevance for the field of youth arts, particularly these:

- Creation of creative programmes for young people in disadvantaged communities.
- Opportunities to participate in drama/theatre outside of school will be expanded.
- Increased opportunities for students to learn coding and computational thinking will be introduced.
- A strategy to develop and extend choral singing will be developed.
- Local creative youth partnerships will be established on a pilot basis.³⁵

Offaly Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018-2022 has prioritised Pillar 2, which provides opportunities for exploration and expansion of ideas in the field of youth arts. The plan also identifies the selection of a key area annually for a significant commission which would promote an aspect of Offaly's heritage through the medium of art. Community-led creative projects that would enable communities to explore aspects of their heritage by collaborating with an artist are also a key action of the plan, as well as the continuation of Cruinniú na nÓg (formerly Cruinniú na Cásca), an annual day of celebration of creativity for children and young people with free events and workshops organised in communities nationwide. The primary vehicle for communicating aspects of the plan has been identified as through the PPN network in Offaly.

There is huge potential for Offaly County Council Arts Office to build on the youth arts programme in partnership with Creative Ireland, accessing funding which will deliver on the above objectives and key action areas; however, the sustainability of this funding sources is a consideration as it is currently unknown whether it will continue. The difficulty that arises is having the personnel to guide and lead initiatives. Offaly County Council Arts Office's current staffing structure does not have the sufficient reserves to focus so deliberately on capitalising on the opportunities that Creative Ireland can offer in the area of youth arts.

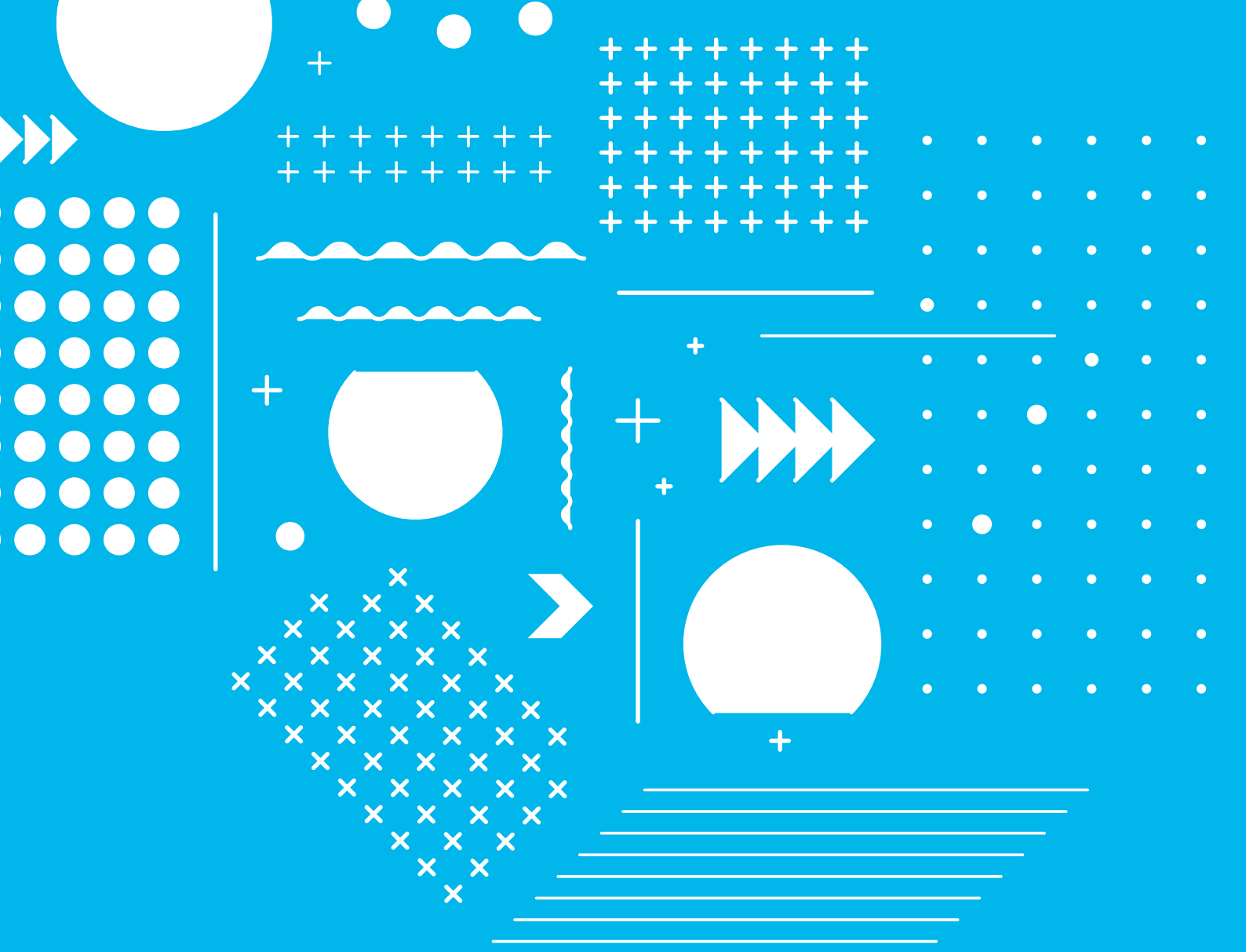
Community Partners

In Offaly, there are organisations already serving the needs of young people in a variety of ways. The Acorn Project Edenderry, Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Clara Family Resource Centre, Midlands Regional Youth Service, Offaly Local Development Company, Offaly Traveller Movement, St. Mary's Youth and Community Centre, Public Participation Network, Library Service and schools are amongst those that aim to meet the needs of the youth population. A collaborative approach to running youth arts projects would address many of the challenges facing the sector.

³⁵ Creative Youth Launch Document, The Department of Children and Youth Affairs, December 2017

CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'RESOURCING YOUTH ARTS - POTENTIAL PARTNERS'

- **Creative collaborations and partnerships are the way forward. There has been an excellent history of creative thought and collaboration in Offaly County Council Arts Office. The reality is that the new ideas, openings and innovations laid out in this chapter will result in increased workload. To broaden the reach through collaboration and partnerships, the expansion of the core team should be considered. Chapter 5 will address this under recommendations for the proposed youth arts strategy.**
- **There are national organisations with whom Offaly County Council Arts Office could work to create youth arts opportunities. National Youth Council of Ireland and Youth Theatre Ireland are identified as potential partners for establishment and/or continuation of projects that would lead to increased participation, training and opportunities.**
- **Creative Ireland offers a unique level of support which can be further drawn upon, with the right leadership at local level. There are funding pathways available that may not continue indefinitely.**
- **At local level, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) offers another possibility for improving opportunity and resources through shared thinking about how to better resource the area.**
- **There are many community partnership possibilities that could be realised through a structured partnership agreement.**



CHAPTER

FIVE



A FUTURE MODEL YOUTH ARTS STRATEGY

To inform youth arts policy in Offaly for 2018-2022 these set of actions (that complement and are in line with the Offaly County Council Arts strategy [2018-2022]; and the Offaly County Council /Arts Council Framework Agreement [2018-2025]) are achievable, scalable and sustainable. They have been drawn up as action points, as a means of delivering a model for youth arts participation that is open, inclusive and welcoming to all, while also helping nurture and progress interest, ability and talent.

There are six recommended key areas or pillars, from which will stem a set of actions that will support and enable the identified four stakeholders: young people, artists, youth service providers and arts service providers.

Six Pillars

1. Placing young people at the centre of decision-making processes involving the direction and programming of youth arts opportunities
2. Improving resources for youth arts
3. Supporting those who work with young people in a professional or voluntary capacity to realise artistic potential in established youth settings
4. Promoting a robust and considered programme of training and continuous professional development for youth leaders and artists wishing to engage young people in creative practice
5. Strategically tackling disadvantaged, marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.
6. Nurturing new talent

Pillar 1 - Placing young people at the centre of decision-making processes involving the direction and programming of youth arts opportunities.

How?

Build - Establish a Youth Arts Forum made up of young people representative of a cross section of Offaly's youth population to advise on youth arts programming, training and engagement.

Encourage - Promote youth participation as a policy embedded in all arts venues, existing and planned. Work with Birr Theatre & Arts Centre and the proposed Tullamore Community Arts Centre, supporting them to foster opportunities for young people to be partners in leading change in culture and creativity. Advise Edenderry Culture & Civic Committee on promoting youth participation as part of standard practice of committee.

Collaborate - Through a partnership approach, invite and invest in collaborations with youth organisations and funding bodies on quality arts projects and initiatives that prioritise youth participation and leadership.

Pillar 2 - Improving Resources for Youth Arts.

How?

Build - Investigate ways of establishing the position of a Youth Arts Development Officer in County Offaly, with responsibility for leading the new youth arts strategy, Youth Arts Forum and existing youth projects, with a county brief.

Encourage - Aspire to increase spending on youth arts as a percentage of the overall budget. Allocate funding to a dedicated age-specific youth arts initiative (13-24). Consolidate agreement that spending on youth should not drop lower than 10% of overall spend, regardless of fluctuation in income.

Collaborate - Work with Department of Children & Youth Affairs, Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board and Midlands Regional Youth Service to explore partnership opportunity towards the resourcing of Youth Arts Officer position.



Pillar 3 - Encouraging those who work with young people in a professional or voluntary capacity to realise artistic potential in established youth settings

How?

Build - Build relationships and develop partnerships with key figures in the youth, community and voluntary sector county-wide.

Encourage - Foster an interest in prioritising youth arts in these settings by running information sessions in collaboration with the Public Participation Network and libraries that provide basic training on core essentials required to manage a youth arts initiative and the how-to of grant applications.

Collaborate - Advise both the sector and artists wishing to engage in this sector on how to navigate appropriate funding such as the Artist and Youth Work Residency Scheme which is managed by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) on behalf of the Arts Council and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Pillar 4 - Promoting a robust and considered programme of training and continuous professional development for youth leaders and artists wishing to engage young people in creative practice.

How?

Build - Invest in a programme of continuous professional development for artists that covers practicalities such as child protection training and facilitation skills as well as offering artists the chance to deepen practice. This initiative should excite and incentivise artists to share their skills with young people in imaginative, age-appropriate ways.

Encourage - Establish links with National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)/ NUI Maynooth to nominate and support an artist or youth worker to attend formal training via the Certificate in Youth Arts programme on an annual basis.

Collaborate - Work with neighbouring arts offices to provide shared opportunities for artists and youth workers to engage in networking and training initiatives. Collaborate with National Youth Council for Ireland on the establishment of such initiatives in the Midlands following the success of this measure in other rural parts of Ireland.

Pillar 5 - Strategically tackling disadvantaged, marginalised and hard-to-reach groups.

How?

Build - Build an ethos of inclusivity for all young people through relationship-building with national and local representatives of organisations such as, but not limited to: Irish Wheelchair Association, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Offaly Travellers Movement, Jigsaw Offaly, Offaly Association for People with an Intellectual Disability.

Take cognisance of the Arts Council's Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy aligning to their principle as quoted:

"The Arts Council, in everything it does, strives to respect, support and ensure the inclusion of all voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, from all sections of society, from existing and new communities, and from all social backgrounds, ethnicities and traditions."

Encourage - Ensure that any funded projects or initiatives have principles of equality and diversity embedded within projects that engage with young people in this sector. Encourage imaginative responses from artists to consider how they can address the topic of equality and diversity in youth arts.

Collaborate - Work with libraries, Public Participation Network and Offaly Local Development Company to build on existing structures and consider how youth arts can be better accessed by young people from these sectors.

Pillar 6 - Nurturing new talent.

How?

Build - Establish a Youth Arts Bursary that acknowledges, encourages, supports and celebrates interest and ability in a creative arts practice that gives young artists an opportunity to further develop their field of practice.

Encourage - Continue to promote and support existing structures that harness new talent in meaningful ways such as Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival, Mini Movies, Singfest, Shakefest, World Cultures Dance and Arts Festival, Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival, Offaly Fleadh Cheoil, Scripts - Ireland's Playwriting Festival, Birr Festival of Music and Voice, That Beats Banagher Festival, Tullamore Trad Fest, Feile Éadan Doire and others.

Collaborate - Explore the establishment of FETAC level training in the arts in association with Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board/ National Youth Council of Ireland, for example in digital media, radio production, film, and other technical skills that respond to contemporary culture and are an important element of arts practice.

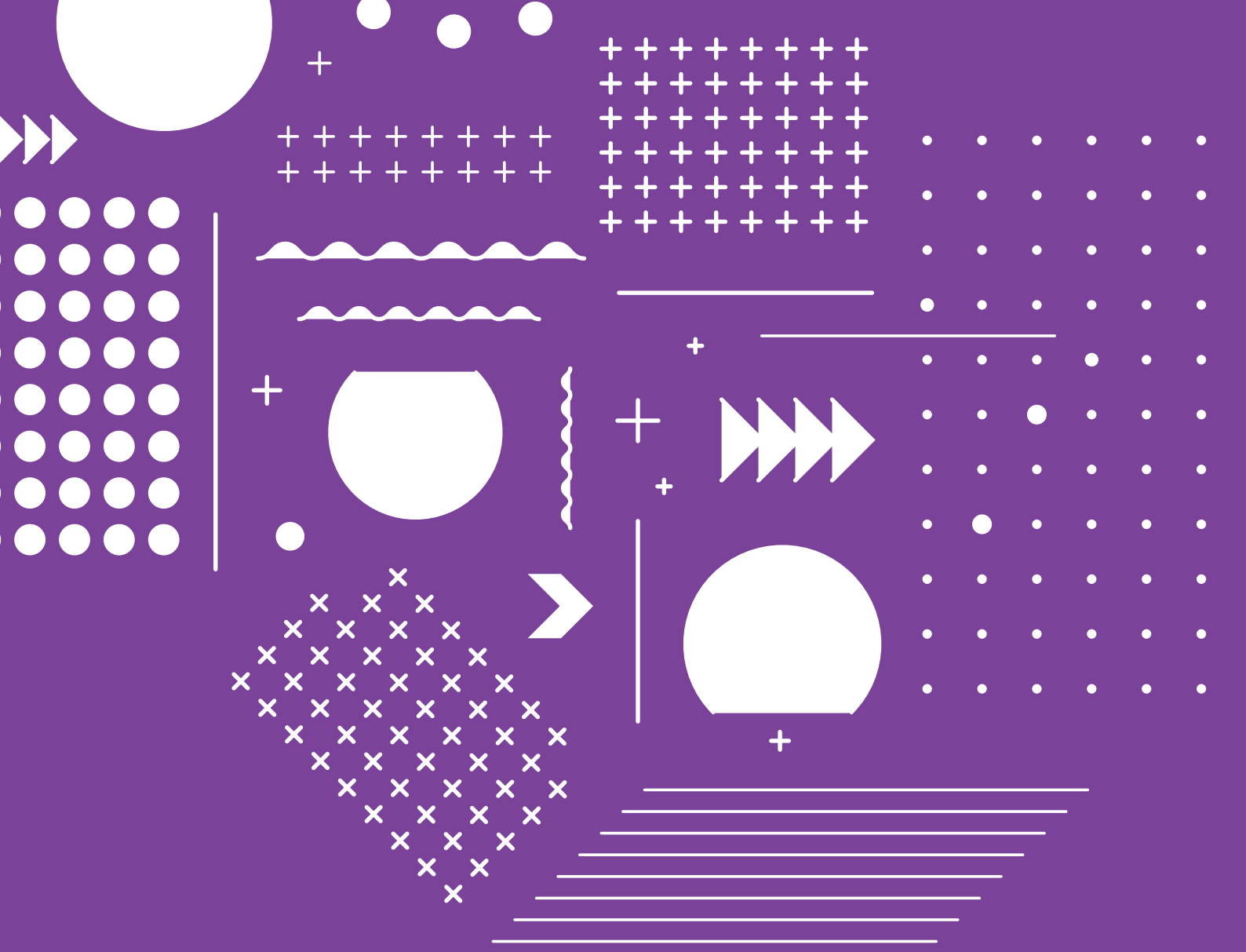
“ THE 25,000 YOUNG PEOPLE WE’VE SERVED IN 13 JIGSAW SITES ACROSS IRELAND HAVE COME TO US WITH ALL MANNER OF PERSONAL AND FAMILY ISSUES. MOSTLY THEIR PAIN WAS HIDDEN AND THEY WERE CONFUSED BY WHAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING. THEY STRUGGLED TO PUT INTO WORDS WHAT THEY FELT INSIDE. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED IS THAT DISTRESS THAT IS WITHOUT WORDS, OR SOME FORM OF SYMBOLIC EXPRESSION, BECOMES ENACTED IN SYMPTOMS AND ACTING OUT BEHAVIOUR. WHEN WE CAN ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE TO FIND THE WORDS TO SAY WHAT THEY ARE FEELING AND FIND A NARRATIVE THAT MAPS ONTO THEIR EXPERIENCE, THEY BECOME EMPOWERED TO FACE AND DEAL WITH THE CRITICAL ISSUES IN THEIR LIVES. ”

*Dr Tony Bates
Founder*

Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health

CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'A FUTURE MODEL YOUTH ARTS STRATEGY'

- **Significant measures must be taken to improve opportunities to engage with quality arts experiences for 13-24-year-olds in Offaly. A dedicated holistic approach to youth arts participation is required to meet the needs of an evolving contemporary youth culture.**
- **Investing in youth arts is an investment in the future creative landscape of the area. Implementation of the youth arts strategy will take persistence and patience.**
- **Over the next five years, use of the guiding pillars and objectives will result in a more engaged youth population and an upskilled community of artists and practitioners. It will require building and encouraging both young people and the community at large to take ownership of their youth arts strategy.**
- **Central to the efficacy of the strategy is collaboration. Working in partnership under a central guiding vision will ensure a clear and consistent message for the future of youth arts initiatives in Offaly.**



CHAPTER

SIX



SURVEY FINDINGS

This chapter sets out the findings from surveyed public opinion, which was undertaken as a key aspect of the research (for full survey results see Appendices). The findings are summarised and an analysis of emerging trends will be presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

Survey Methodology

In November 2017, four online surveys were designed and circulated on the theme of youth arts. They included:

1. A youth survey (13-24-year-olds)
2. Parents of youth survey
3. Artists living and working in Offaly
4. Professionals working with young people in youth centres, schools and community centres.

All surveys were conducted anonymously and were designed to stand alone. There was no intentional link between the respondents. All four surveys were designed and managed by SurveyMonkey.ie. Hard copies were made available to participants at an Offaly Public Participation Network Meeting (Offaly PPN) and the results uploaded to SurveyMonkey.

The public were informed of the rationale behind the process via a press release circulated by email and social media. This communicated that the objective was to gather opinion, which would be taken into consideration in developing a new model for arts provision for young people in Offaly. The Arts Office contacted art teachers in schools to encourage them to promote the online survey to their students, and give time for students to complete the survey in class.

Survey Response

The online surveys involved 115 young people aged between 13 and 24; 23 parents of young people aged between 13 and 24; 27 artists; and 11 adults working with young people in a professional capacity in formal and non-formal settings, such as schools and youth centres. Participation in the survey covered a geographical spread across Offaly's towns, villages and rural areas. Some 35% of participants listed their location as urban, with 65% stating they lived in villages or countryside. Information was collated on the following themes relevant to young people:

- What arts activities they are currently engaging with and the frequency of the occurrence
- Where arts engagement happens
- Motivation to take part
- How far a young person travels to attend
- What is the most important aspect?
- Descriptions of a good or bad experience with the arts
- Preference of day and time to engage
- How young people engage with the arts as audience members
- Barriers to engaging
- What arts training and events young people would like to see more of

This information was measured from the viewpoint of three stakeholders: young people, parents of young people, and professionals who work with young people. A similar framework was provided for the survey of artists living or working in Offaly. The artist survey also focused on measuring current artist engagement with young people and interest in further training in youth arts facilitation.

Findings - Youth and Parents' Surveys

Surveys 1 and 2 indicated:

- A high uptake in the **type of weekly arts engagement** in a number of disciplines ranked from the highest frequency of occurrence in drama, literature, art, digital media, dance, music, film.
- **Where arts engagement happens:** a key finding was that engagement was happening in school, as stated by 44% of young people and 55% of parents. Private tuition was the next highest, then youth clubs and private providers such as stage schools. Reference was also made to significant opportunities provided by festivals particularly in the Birr area and in Birr Theatre & Arts Centre.
- The biggest **motivation to participate** was fun, listed by 70% of young people and 63% of parents; followed by skilled facilitator as listed by 50% of young people and 68% of parents. Other important factors included making new friends, cost, location, opportunity to perform, and accreditation. These varied in response from 22% to 28%.
- A feature of a rural area such as Offaly is the **distance one must travel** to engage with the arts. For 23% of young people surveyed, they could only engage in activities that were within walking distance, with this opinion seconded by 9% of parents surveyed. The majority of young people and

adults surveyed discussed car journeys of between 10 and 60 minutes as an option they would use to avail of an arts experience.

- **Significant growth in self-confidence** as a result of youth arts activities was identified by 40% of young people, 80% of professionals and 52% of parents. Some 29% of young people measured significant growth in social skills as a result of youth arts engagement, as did 80% of professionals and 50% of parents. Significant improvement to decision-making skills was named by 21% of young people, 60% of professionals and 19% of parents. Some 14% of young people surveyed witnessed significant improvement in their ability to problem-solve, as did 60% of professionals and 33% of parents.
- **Optimum time for youth arts activities** to take place was identified by 39% of young people surveyed as weekdays after 6pm, seconded by 50% of parents. Some 37% of those surveyed named weekdays between 4pm and 6pm as the best time slot, as did 36% of parents. Wednesdays and Fridays were popular options. Sunday was seen as the least favourable option by all cohorts surveyed.
- Young people who participated in the survey indicated relatively limited ongoing **engagement with the arts as audience members**. The most popular way to engage was through film, listed by 20% of young people who had been to the cinema within a week of being surveyed. Musical theatre, theatre, dance shows and visit to a gallery were mentioned with low percentages.
- **Barriers to participation** in youth arts training or events produced similar findings for both young people and parents. Lack of interest was named by 52% of young people and 47% of parents. Cost was listed as a barrier by 50% of young people and 52% of parents. Location was identified by 48% of young people and 52% of parents. Lack of age-appropriate opportunities was listed by 39% of young people. Other interest such as sports was named as a barrier by 35% of young people and 34% of parents. Lack of choice was listed by 33% of young people as a barrier to engagement. Professionals working with young people identified lack of funding and skill set as the key barriers to engaging the young people they worked with in arts activities.
- In response to **'What would you like to see more of?'**³⁶ the top six results were: film, music, drama, dance, literature and digital media. Parents' responses ranking from the highest were: drama, music, digital media, dance, literature and art. Professionals gave the following list of preferences: digital media, music, film, circus, art and literature.

Findings - Artists' Survey

A total of 27 artists based in Offaly participated in an online survey. There was a broad representation of art forms including drama, musical theatre, art, digital media, literature, circus, dance, music, photography and poetry. The highest volume of responses was from the genre of drama and musical theatre. Geographical representation was across Offaly.

- Some 56% of the artists surveyed offer **workshops** to the public and 44% do not. Of the 44% who do not offer classes and are not working with young people, all said they would consider it in the future. Some 33% currently work with young people aged 4-24 years.
- **Barriers against working with young people were identified as:** resources, Garda vetting procedures, lack of locations, funding, lack of facilitator training and child protection training.
- Of those who are offering workshops to young people, **location** is a factor. Some 34% work in private premises, rented or owned; 30% work in schools, 19% in youth clubs, 19% in other

³⁶ The results here are based upon respondents being allowed more than one choice from options given

locations, 15% in arts centres and 11% in community centres.

- **Engaging with disadvantaged or marginalised communities:** Some 55% of artists have engaged with disadvantaged or marginalised communities, while 22% have not but would consider it. Cost was identified by 70% of artists as the biggest **barrier** to youth participation in this area, followed by lack of choice at 59%, location at 55%, lack of age-appropriate events at 55%, lack of interest at 33% and other interests such as sport at 25%.
- In response to **what artists would like to see more of for young people in Offaly**, respondents indicated: dance - 48%, art - 44%, film - 44%, music - 40%, circus - 33%, literature - 33%, digital media - 29%, and musical theatre - 29%. Photography, street art, spectacle and contemporary theatre were other named interests that should be explored.
- All of the artists surveyed (100%) were willing to upskill to share their expertise with young people. **Artist supports needed to provide workshops** included funding, a suitable location to act as both a venue to conduct work in and also to store appropriate materials, plus training in facilitation, workshop management and confidence-building skills. Many suggested introducing a competitive funding stream for the purchase of equipment and materials that could be used in community contexts for work with young people.

“ THE ARTS SPEAK DIRECTLY TO YOUNG PEOPLE’S MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES AND OFFER A VARIETY OF PLATFORMS TO ‘GIVE THEIR SORROW WORDS’. THE ARTS BRING THEM OUT OF ISOLATION INTO COMMUNITY AND BUILD THEIR RESILIENCE. ONE-TO-ONE SPECIALIST THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION HAS ITS PLACE, BUT IT IS A LIMITED RESOURCE THAT WILL NEVER SOLVE THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE. EVERY YOUNG PERSON TODAY IS CHALLENGED TO ADAPT TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING AND FRIGHTENING WORLD FOR WHICH THERE ARE NO CLEAR ‘MAPS’. THE ARTS HAVE A CRUCIAL ROLE TO PLAY IN HELPING THEM MAKE SENSE AND NAVIGATE THESE NEW FRONTIERS. ”

*Dr Tony Bates
Founder
Jigsaw - The National Centre for Youth Mental Health*

Focus Groups

Focus Group Methodology

Having completed quantitative research on preferences, qualitative research was then undertaken through the medium of focus groups. Three focus groups were held with young people in Offaly aged 13-24. Questions were prepared in advance which would facilitate group discussions and feedback via wallcharts, nominated spokespersons and in some cases, drawings. The line of questioning mirrored the online surveys in terms of garnering information but flexibility was allowed to go with the mood in the rooms if there was a thread to follow.

The following were discussed by the groups:

- What art forms you engage in already?
- Why do you take part?
- What kind of positive outcomes have you had from youth arts?
- Descriptions of good/bad arts experiences
- Practicalities - where and when activities take place, how often, costs?
- Barriers to engaging
- Supportive factors
- Engagement with the arts as audience members
- What do you want more of?

The groups who participated were as follows:

Group 1:

Transition year students at Oaklands Community College, Edenderry

Number of participants: 14

Age group: 16 to 17

Group 2:

Youth club participants at Offaly Travellers Movement Youth Club, Tullamore

Number of participants: 5

Age group: 13 to 16

Group 3:

Invited sample of audience at Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, Birr

Number of participants: 6

Age group: 16 to 23

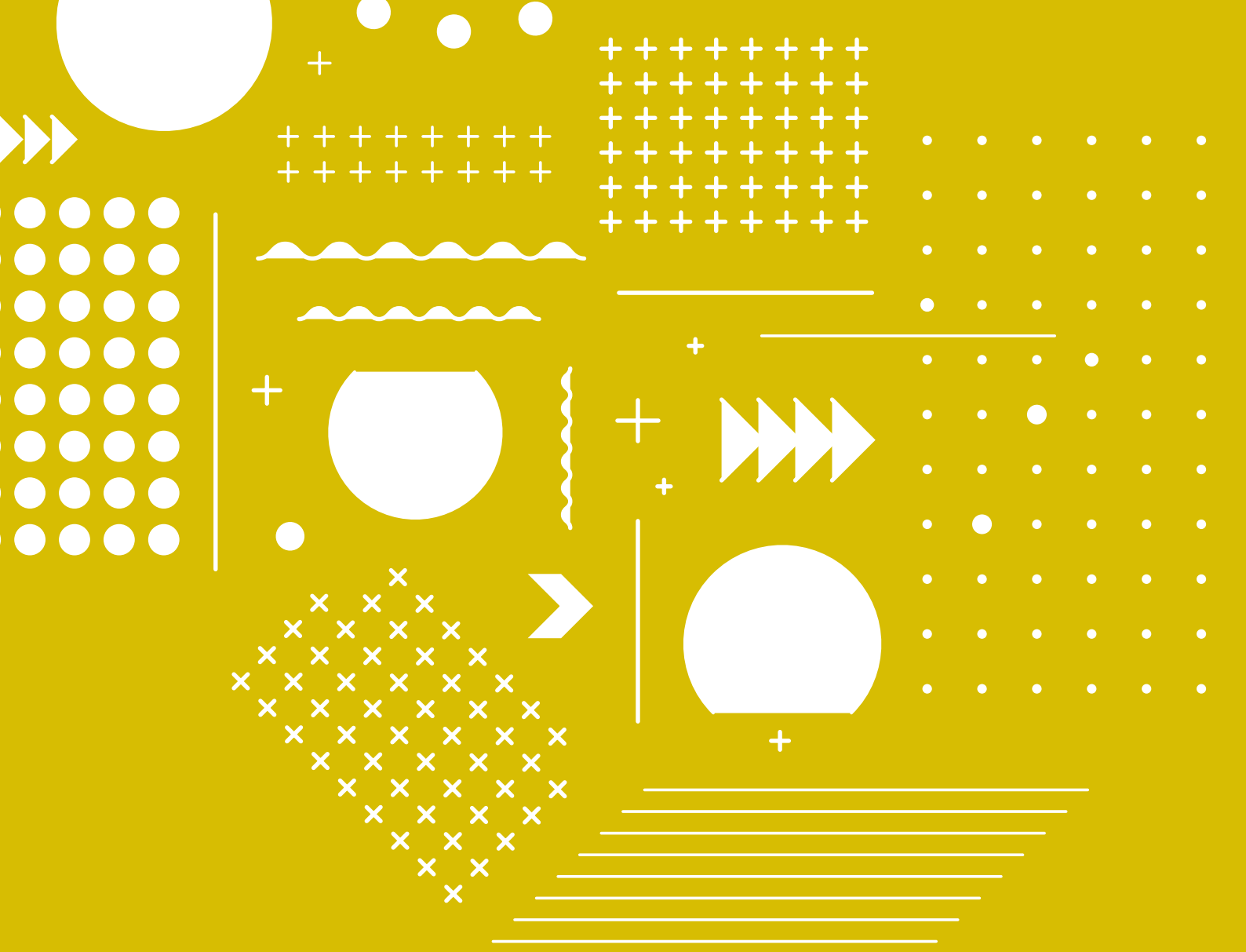
Findings - Focus Groups

- Young people in all three groups needed explanations and examples on what exactly constituted 'arts'. The highest ranking art forms that young people engaged in regularly were: drama, music, art, film, digital media and dance.
- The **biggest motivation** to take part was "to have fun", followed by "to chill out" or relax and "learning something new".
- **Positive and negative outcomes:** Improved self-confidence was the biggest positive outcome from participation in all three groups. Negative outcomes varied in the three different locations. In Edenderry, young people discussed projects ending as a negative and feeling there was "nothing for us out here". At Offaly Travellers Movement in Tullamore, young people reported the feelings of "shame" associated with performing in public and feeling lost in a big group. At Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, young people discussed favouritism in casting and balancing study with rehearsals for plays and musicals.
- **Practicalities** varied a lot in the locations. The majority favoured activities that could happen right after school, ideally in or close to school. Getting home and back into town again was highlighted as problematic by those who lived in rural locations.
- The **barriers to engaging** in Groups 1 and 3 were listed as: cost, lack of choice, lack of time, lack of interest. At Group 2, Offaly Travellers Movement members identified facilitators' lack of understanding of Traveller culture as the biggest barrier to participation.
- **Supportive factors** that would encourage participation were: low or no costs, good teachers, learning support, non-judgemental attitudes and fun atmosphere.
- Young people's main regular way to **engage with the arts as audience** members was through cinema, musicals, music and dance.
- The following art forms were selected as the top six that young people wished to see more of in Offaly: film, music, digital media, dance, drama and circus.



CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'SURVEY FINDINGS'

- **Who?** There are stakeholders on whom a strategy can be built. These stakeholders are: 1) young people as makers; 2) artists as facilitators of skill-sharing; 3) youth services as facilitators of potential target groups and venues; 4) arts service providers as facilitators of advice, guidance, training and overarching vision.
- **What?** The depth of interest in art forms is larger than participation. Discussions at focus groups on what constituted art indicated the potential for embracing new ways to engage young people through new media and digital devices. Unpicking some of the barriers to participation such as cost and looking at what people named as reason to participate, which possibly are not being addressed, such as certification, can be a way to open up participation rates.
- **Where?** Location of arts activities is an important consideration. Much of arts engagement is happening in schools - this can be viewed as either a challenge or an opportunity. Private tuition accounts for much of respondents' experience of the arts and yet cost is identified as a barrier to participation. Bringing this back to the social, economic and geographical makeup of Offaly is important. Addressing the issue of 'where' is a way to address access and inclusivity of arts activities.
- **When?** Survey feedback and focus group discussions indicate that young people are identifying a need for a broader, more multi-disciplinary youth arts strategy. Experience of many art forms outside of school settings is limited.
- The key to nurturing the development of a new model of youth arts engagement is collaboration and partnership. The fusing of the specific skill sets of adult youth workers and artists under the guidance of Offaly County Council Arts Office could allow everyone to work to their strengths for enhanced opportunity for young people to engage with the arts.



CHAPTER

SEVEN



CONSULTATION TRENDS

The overall consultation process involved 27 professionals from a variety of local and national organisations from the arts, youth and community sector. Following on from the data collected through surveys and focus groups, this chapter will summarise ideas and suggestions that emerged from these one-to-one interviews. The aim here is to begin to apply the collected information to the beginnings of a strategy.

There was a palpable desire and passion to serve the needs of young people present in the interview phase of this research.

Overview of consultations

The objective of the interviews was to garner information on where the organisation/ department/ individual sat in their provision of youth arts opportunities. The goal was to identify where gaps in provision lay and where opportunities might be further developed. Barriers to engagement, as seen from the point of view of the interviewees, were discussed. With national organisations such as the Arts Council/an Chomhairle Ealaíon, National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and Youth Theatre Ireland, interviews focused more on the national context and how Offaly's provision of youth arts experiences fared comparatively. Policies and funding streams that are specifically relevant to youth arts were discussed. A thread of consistency was a move towards a collaborative way of thinking and a partnership approach to improving opportunities for young people to engage with the arts.

Internal Consultations Offaly County Council

Several departments at Offaly County Council participated in the consultation. Taking into consideration the information shared, the following section outlines suggestions that can enable a better environment for a Youth Arts Strategy to rest within the overall organisation. Within Offaly County Council, placing prominence on the question “Where do young people feature in this?” for any activity or initiative that is being planned, will stimulate a more youth-centric focus. The following are suggestions and observations for each section made during the consultations:

Suggestions and Observations

Public Participation Network

- Promote the advisory process that PPN offers for funding applications to incentivise community to take on youth arts projects.
- Establishment of PPN-funded training in youth leadership, team-building initiatives that support young people to participate with arts projects.
- Prioritise rural isolation with pilot arts projects in rural areas.

Comhairle na nÓg

- Establish an arts subgroup as part of Comhairle.
- Formalise consultations with Comhairle by an agreed pattern of participation and engagement by Offaly County Council Arts Office with the group - to agree to meet three times a year.
- Consider opportunities for members to achieve their objectives through the medium of arts and continue to source funding streams to support such initiatives.

Library Service

- Due consideration given to programming arts events specifically for the 13-24 age group.
- Support of youth arts initiative with provision of space for advisory panel to meet and training room for workshops, particularly in areas without an arts centre, such as Tullamore.
- Consideration given to improving access to learning in youth arts through the medium of books and reference areas in specialised arts topics

Heritage Department

- Continue to explore the possibilities for partnerships on heritage youth projects that can have an arts focus and programming of events that can have a broad appeal for young people.
- Continue to look at the potential for Creative Ireland to support young people to create through the shared mediums of arts, heritage and libraries.



External Consultations - National and Local

Having consulted with identified national and local figures a number of key themes emerged.

Theme 1: Tackling Disadvantage

Under Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 and the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015 discrimination is unlawful in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services. The grounds for discrimination are: gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

Chapter 1 looked at how disadvantage features in Offaly, noting that 50% of young people surveyed named cost as the biggest barrier to arts participation. The development of a Youth Arts Strategy can address the inclusivity of arts experience. The following were suggestions and observations drawn from the consultations.

Suggestions and Observations

- Broadening opportunities for arts education in Offaly by the establishment of accredited training with partnerships between Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB), National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and Offaly Local Development Company (OLDC).
- Consideration given to training opportunities in technical skills that support arts projects.
- Look at partnerships with agencies that work in disadvantaged communities; consider migrants, Travelling community, disability sector and consider how the young people in these communities can engage with the arts.

- Work closely with The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon in planning how to consider disadvantage when working with young people.
- Continue to look at Per Cent for Art Scheme as a way to generate quality experiences for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Transport: establish support from Local Link transport service for youth arts projects to bring young people from rural locations together for projects.

Case Study - Disadvantaged: Tullamore Traveller Organisation

The following is an example of how a strategic alliance can be a way to improve participation in youth arts, tackle disadvantage and make new work.

The Tullamore Traveller Movement was launched in 1996 as a response to the needs of the local Traveller community and has since become the Offaly Traveller Movement (OTM). The organisation is committed to working for Traveller rights and social justice throughout the county. A community development organisation, OTM offers services responding to health, accommodation, youth, education and human rights.

Youth workers who work with young Travellers on an ongoing basis provided some excellent feedback and a focus group with young people from the Travelling community identified key considerations. "As a Traveller youth group, there are significant barriers to engaging young people in the arts as a result of cultural differences. Notably there is a reluctance to engage in activities other than the interests of their peers and an overall negative view of arts-focused activities. Confidence can be a big issue for these young people who have little opportunity to shine and express their creativity. This is particularly true for young Traveller males who view the arts as 'soft' and 'for girls'. With previous projects we have noted that a small number of males will initially get involved and actively and positively engage, behind the scenes. However, there is a strong resistance to follow through or 'be seen' in terms of an audience. They seek anonymity in this regard due to the negative view they perceive from their peers towards boys in creative activities. The gender dynamic is present in many other activities however outside of arts, and girls are generally easier to engage than boys. While there are barriers that present themselves in attempting to establish a committed group to participate and follow through in arts activities, there is also a strong underlying interest from the girls in these projects. They derive a huge amount of benefits from these activities despite being reluctant at first. The confidence and capacity building of young people that has been achieved upon evaluation of a project has been consistently noted. In addition, there is always an interest voiced in youth groups to start an arts-based project despite the surface resistance."

Saranne Lovett,

Youth Worker

Offaly Travellers Movement

Focus Group Discussion Summary

A focus group with young Travellers aged between 12 and 16 highlighted the scope for engagement. What was evident is that young Travellers' ability to engage with the arts was diminished by virtue of their minority status. Raw unique talent was evident amongst the young Travellers who frequent OTM. This could be a way for young people to process fears and navigate changes in society, through the medium of artistic expression. The supportive structure of the centre, with youth workers knowing the young people so well, makes it an ideal project to be identified for a pilot scheme to target disadvantage.

Theme 2: Pooling Resources

In examples where projects have excelled, such as Waterford Youth Arts, The Grainstore and Galway Youth Theatre³⁷, a partnership approach upon establishment has been a key indicator of success and longevity. Offaly's urban areas are small in comparison to some of these examples. There are limited resources available in every context - from rooms to rehearse and perform in to skilled professionals to work with the young people. It makes sense to work in collaboration, to make the most out of available resources. A shared approach where a youth project could offer space and support by means of staff or volunteers who are familiar with the young people could boost engagement. If Offaly County Council Arts Office could fund an artist to work with groups in these contexts, it could cut through a lot of the barriers that both artists and professionals working with young people have identified. (see Appendices for full details) The consultation process highlighted that the partnership process can be the way forward for youth arts in Offaly. Chapter 4 'Resourcing Youth Arts' looked at the options for partnership development in greater detail.

Theme 3: Meeting Young People where they are at

Young people in full-time education are 'time poor' and under a lot of pressure to spend their spare time working towards school and college work. Youth workers referenced the difficulties facing many of the young people they work with, such as economic constraints, lack of parental support to attend out-of-school settings, low attention spans due to overuse of social media and technology, exam pressure and ignorance of what constituted youth arts. A strategic Youth Arts Strategy must meet young people where they are at, both literally and metaphorically.

Youth arts needs to enter their space in a language that they recognise and understand, providing opportunities for young people in places or services where they are already engaging - schools, youth clubs or any setting where young people attend on a regular basis.

Getting into the 'headspace' of young people, including how opportunities to engage with the arts are designed, packaged and promoted, is essential. This could mean, for example, looking at a graffiti project or smartphone photography as a way to engage a group in visual arts.



³⁷ <https://www.galwayartscentre.ie/en/galway-youth-theatre>

CONCLUSION/KEY POINTS ON 'CONSULTATION TRENDS'

What emerged from the consultations is the need to adjust focus to enable Offaly County Council to meet needs more completely. This requires some structural reform in parts, a shift in thinking for individuals in leadership roles and a greater consistency in the exploration of collaborative opportunities. There are existing structures within Offaly County Council that can support youth arts in ways that are not exhaustive of resources, both financial and human. With the Public Participation Network (PPN), Comhairle na nÓg, Library Service and Heritage Department, there are opportunities to improve and increase focus on youth arts and to boost engagement through a collaborative approach.

In the local community sector, youth workers who were consulted displayed a keen understanding of the benefits of youth arts and a commitment to provide and support arts opportunities for their service users. Collaborating with youth services in Offaly is something to consider as a way for a youth arts model to evolve.

National organisations with arts and youth focus are also very keen to advise, support and collaborate with Offaly County Council to rejuvenate youth arts in Offaly and boost opportunities for young people.

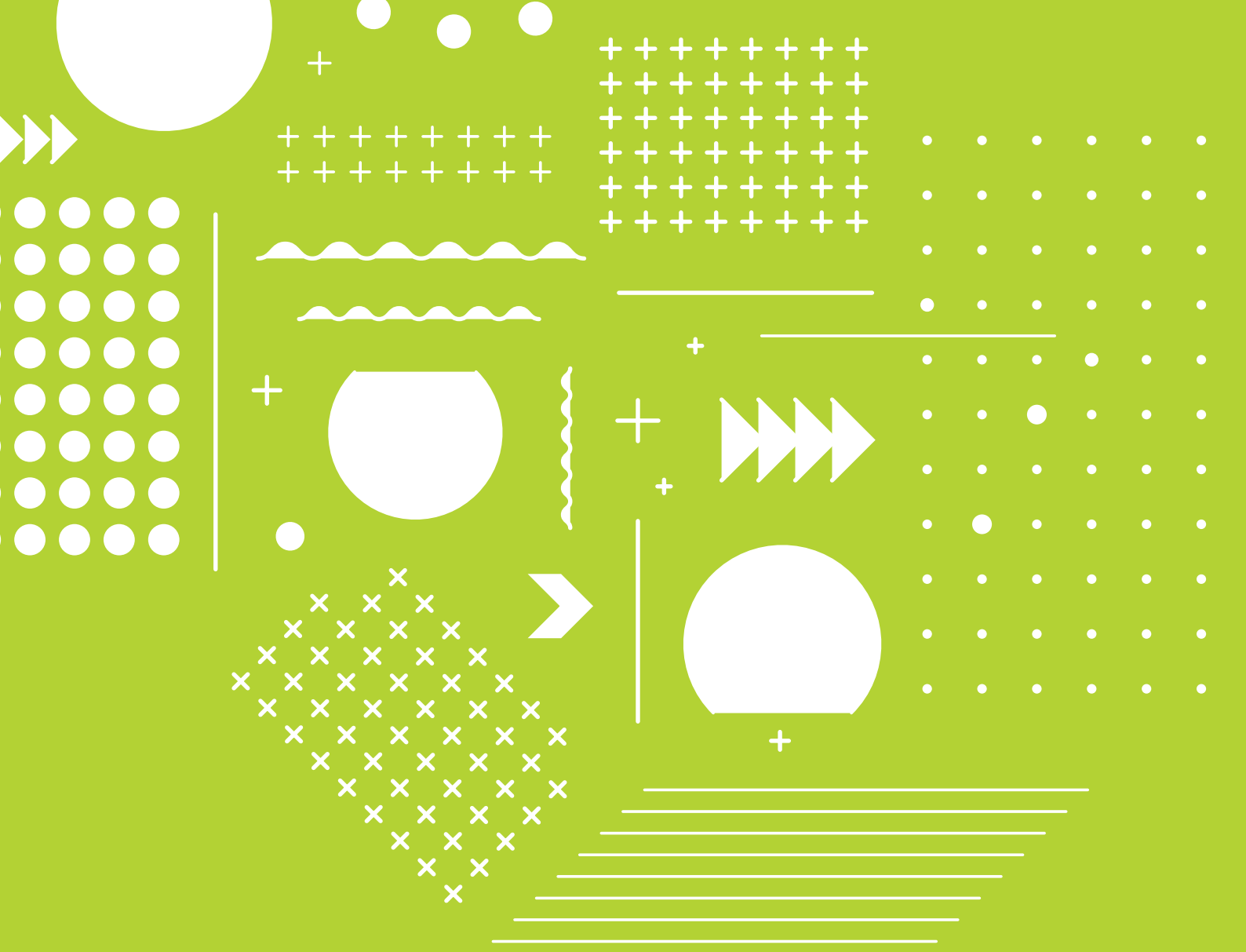
Three strong themes emerged from one-to-one interviews and consultations with a wide range of individuals. The input of those consulted was that a policy on youth arts must pay close attention to these areas: the importance of a) tackling disadvantage, b) pooling resources, c) meeting young people where they are at.

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- Deery, Macdara - Offaly Youth Theatre
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- Ní Bhriain, Seona - Arts Council of Ireland
- Ní Chonail, Muireann - Laois County Council Arts Office
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- O' Hanlon, Bill - St. Mary's Youth Centre Tullamore
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- Stewart, Breda - Offaly Local Development Company
- Thompson, Joe - Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)

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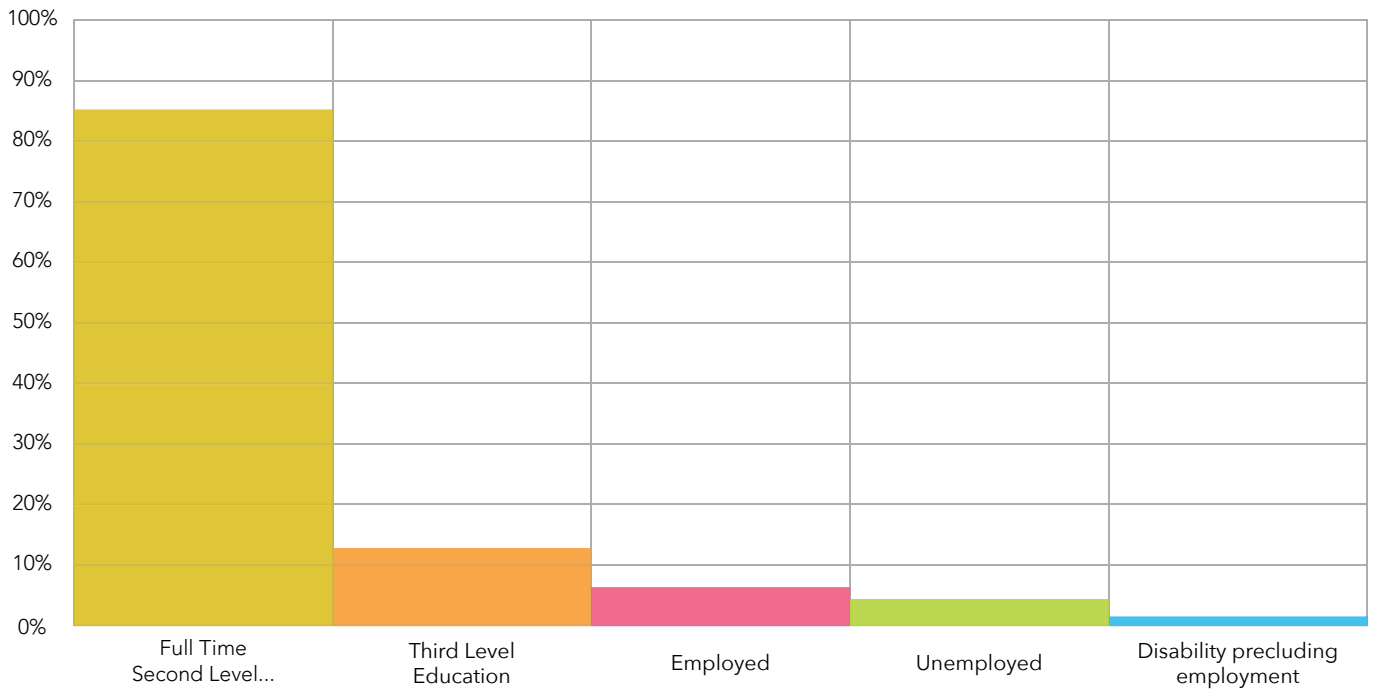
YOUNG PERSONS SURVEY

Appendix 1.1 - Young Persons Survey

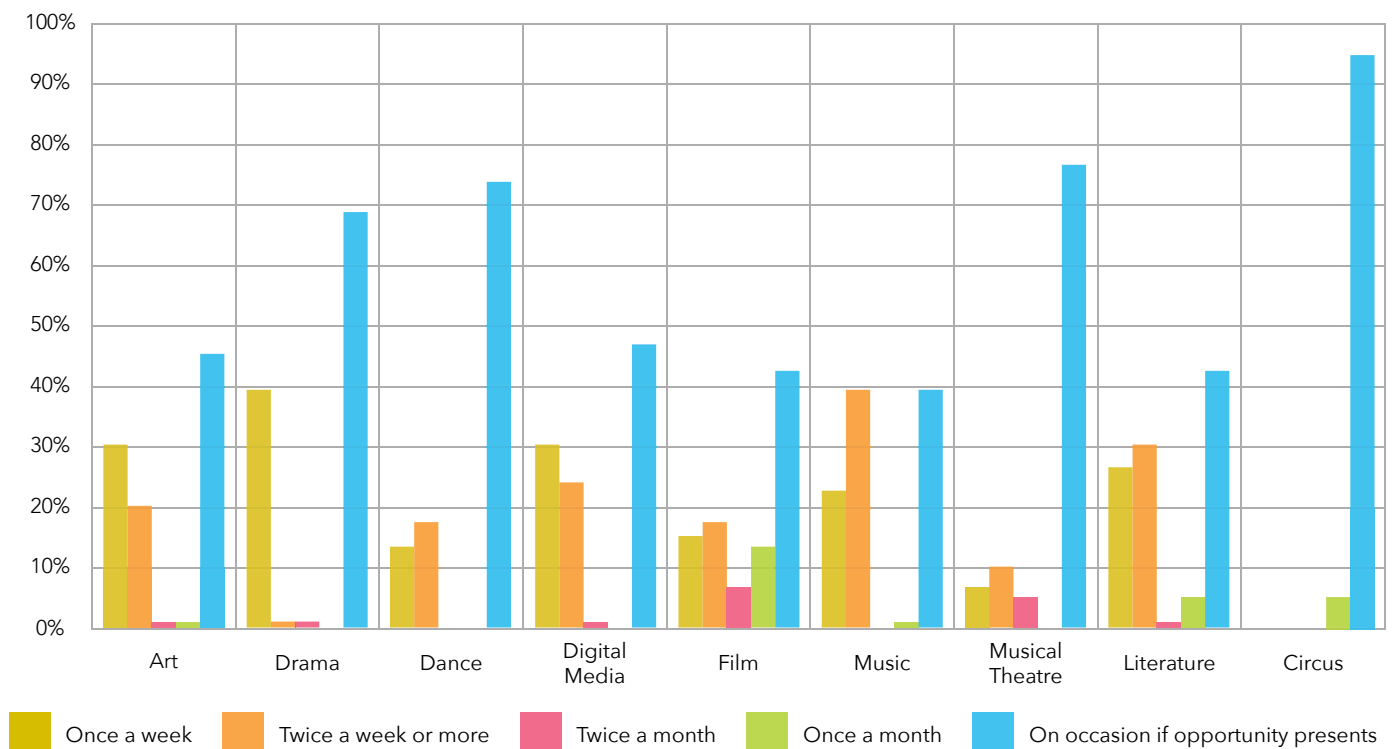
Of those 115 young people surveyed, there was a 100% completion rate. A total of 76% were aged 13-16, and 24% were aged 17-24. Responses came from the following geographical spread, with highest response in order of appearance as follows: Edenderry, Tullamore, Birr, Daingean, Ferbane, Kinnitty and Clara. Some 37% were urban-based, compared to just under 49% rural-based with 13% based in villages.

Here is a visual summary of the responses.

Q4: Are you in?

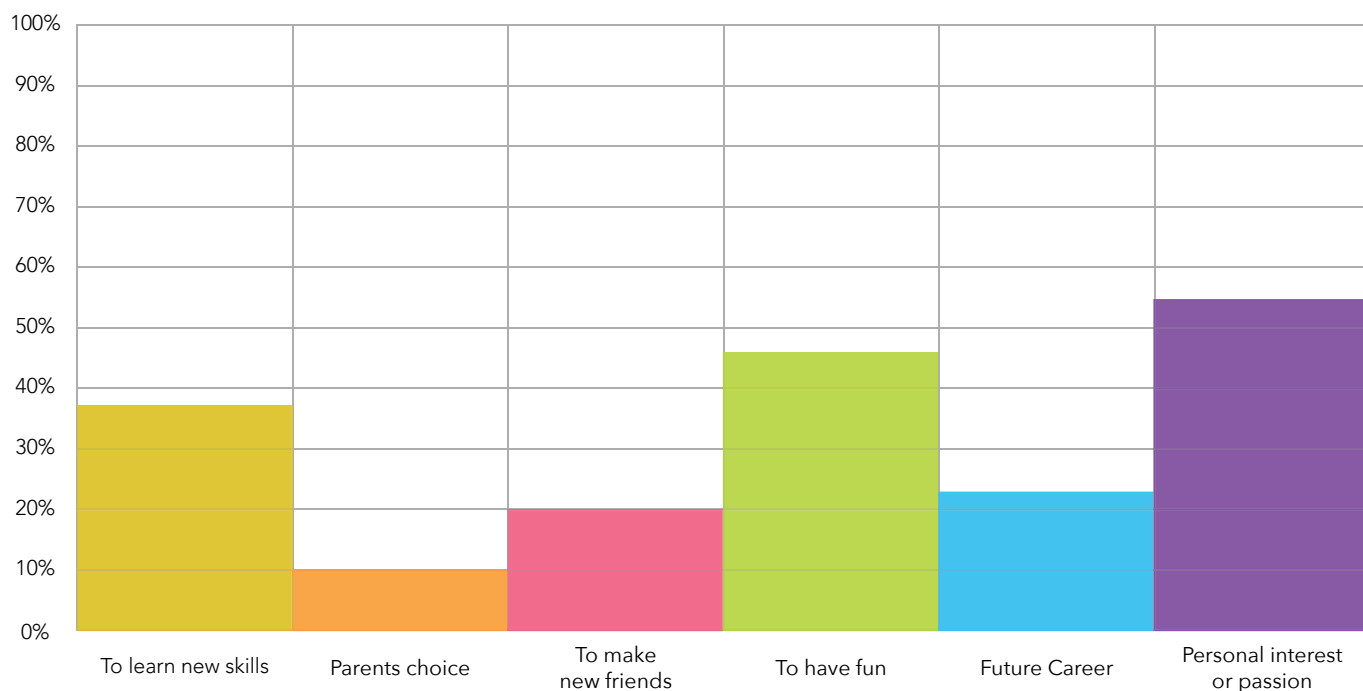


Q5: How often do you take part in any of these Arts activities?



The art forms young people engaged with, ranking the highest, were: drama (38% weekly engagement); art (31% weekly engagement); digital media (26% weekly engagement); literature (23% weekly engagement); music (23% weekly engagement); film (16% weekly engagement); and dance (12% weekly engagement). However, respondents all showed high levels of interest in all art forms "if the opportunity presented", particularly in art, music, musical theatre, digital media and circus. Interestingly, there were no instances of young people regularly engaged in circus, yet over 96% of young people surveyed expressed an interest in doing so were the opportunity presented.

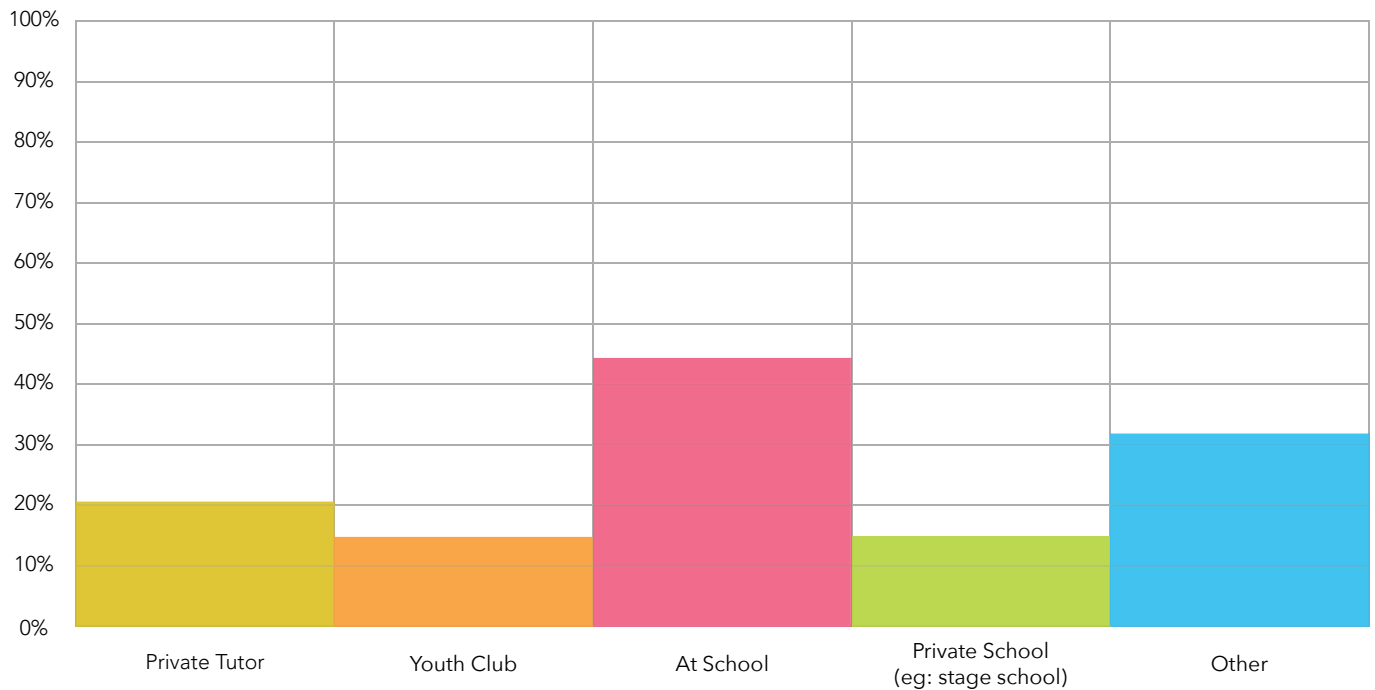
Q6: Why do you take part?



Young people's primary motivation to engage in the arts was "personal interest or passion" with 53% listing this as the reason for participation, followed by "to have fun" - 47%, "learn new skills - 36%, "to work in the field" - 22%, "to make new friends" - 21%, and lastly "parent's choice" was the least popular answer at 10%.

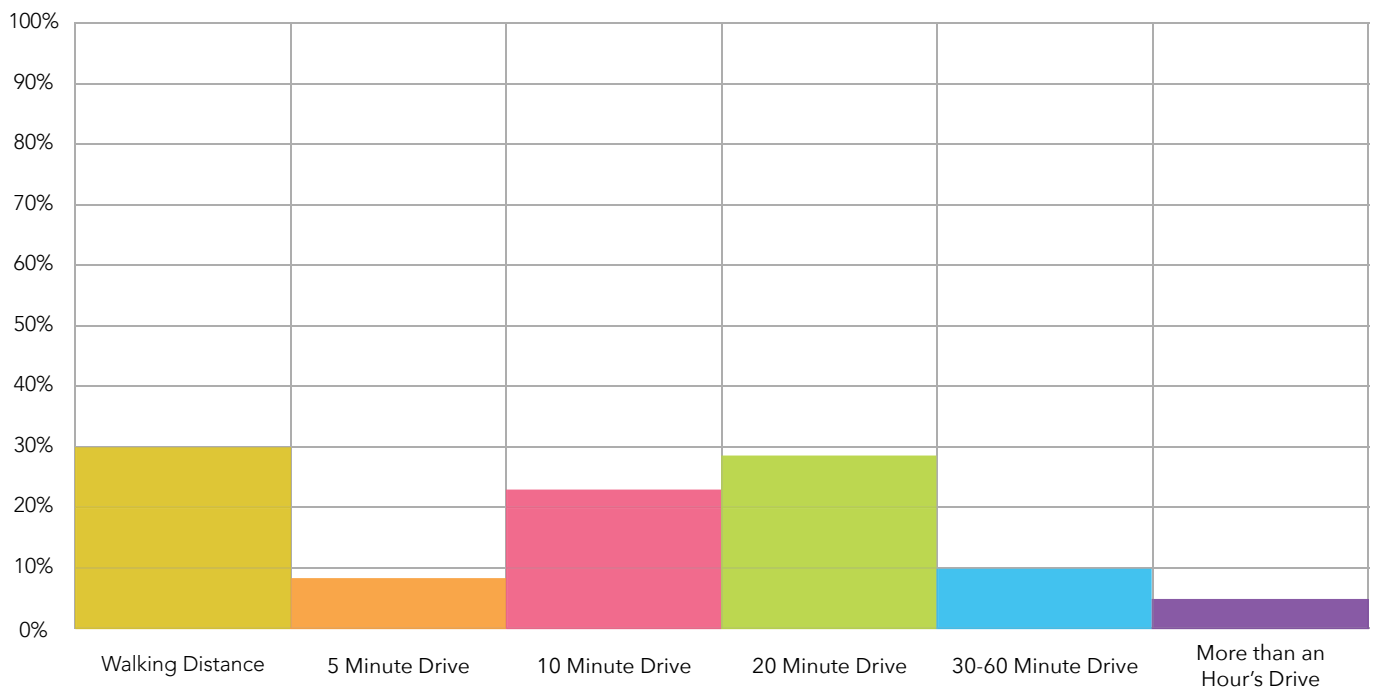


Q7: Where do activities take place?



Most of young people’s engagement with the arts happened at school which 44% of those surveyed listed, followed by private tutor (20%), youth club (15%) and private school such as stage school (14%).

Q8: How far could you travel to attend an Arts class/workshop?

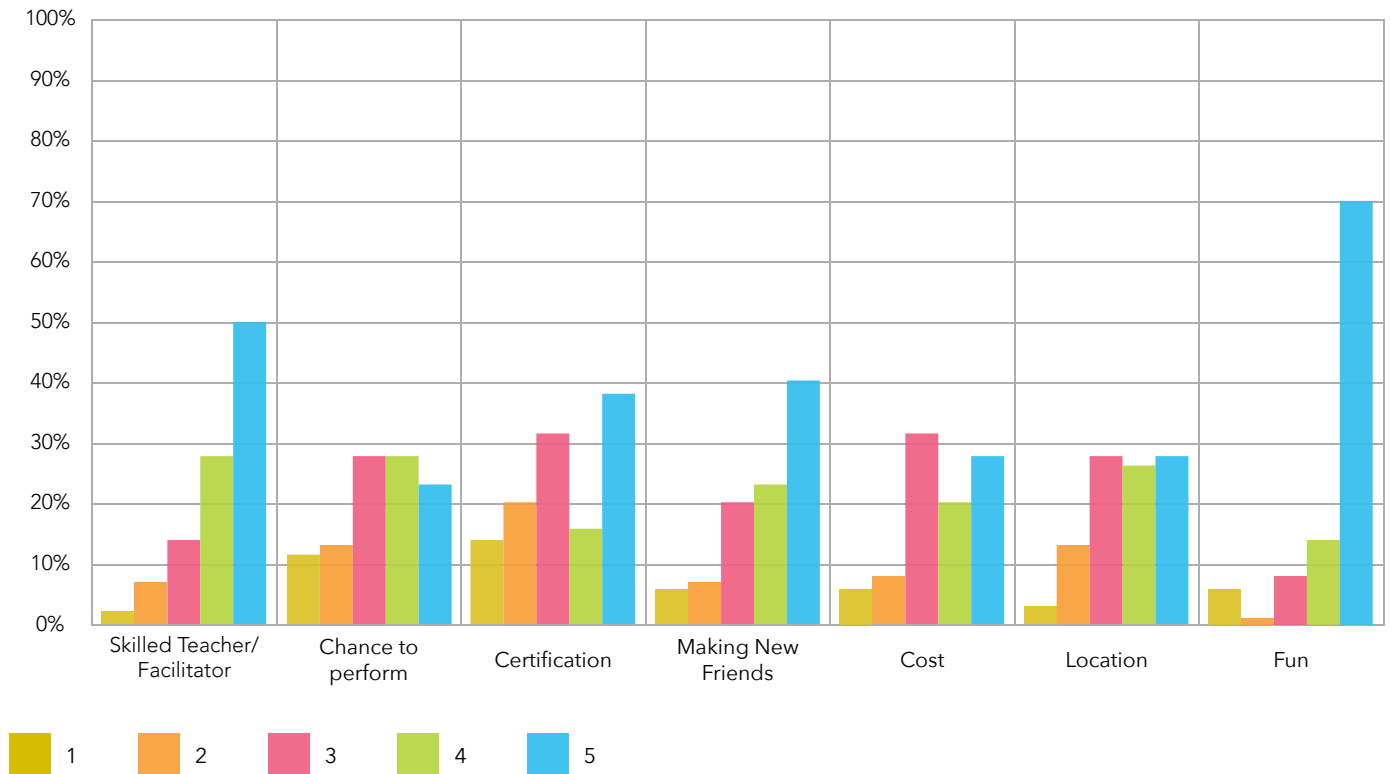


The distance a young person felt they could travel to engage with the arts is particularly pertinent in Offaly, an area where rural links and transport options are limited. For some Offaly residents, there are limited or no public transport options available. Young people rely on parents driving them to activities. This raises the issue of socio-economic divide. In low-income families, access to a car is not always possible. Therefore, if there are not arts opportunities in their local area, the chance of engaging with the arts is limited if it happens outside of school.

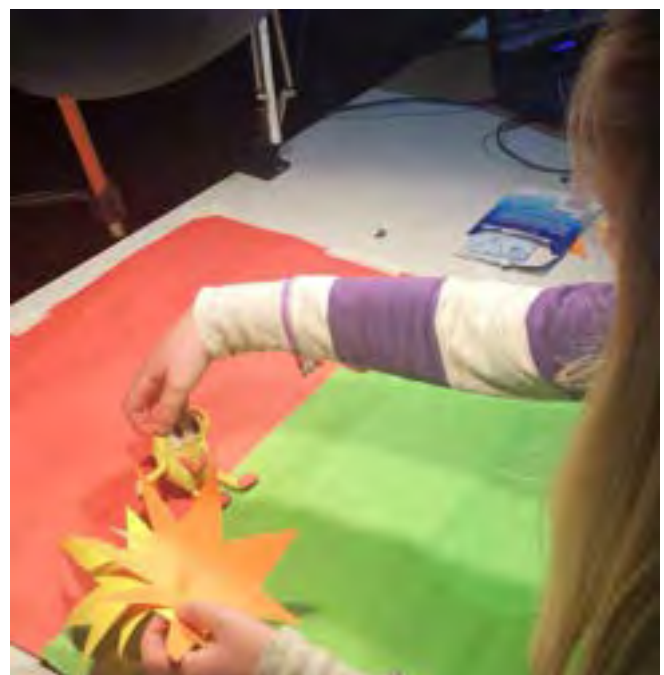
Some 28% of young people surveyed felt they could travel up to a 20-minute drive to partake in an arts class/workshop. For 24% this drive time was 10 minutes, with 23% stating that it would need to be walking distance. Just 9% said they could travel between 30-60 minutes, while 4% said they could travel more than an hour's drive.

What the data shows is the importance of ensuring equal access to arts engagement. If a young person does not have the support structure of a regular public transport service or a driving parent, it's important to consider how they have a chance to engage with the arts.

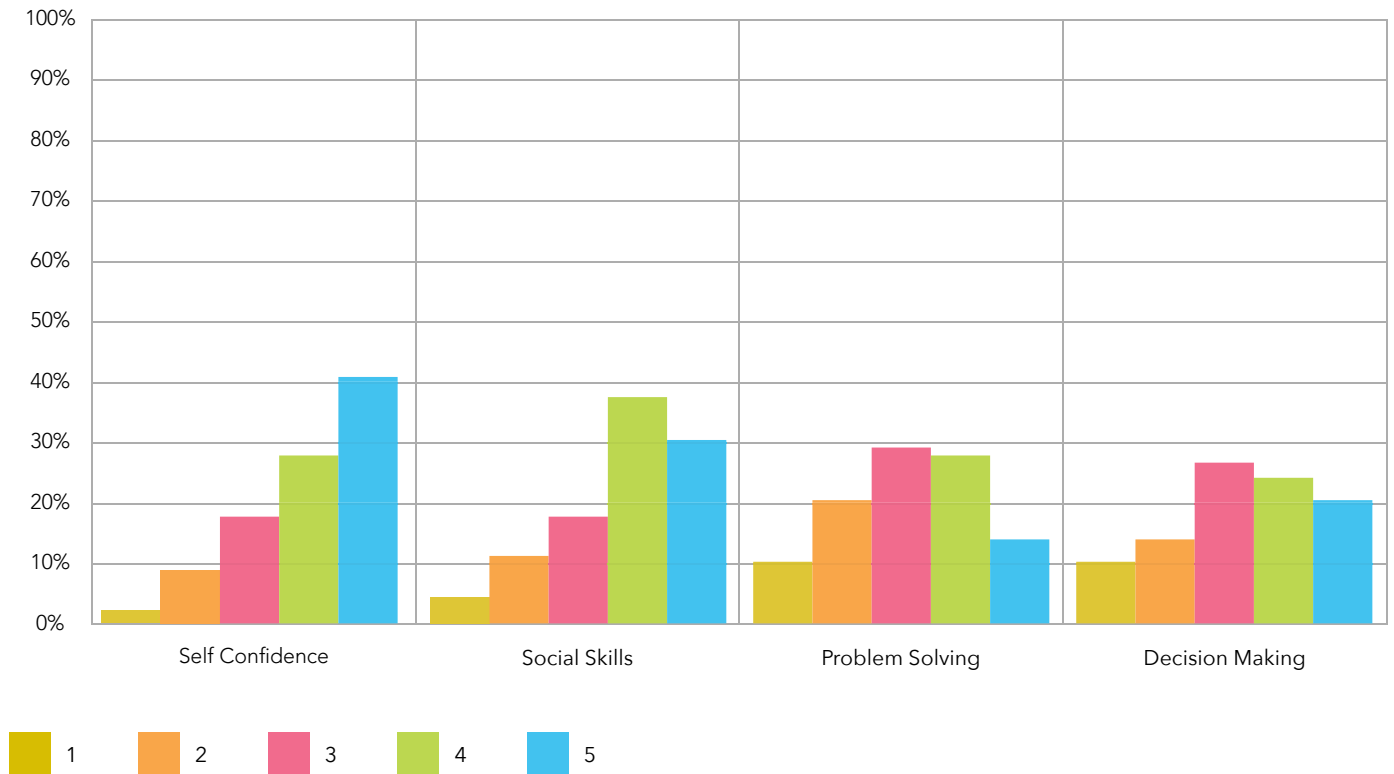
Q9: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 indicating very important and 1 indicating unimportant) how would you rate the following factors of the Arts experience?



Fun is the factor identified as most important by the young people surveyed, with 70% naming fun as the most important influencing factor, followed by skilled teacher/facilitator at 50%. Making new friends was rated as important by 39% of those surveyed. Cost and certification were seen as important to 28% of young people while 27% named location as important and 22% cited the chance to perform as the most important factor. This shows the diverse spread of influencing factors and shows how consideration of all these factors is important when planning activities for the group. It clearly shows also that the fun and social element to the work has to be prioritised. If we are to place ourselves in the shoes of a young person and consider essential motivations and interest levels at that developmental stage, the opportunity to be with our peers in a fun, safe environment is crucial.



Q10: If you have experienced growth in the following areas as a result of an Arts experience on a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate that growth/development? (5 indicating big impact, 1 indicating little impact)



When we consider the 'why' of creating opportunities for young people to engage with the arts, it's important to look at what young people have named as positive outcomes. More than 40% of young people surveyed said they experienced a significant growth in self-confidence as a result of an arts experience, while 29% saw significant growth in their social skills. For 21% of young people, the growth they listed was their decision-making ability, and for 14% of young people their ability to problem solve was improved. Key critical skills in the development of young people are seen here to be resulting from engagement with the arts.

Q11: Can you describe a positive or negative experience you have ever had while involved with an Arts project naming the positive or negative factors that influenced that experience?

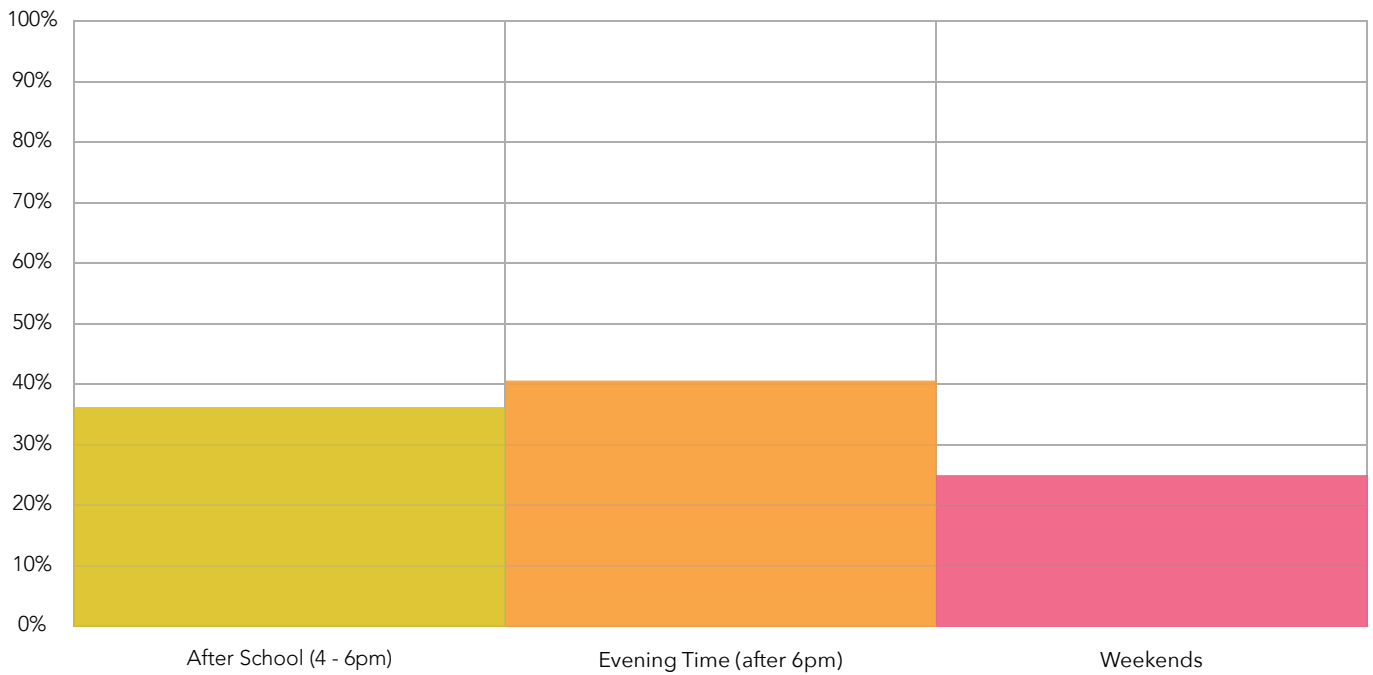
DRAMA **FEELING** **FUN** **CONFIDENCE**
MEETING PEOPLE **POSITIVE** **EXAMS**
MAKING NEW FRIENDS **COMPETITION**
LEARNED **ACTING** **BIG CROWDS** **MUSICAL THEATRE**
SCHOOL **SINGING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE** **NEGATIVE**
DANCE **PLAYING** **GROUP SKILLS**

Above is a graphic showing common words and phrases amongst the data collected to capture what was a good or bad arts experience. The most common positive word occurrence was confidence. Friendship and fun were also common themes as positive outcomes. There were significantly more positive experiences than negative. In instances where negative experiences were described, the reasons followed a pattern including: poor or disinterested teacher, favouritism by teacher, feeling awkward or unsure in front of peers, cost and pressure. What is evident is that facilitation of youth arts projects is more than pairing someone with a skill with a group of young people. Offering training in facilitation and youth work is another way to ensure access to arts for young people. Here is a sample of the comments collected:

- "I got a distinction in a music exam and my drawing became the school logo when I was young and still is to this day."
- "The school show as it helps build confidence whilst on stage performing."
- "The coach is very good there is a lot of respect and the atmosphere is amazing."
- "Positive factors displaying my artistic art to peers and wider community. Negative factors don't proper funding for professional tutors."
- "Being part of my school's musical really boosted my self-esteem and ignited a passion in me for theatre. This was largely to do with the people I was involved with during the show."
- "I was once part of a drama group in which the facilitator barely engaged with or participated with the group. And seemed quite disinterested with the whole thing."
- "Meeting like-minded boys who enjoy singing and playing music. I don't do sport and feel very isolated here."
- "Positive; Boosts confidence and independence. Negative; you need lots of time, energy and money is very expensive."
- "I don't like speaking out in front of big crowds like in a play. I was Joseph in the nativity, didn't the 3 wise men come in and deliver the gifts. I forgot what to say, so instead I just said 'thanks lads'. Everyone in the crowd laughed so I thought it was grand like they thought it was funny but sure after the play the teacher gave out terrible to me."
- "I have always had a positive experience with the Arts and have found it to be a huge positive impact in other areas of my life. Not many people realise it but it presents a lot of skills that are there to be learned that are a huge help in everyday living, professionally and privately."

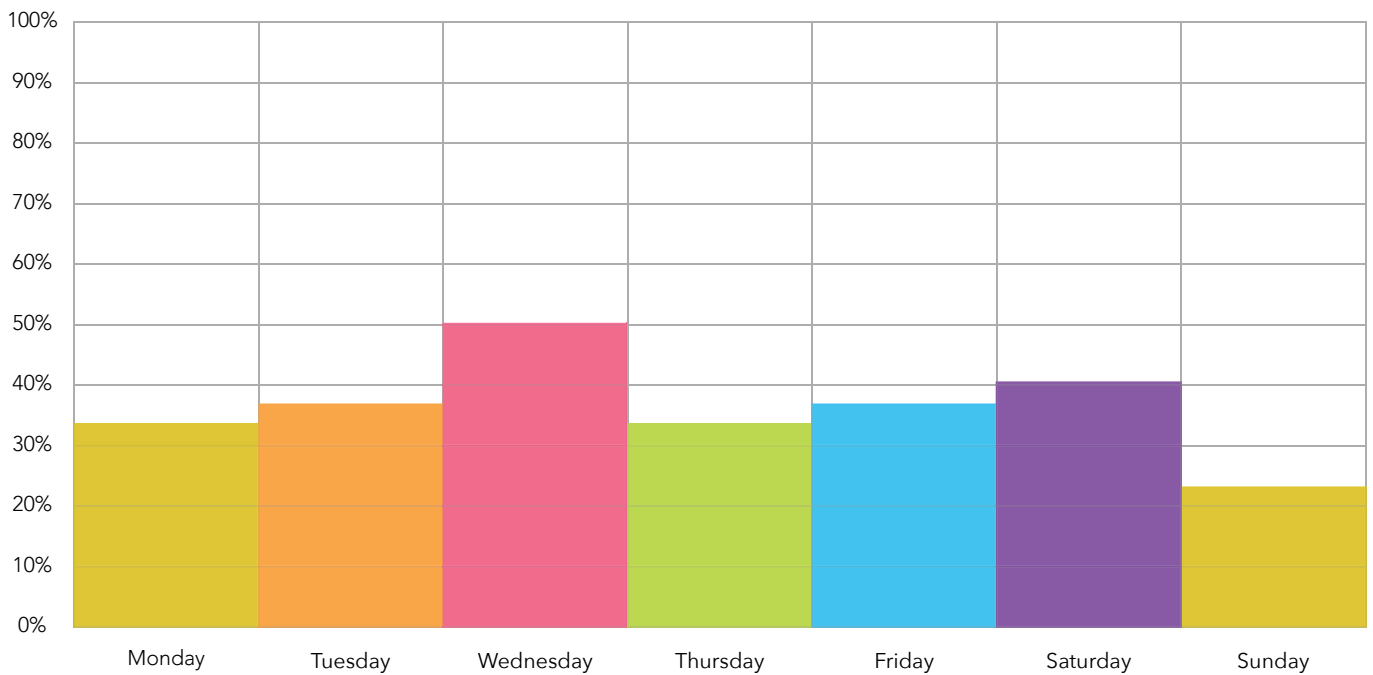


Q12: What time of day is most suitable for attending classes or workshops?



The timing of arts activities is important to ensure appropriateness from a youth perspective and to improve participation rates. Some 39% of those surveyed listed after 6pm on weekdays as best time for classes or workshops, while 37% listed weekdays between 4pm and 6pm as favoured time. Just 22% rated the weekend as the best time for engaging.

Q13: What days work best for attending classes or workshops?



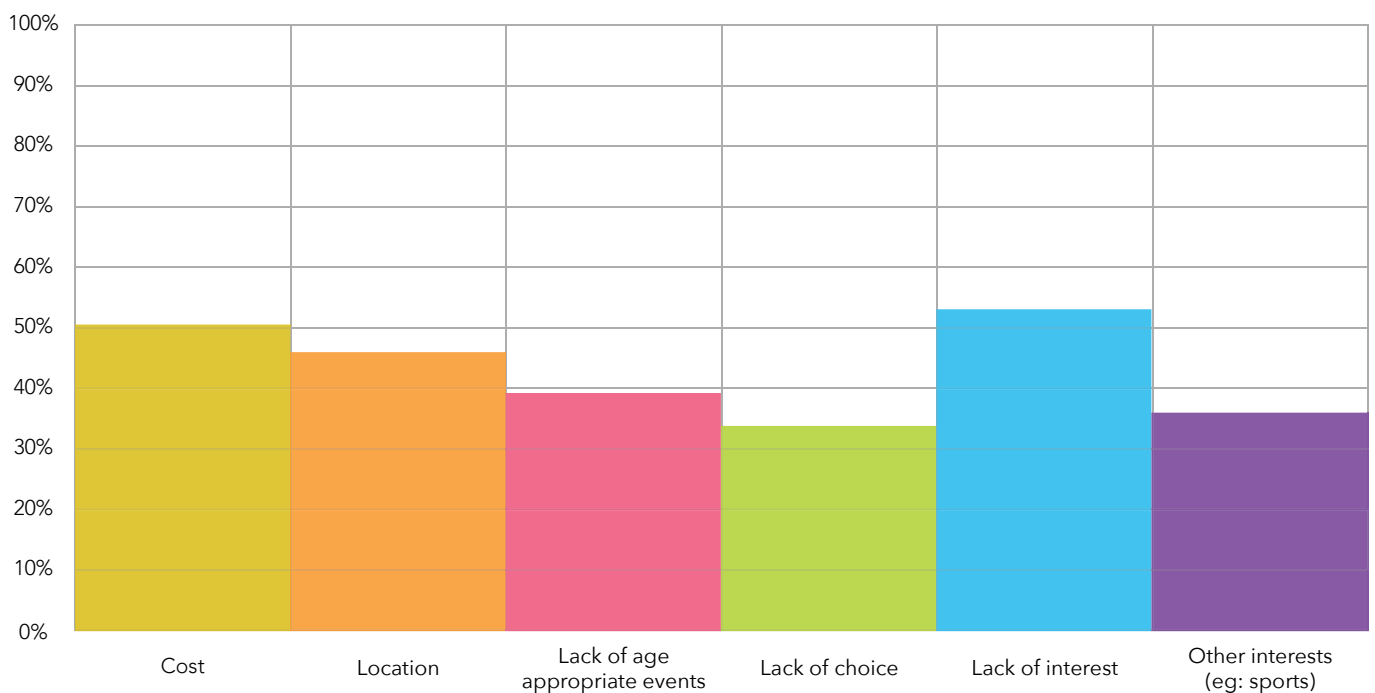
Wednesday was identified as the best day for activities to take place. However, this may be influenced by a high response rate from Edenderry-based young people who have a half-day from school on Wednesdays. The second most popular answer was Saturday, with all the other weekdays averaging 35%. Sunday was the least popular day, listed at 22%.

Q14: Have you ever attended any of the following Arts events as an audience member?



In terms of ongoing engagement with the arts as an audience member, the cinema would be the most common way of engaging with an art form, with the highest proportion of responses signifying an experience of film in the last week, accounting for 20%. The next highest was musical theatre at 9%, followed by a play at 8%, dance performance at 5%, exhibition attendance 3% and opera at 2%. Overall, there were low levels of engagement in the time closest to their completion of the survey (January 2018). However, when asked the same question in the timeframe of 'in the last year', 52% had attended a play, 41% an exhibition, 40% a musical, 33% a concert or gig, 28% the cinema and 2% the opera.

Q15: What do you see as the biggest barriers to young people engaging with the Arts?

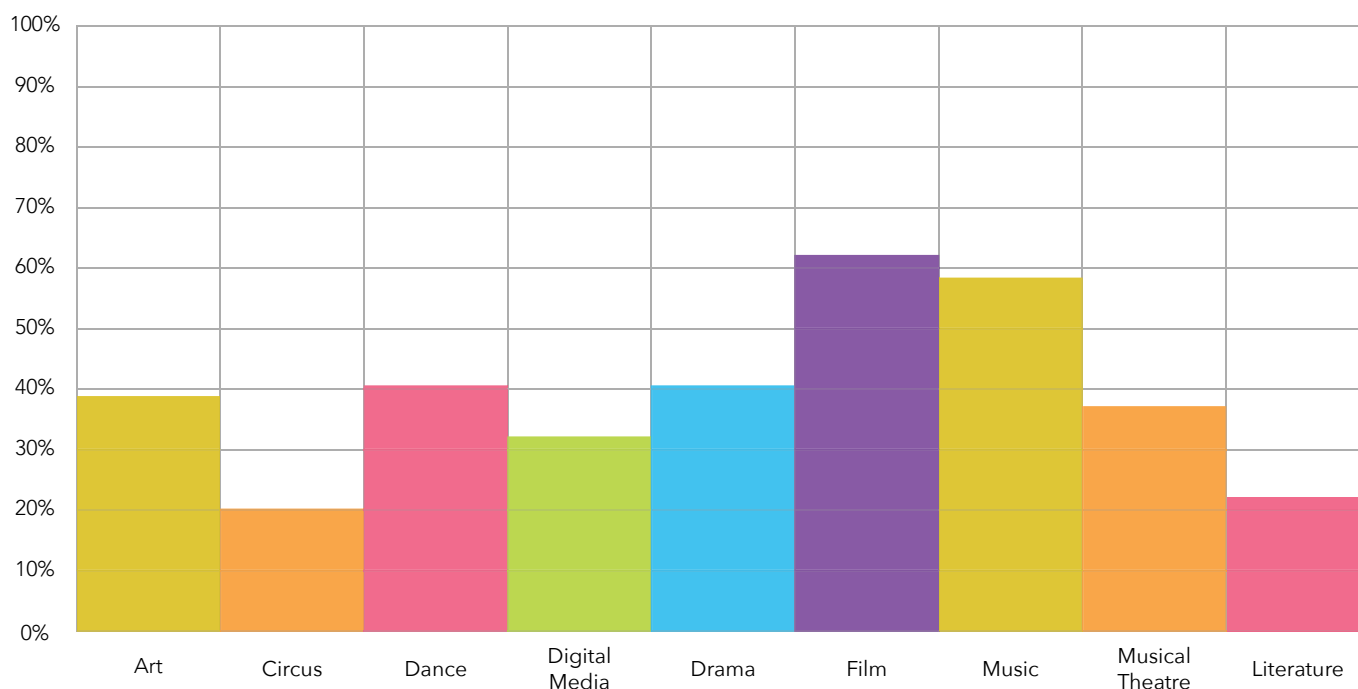


The biggest barrier to engaging with the arts was identified as lack of interest, which accounted for 52% of responses, followed by cost at 50%, location at 48%, lack of age-appropriate material at 39%, other interests such as sports at 35% and lack of choice at 33%. As we can see, this gives us a broader sense of the many reasons why a young person may not engage, and includes many factors which we cannot control such as interest levels and other conflicting interests.

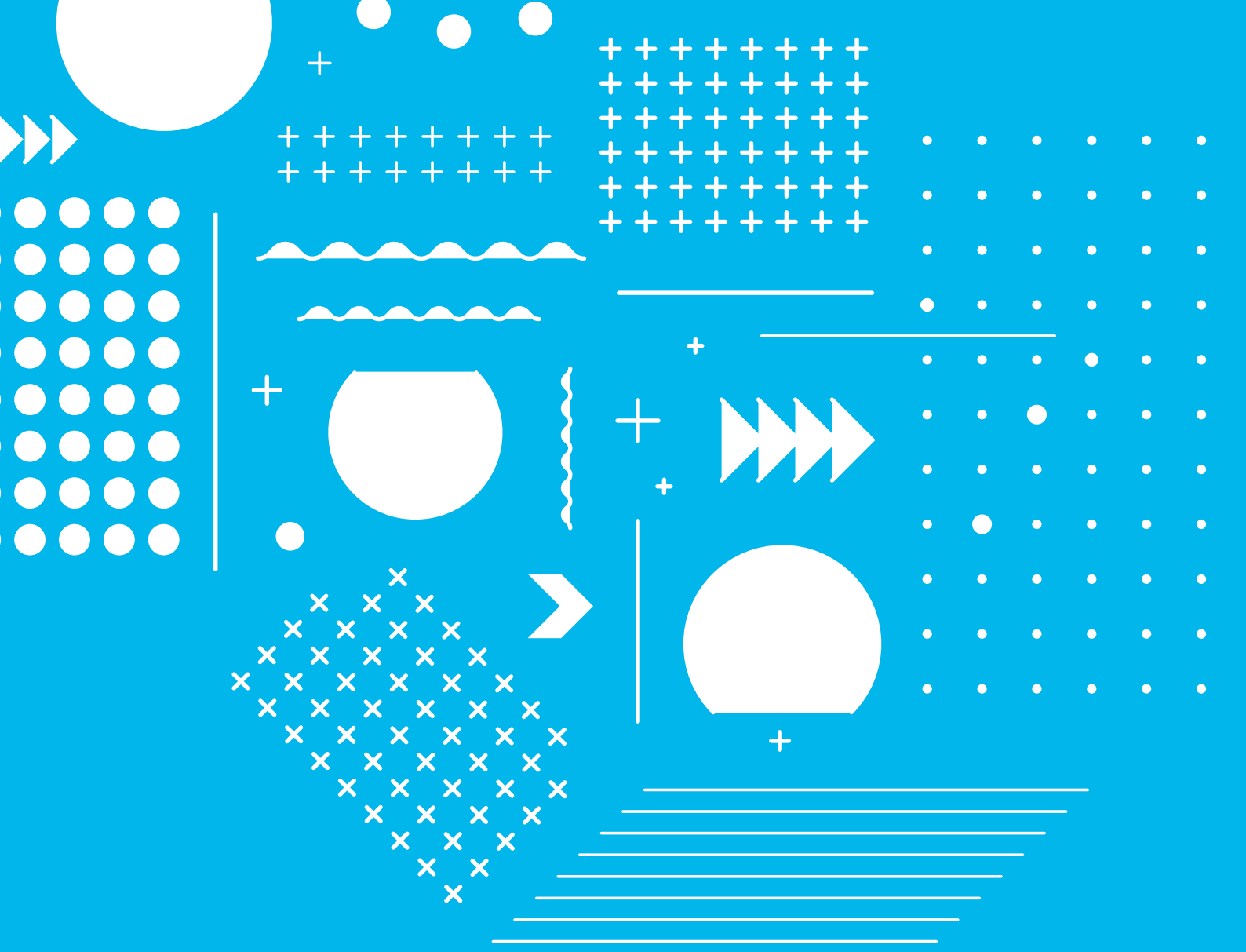
Some of the comments included the following:

- "People are too busy with other activities they do and many don't have the confidence to do something different."
- "A lot of young people just aren't bothered, myself being an example. I don't mean to be rude, sorry :("
- "They need to be less serious."
- "Not as much time to take part in a lot of after school activities."
- "Lack of local groups/ facilities."
- "I think just lack of knowledge of what's out there is a big one. Also though always try to remember how little control teenagers actually have over our lives! Most have to ask parents for money and lifts and are expected to do 7 hours of homework per night (honestly!) So bear these things in mind when organising workshops etc. if you can - us kids may seem mature but there are still parents and teachers to answer to!"

Q16: What type of workshops or performances for young people would you like to see more of in Offaly?



Preferences were quite broad, with film coming in at the number one choice for 62% of those surveyed, followed by music at 58%, drama at 41%, dance at 40%, art at 38%, musical theatre at 35%, digital media at 33%, literature at 22% and circus at 20%. The diverse level of interests amongst those surveyed highlights the importance of consideration of the use of multiple mediums when designing youth arts projects or experiences for young people.



ADULT'S

SURVEY

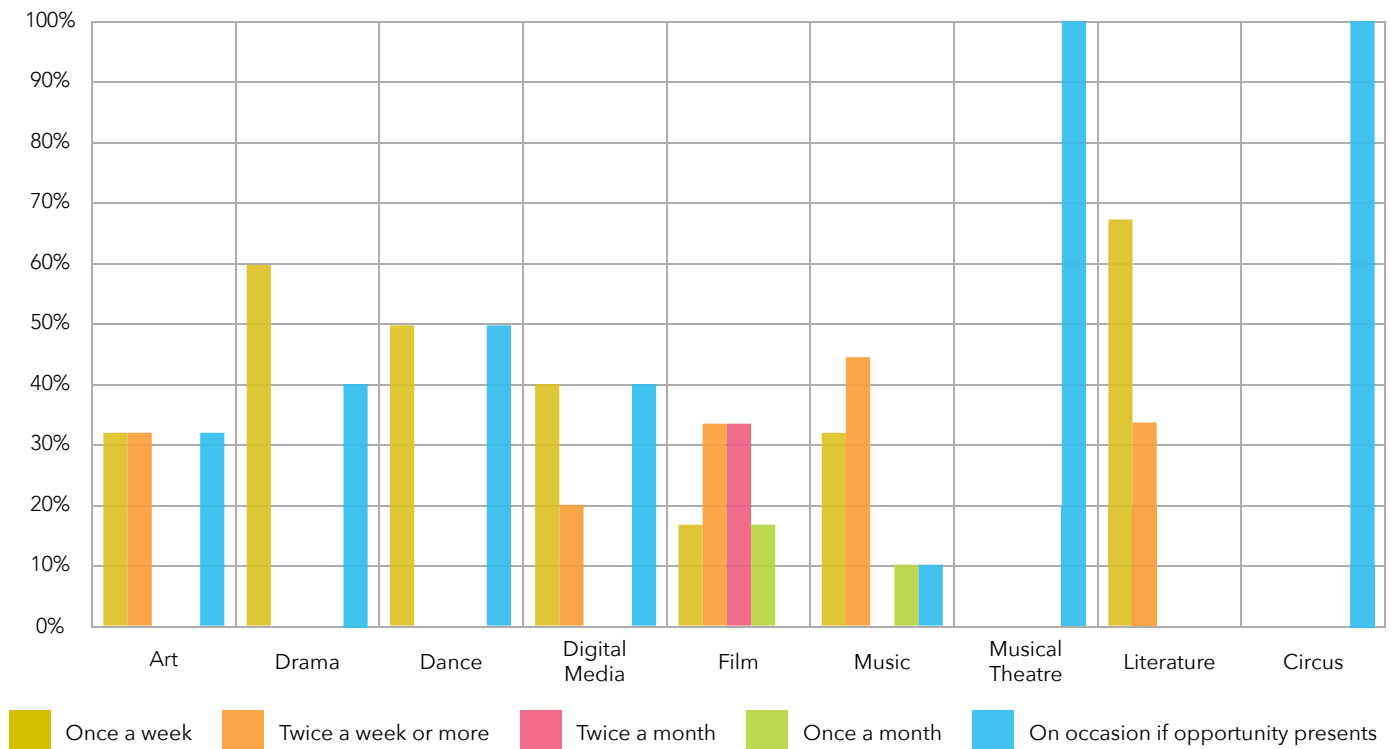
Appendix 1.2 - Adult's Survey

A total of 23 parents took part in the survey and the age category of their children was as follows: 72% were parents of 13-16-year-olds and 40% were parents of 17-24-year-olds. The geographical spread was from Tullamore, Birr, Edenderry and Banagher and surrounding villages and rural areas.

Some 90% of their children were in full-time second level education with 9% in third level education, 4% employed and 4% unemployed.

Parents' Survey

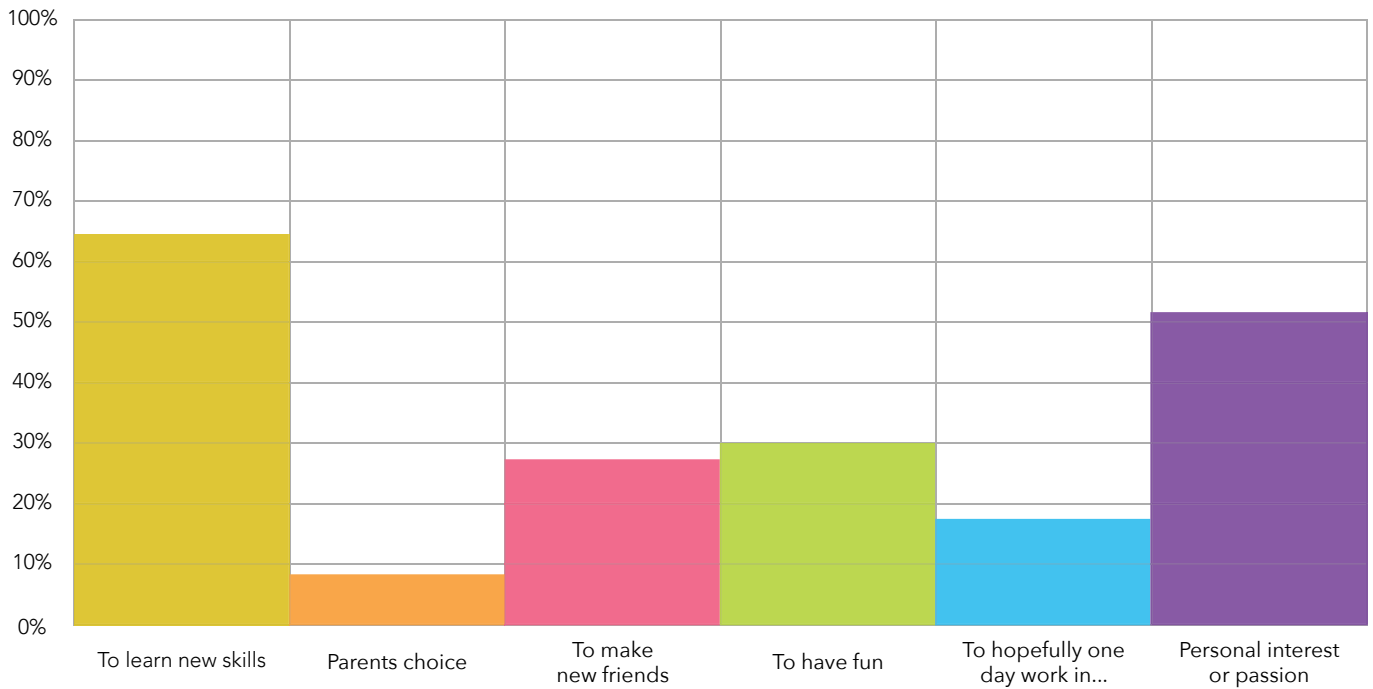
Q4: Does your child take part in any of these Arts activities?



The spread of activity across the art forms was as follows, with 66% of parents citing literature as a weekly activity, 60% mentioning drama, 50% dance, 40% digital media and 33% for both art and music.

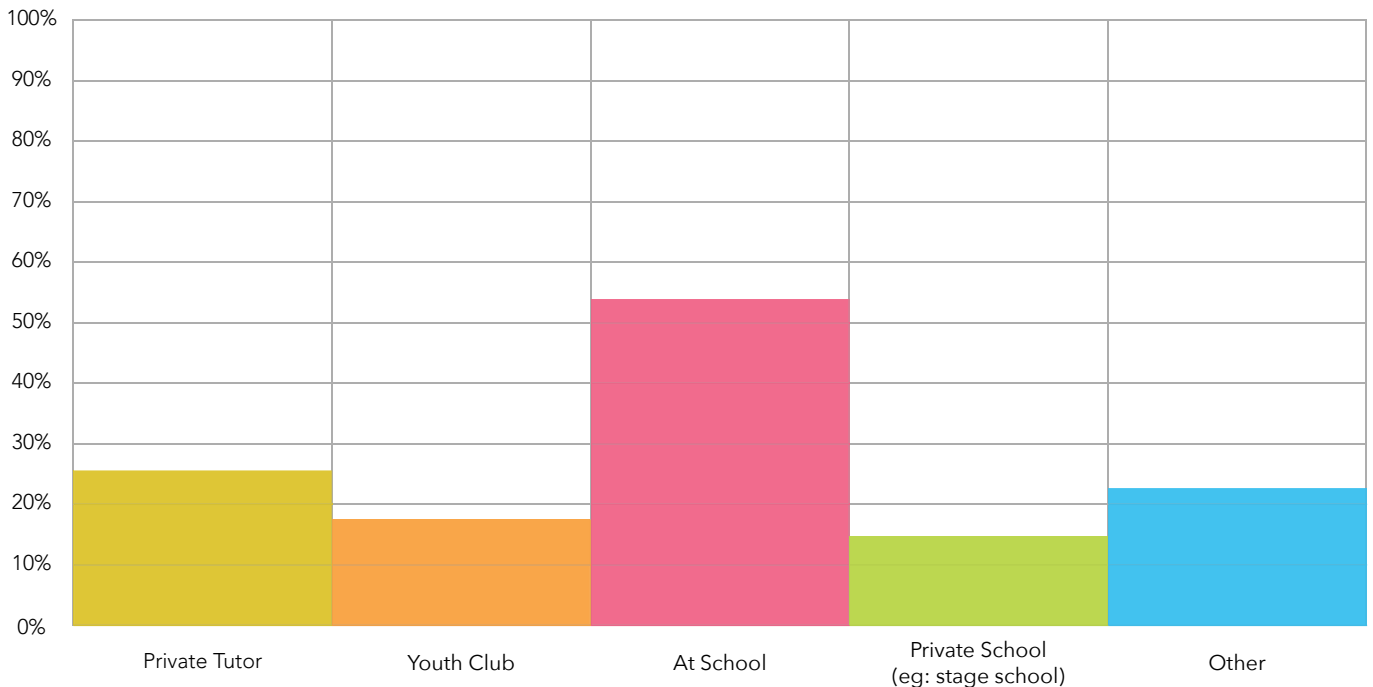


Q5: Why do they take part?



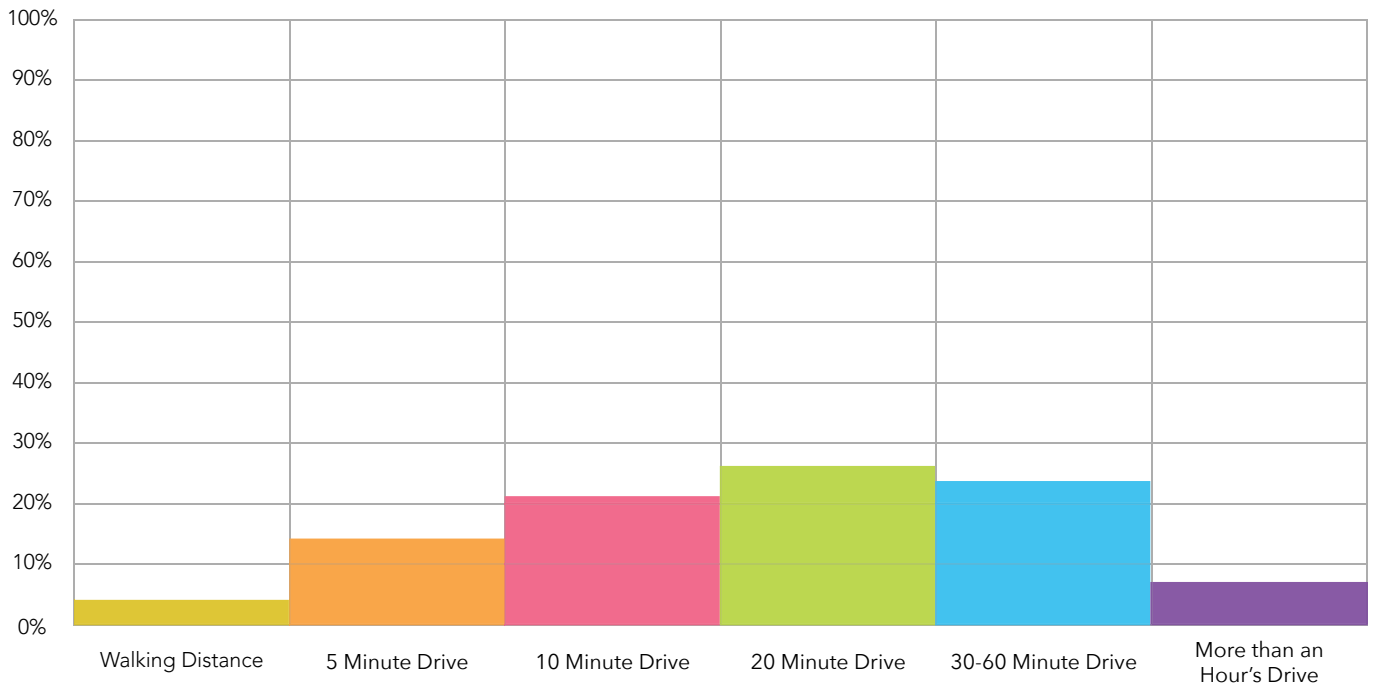
Learning new skills was seen as the most important motivation for 65% of parents, followed by fun, listed by 30% of parents. Making new friends was listed by 26% of parents with 17% listing a desire to work in that area and 8% listing is as parents' choice.

Q6: Where do activities take place?



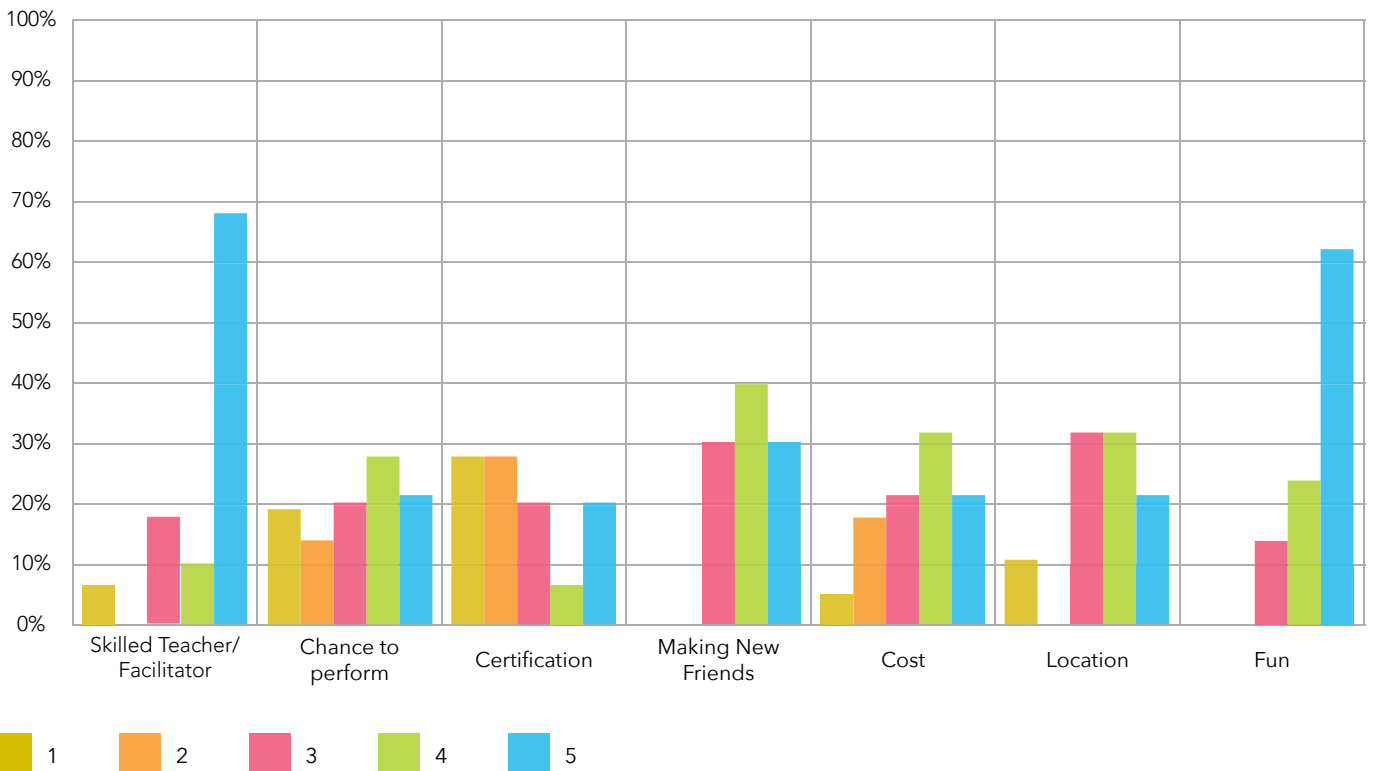
Some 54% of parents said the arts activity happened at school while 27% said it was under private tuition. A further 22% said 'Other' which was compiled of many references to Birr Theatre & Arts Centre, festivals, Music Generation, local pubs and at home. Meanwhile 18% said youth club and 13% said private school such as stage school.

Q7: How far would you travel to bring your child to a class/workshop?



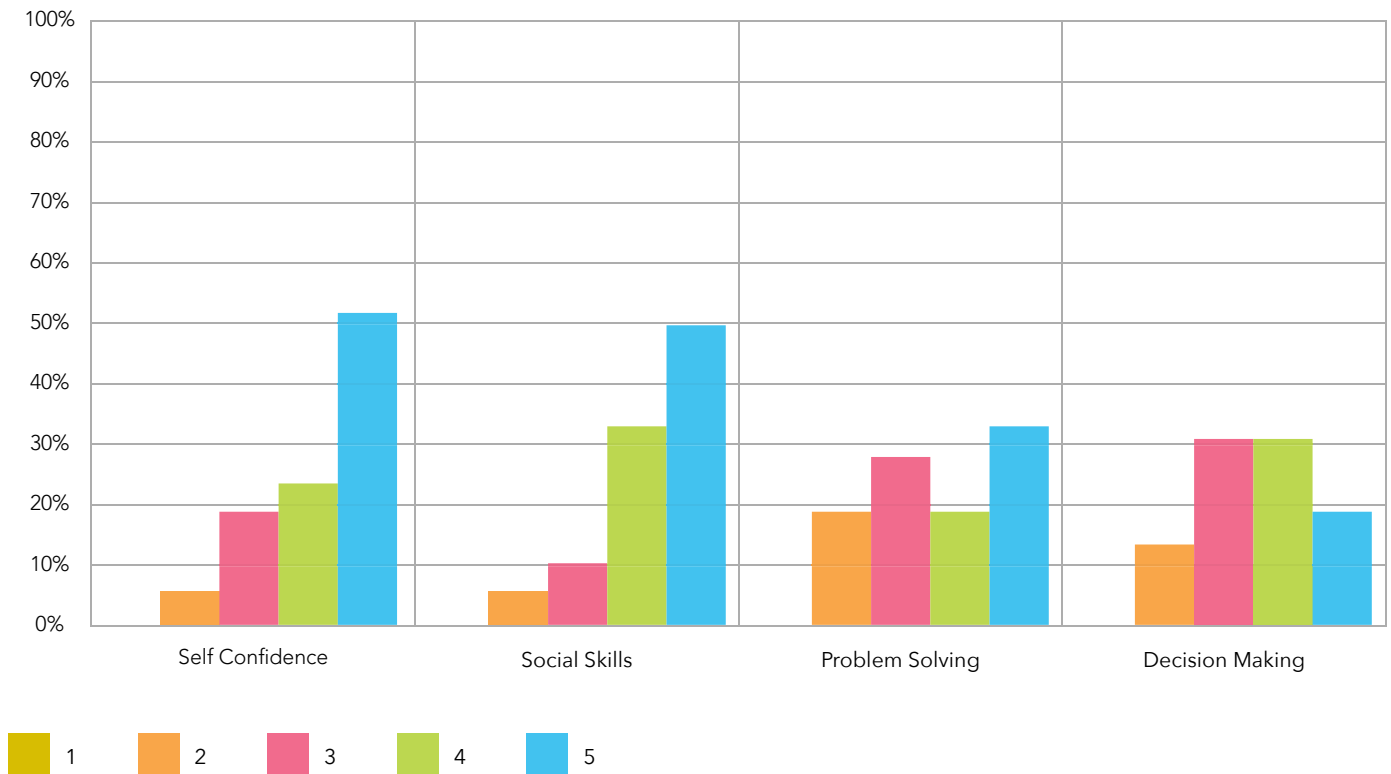
The majority of parents surveyed were willing to drive a child to a class or workshop, with 26% stating they would travel 30-60 minutes by car and 26% stating they would travel up to 20 minutes by car. Some 21% said they would travel up to 10 minutes by car and 8% would travel over an hour. Meanwhile 4% of those surveyed said they would travel within walking distance. The issue this raises is, of course, what happens to the children who do not have access to a car-driving parent who has the means and the time to bring their child on a journey to engage with the arts?

Q8: On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 indicating very important and 1 indicating unimportant) how would you rate the following factors of the Arts experience?



A skilled teacher/facilitator was seen as most important factor by 68% of parents while 63% rated fun as the most important feature, followed by making new friends at 30% of responses. The chance to perform, location and cost all featured as important to 22% of parents, with 21% listing certification as an important factor.

Q9: If your child has experienced growth in the following areas, on a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate that growth/development as a result of their development as a result of their involvement? (5 indicating big impact and 1 indicating little impact)



A total of 52% of parents noticed a growth in self-confidence from involvement in arts activities, while 50% listed improved social skills. A growth in problem-solving was listed by 33% of parents, with an improvement in decision-making listed by 19% of parents.

Q10: Can you describe a positive or negative experience your child has had while involved with an Arts project naming the positive or negative factors that influenced that experience?

MUSIC **ADULTS**
ISSUES **SPEAKING** **ARTS PROJECT**
SELF CONFIDENCE **YOUNG PEOPLE**

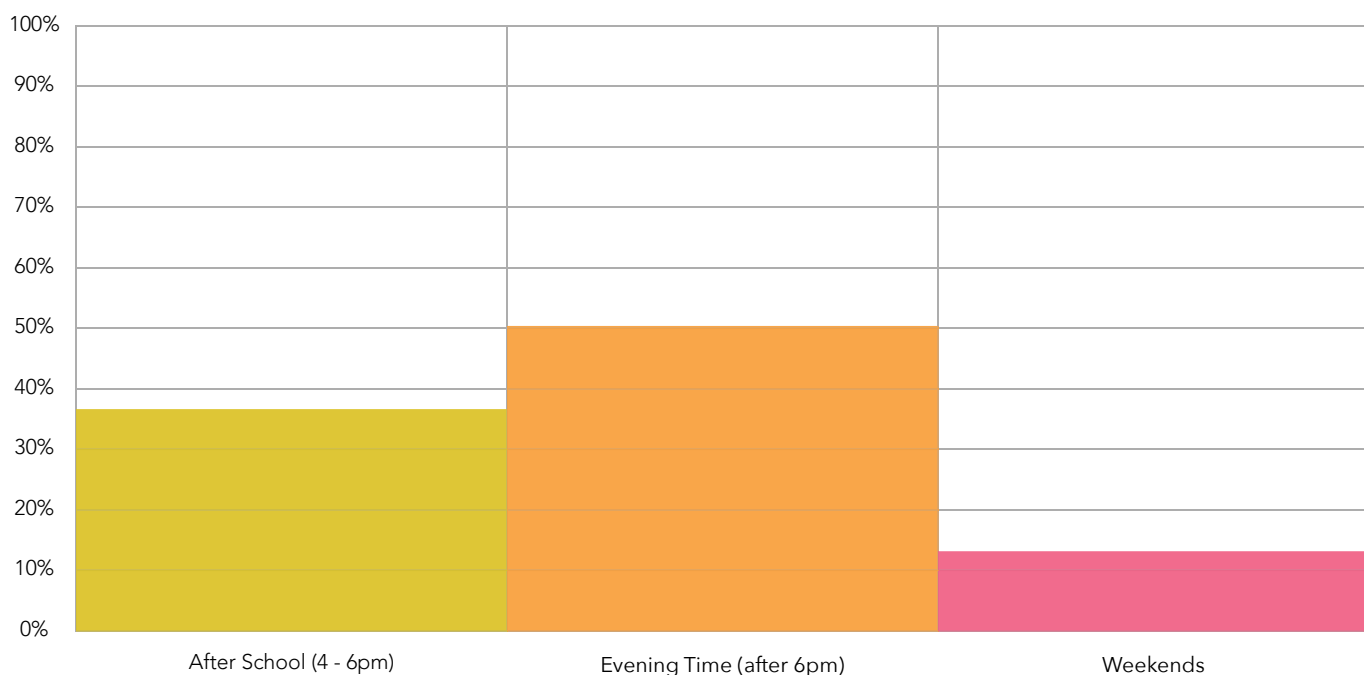
The general trend in feedback from parents was the improvement in self-confidence as a result of an arts experience. Many listed the lack of opportunity to engage as a negative.

See some of the feedback below:

- “Getting a lead role in a production has really made him believe in himself. He has learning difficulties but the external director believed he could do it. He has become part of his school class now because they have gotten to know him where before he didn’t quite fit in. His self-confidence has improved hugely.”
- “My child grew up so much by being involved in an arts project.”
- “There are no opportunities for singer songwriters, Joe Lee’s pub is the only place supportive of this. My son has issues signing on but is never guaranteed gigs, if you have no money you can’t take classes, he is self-taught as his school had no music and we could not afford classes. Arts grants insist you have a tax number and jump through hoops to apply and then the let down when you don’t succeed. There are NO events for young people, it’s sad.”

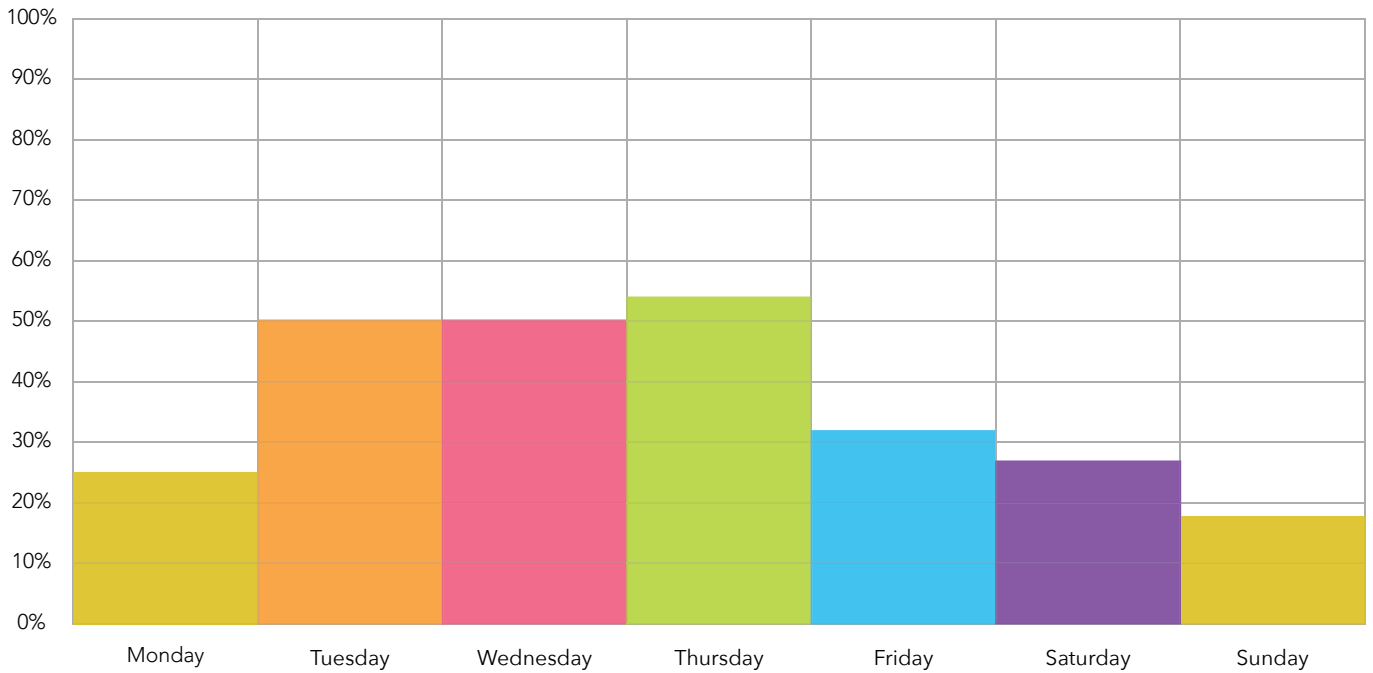


Q11: What time of day is most suitable for attending classes or workshops?



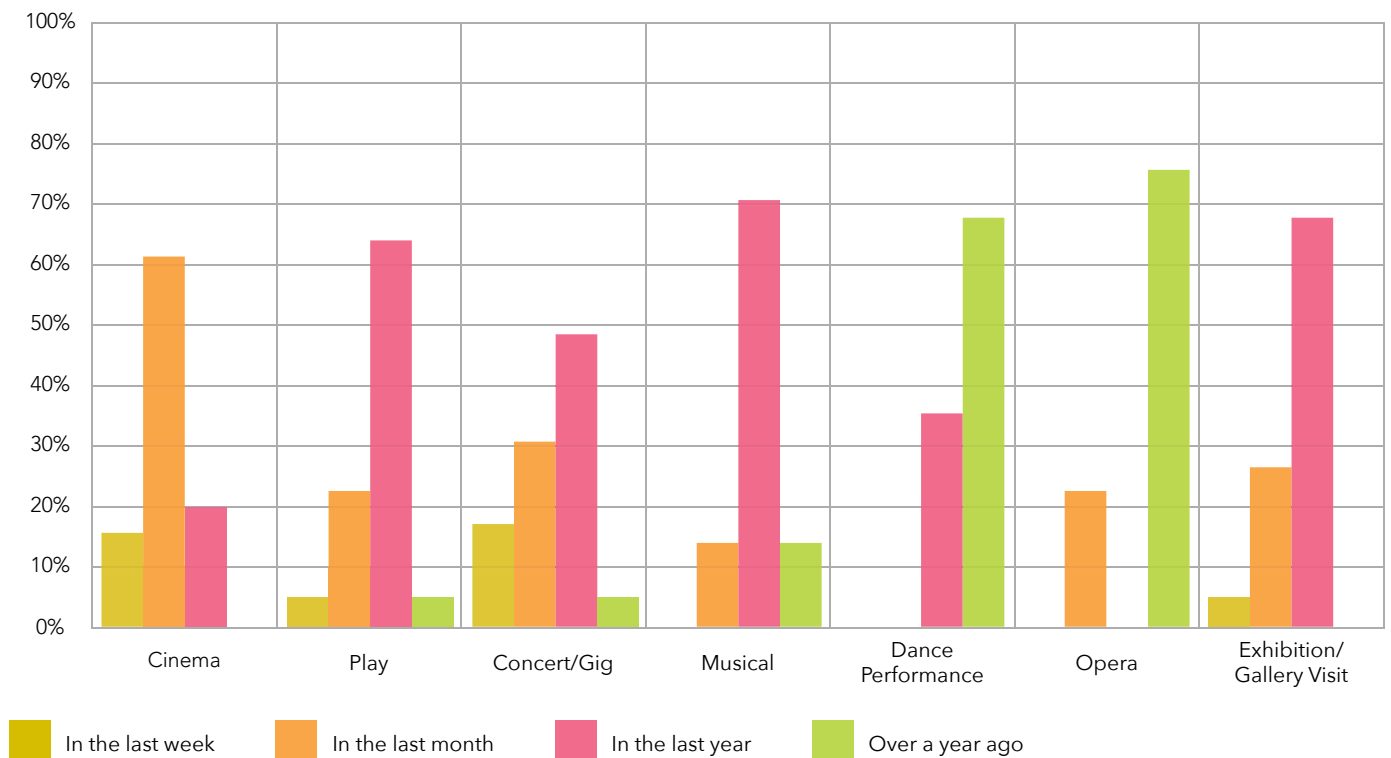
Timing of workshops was in keeping with young people’s feedback, with 50% of parents saying weekdays after 6pm, 36% listing weekdays after school (4-6 pm) and 13% listing weekends.

Q12: What days work best for attending classes or workshops?



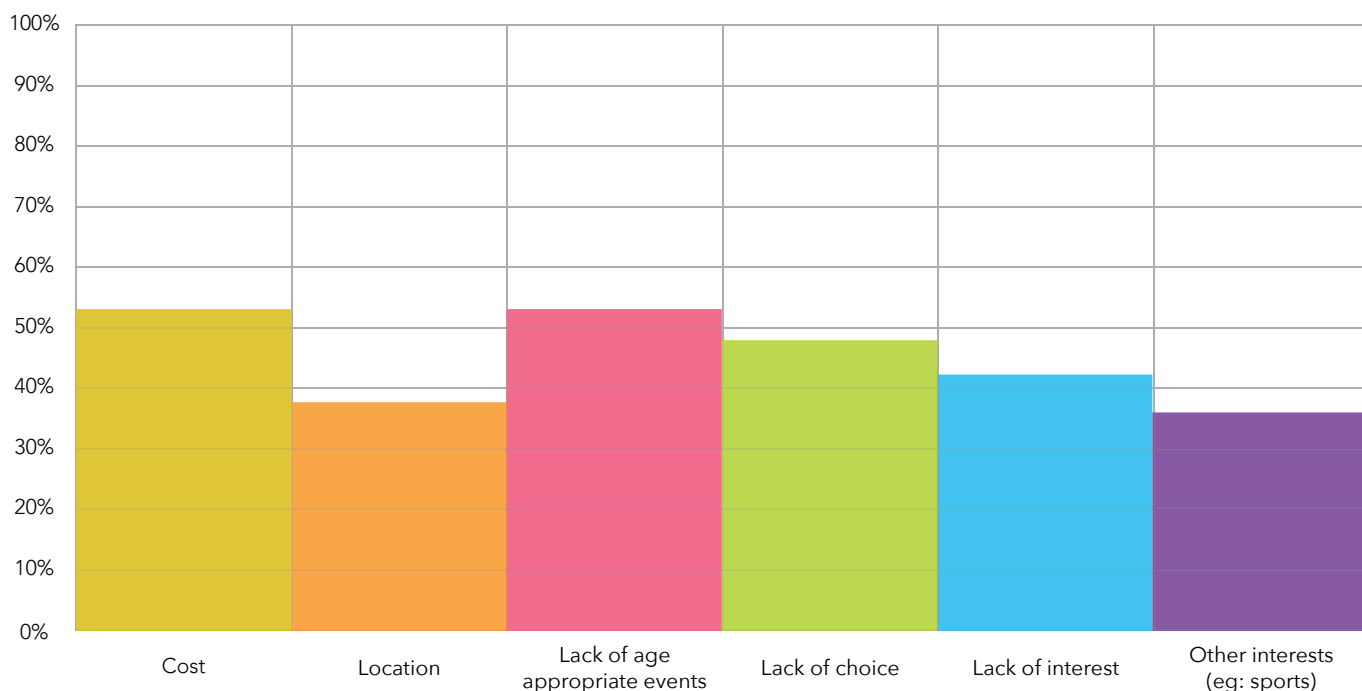
Again, weekdays were all evenly placed as popular days, with Sunday being the least favourite day, as it was with young people also.

Q14a: Have you ever attended any of the following Arts events as an audience member? If yes, how often?



In terms of engaging with the arts as an audience member, there was quite a difference between recent engagement (within a week of being surveyed) and longer term engagement (within a year of being surveyed). In the last year, 71% of parents said young people had been to a musical versus 0% in the last week. Some 68% of parents said a gallery or exhibition visit had occurred within the last year while 6% had happened within the last week. Meanwhile 64% mentioned a play attendance in the past year compared to 5% within the week; 47% referenced attendance at a concert or gig within the last year versus 17% within the week. Some 33% had been to a dance performance within the last year with no occurrences in the past week, and 21% had been to the cinema in the last year compared to 15% within the week. This shows us that while there are opportunities for young people to engage with the arts as audience members, the most common way is through cinema and musicals.

Q14b: What do you see as the biggest barriers to young people engaging with the Arts?



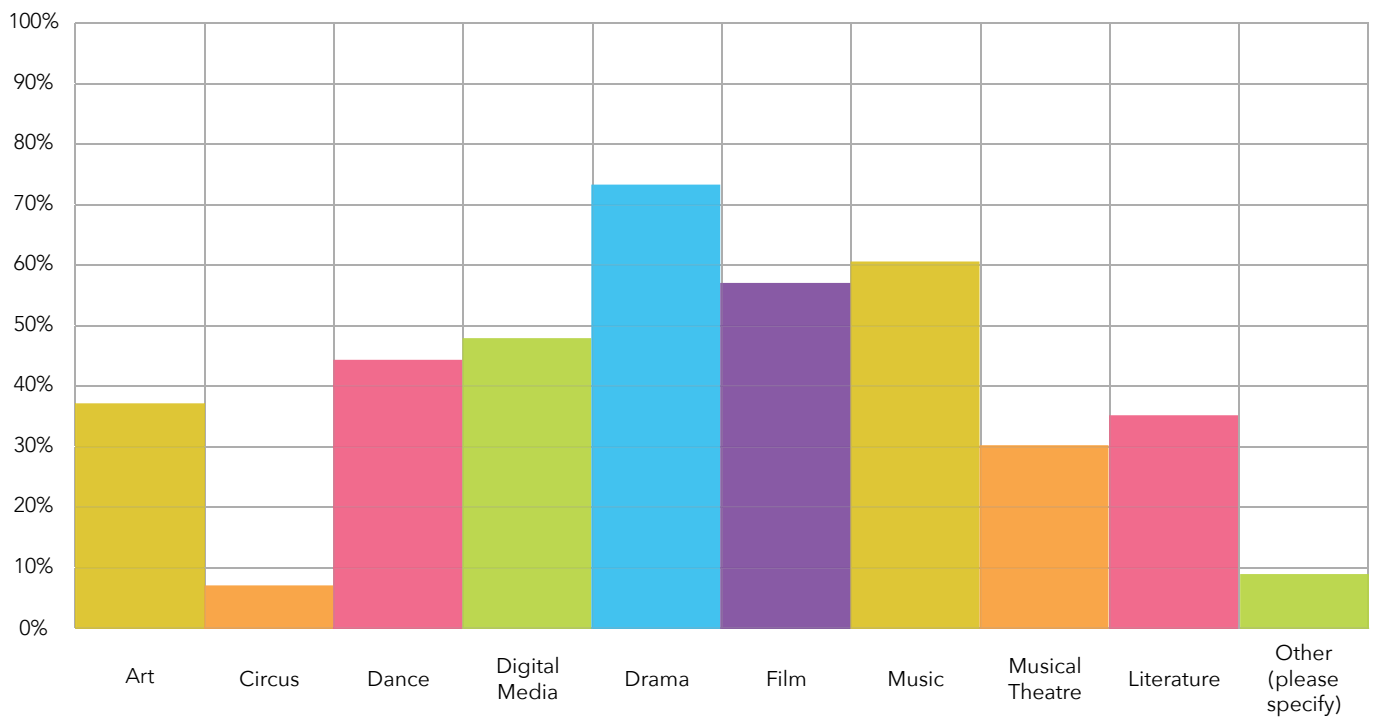
For parents, the biggest barriers are seen as cost and location which both accounted for 52% of answers. Lack of choice was identified by 47% and lack of interest by 43%. Location was mentioned by 39% and interest in other activities such as sports was identified by 34% as a barrier to engaging with the arts.

Some comments on this issue were as follows:

- "Not providing clubs/groups access to art tutors to do projects eg: St. Patrick's Day. Not providing clubs/groups with a simple process to access art tutors. Place to store art project work until complete."
- "Needs to be introduced from age 4 to children."
- "Exposing children from a very young age to all the arts is the key to a lifetime of participation. Visual arts feature well in primary and second level education whereas music, dance and drama are very much at the whim of the school, often dependent on the class teacher's ability/interest, in primary education. Many of these teachers give a wonderful introduction to children in visual art and some in music, but rarely in dance and drama. They cannot be expected to be expert in everything. A lot of lip service is given to the importance and value of the arts in life, which is not matched with resources. Highly qualified and skilled teachers/tutors are needed to insure that

young people’s experience is an enriching, positive and enjoyable one. Music Generation Offaly/ Westmeath is gradually providing this support in schools which can afford to opt in to their music programs. Outside the school structure it is financially not possible for many families to access music, dance and drama programmes for their children. Every school without exception, primary and second level, includes many sports in their day to day activities, with qualified coaches coming in from, and financed by, national sports bodies. Could this highly successful model be adapted for the arts?”

Q15: What type of workshops or performances for young people would you like to see more of in Offaly?

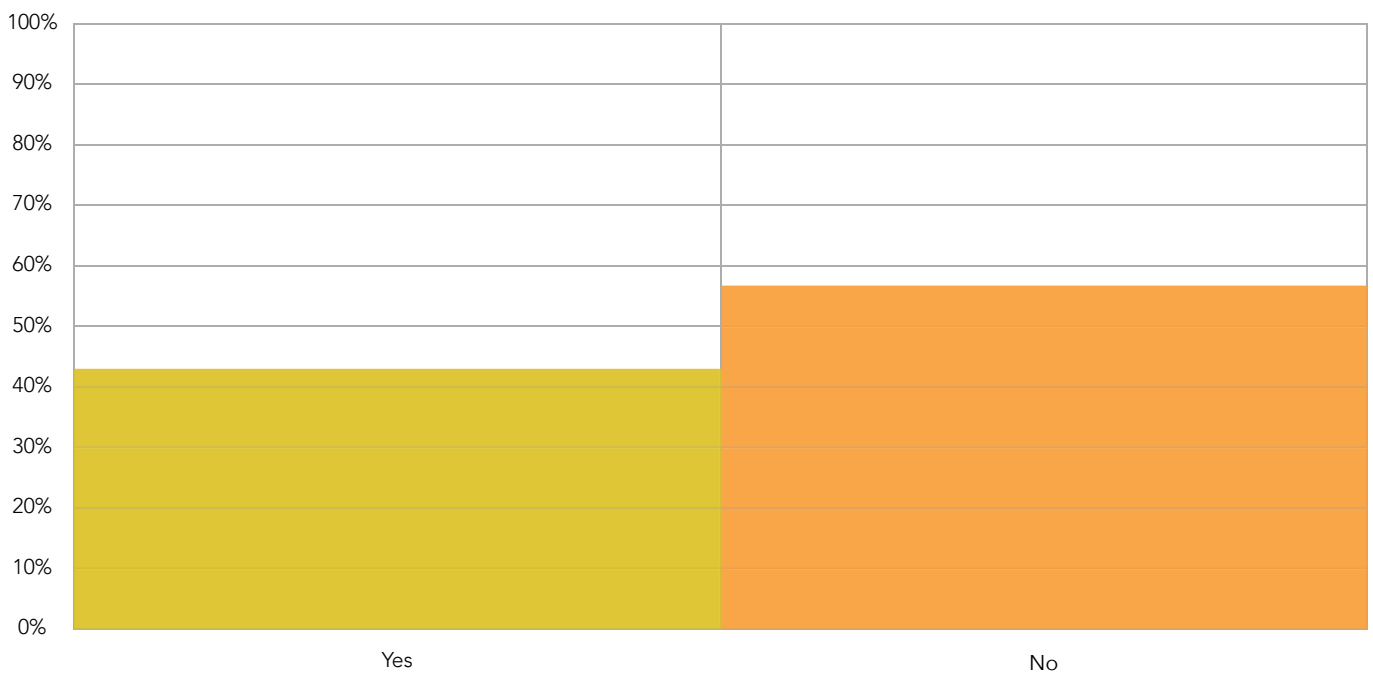


When parents were asked what they would like to see more of in terms of workshops or performances for young people the results were as follows:

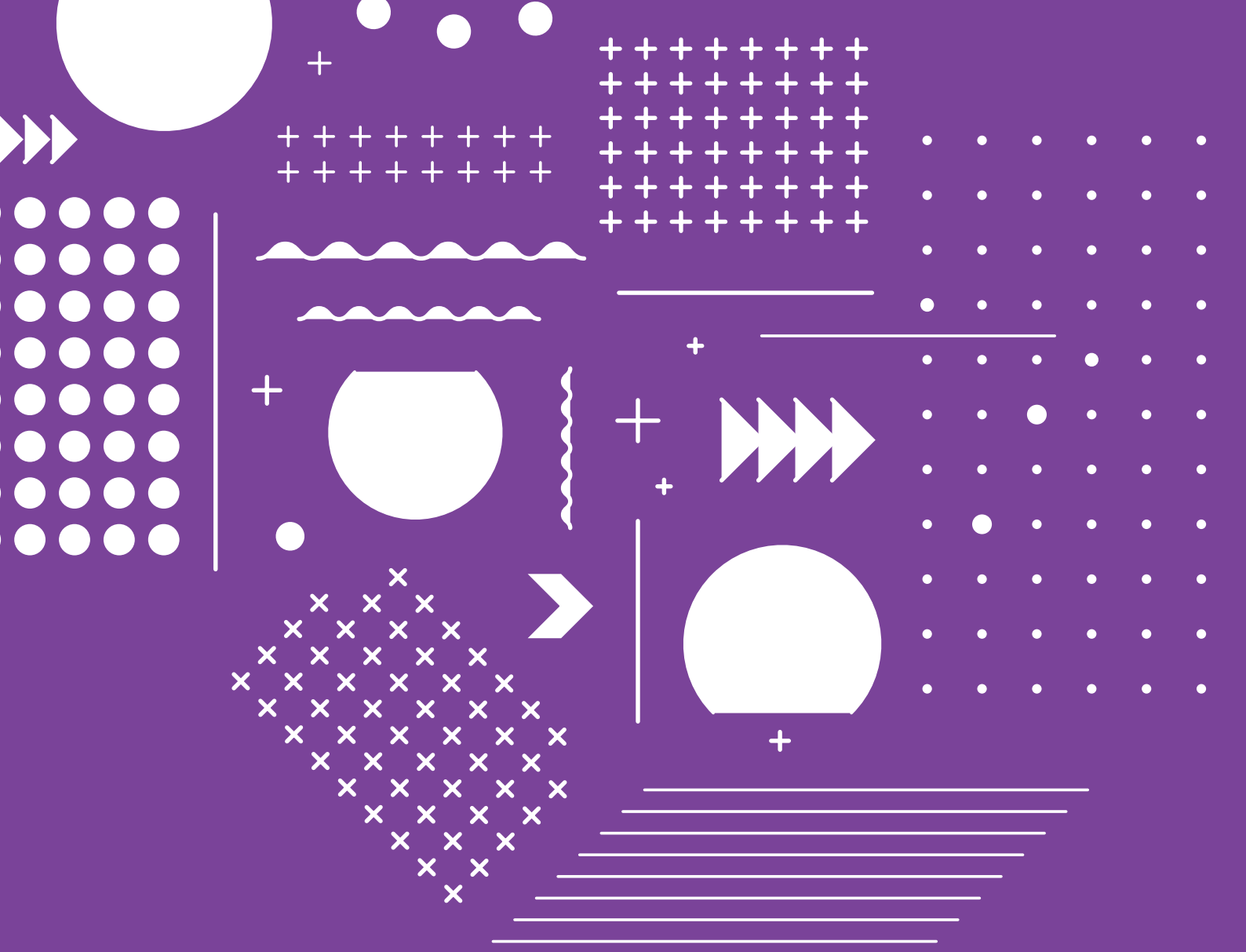
- Drama - 73%
- Music - 60%
- Film - 56%
- Digital Media - 47%
- Dance - 43%
- Literature - 34%
- Art - 34%
- Musical Theatre - 30%
- Circus - 8%
- Other (identified as Spectacle, Street Art, Prop Building) - 8%



Q16: Has participation in an Arts themed class/workshop/project impacted on your child's choice of further education/employment?



Some 42% of parents surveyed felt participation in the arts had impacted on their child's choice of further education and employment, with 58% stating that it had not. Many commented that it was too soon to tell, and others again identified the lack of affordable opportunity as a barrier to getting that far.



ARTIST'S

SURVEY

Appendix 1.3 - Artist's Survey

A total of 27 artists from Offaly participated in an online survey on Youth Arts Participation. There was a broad representation of art forms including drama, musical theatre, art, digital media, literature, circus, dance, music, photography and poetry. The highest volume of responses was from the genre of drama and musical theatre. Geographical representation was across Tullamore, Birr, Clara, Edenderry, Shinrone, Crohan and Ballinahown.

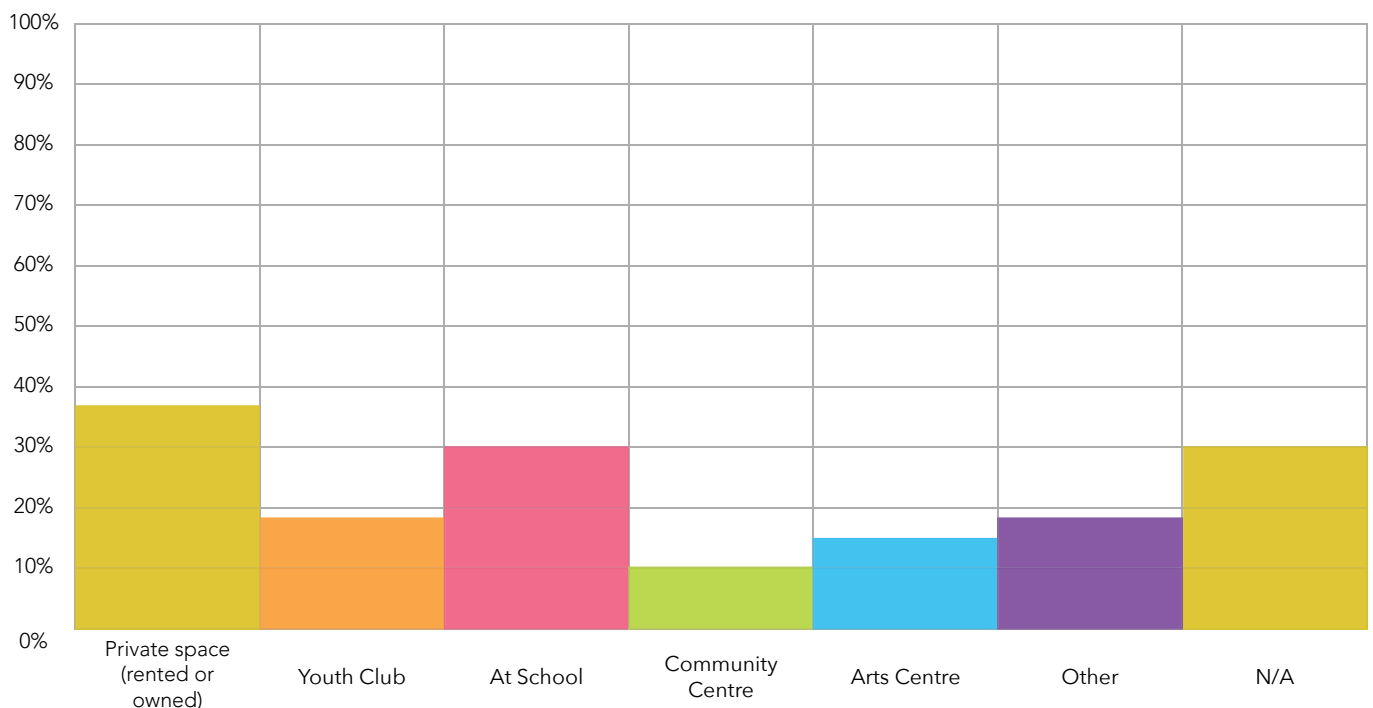
Some 56% of the artists surveyed offer workshops to the public and 44% do not. Of the 44% who do not offer classes and who are not working with young people, all said they would consider it in the future. A total of 33% work with young people aged from 4-24 already.

Q5: If you are not working with children or young people, what do you see as barriers to doing so?



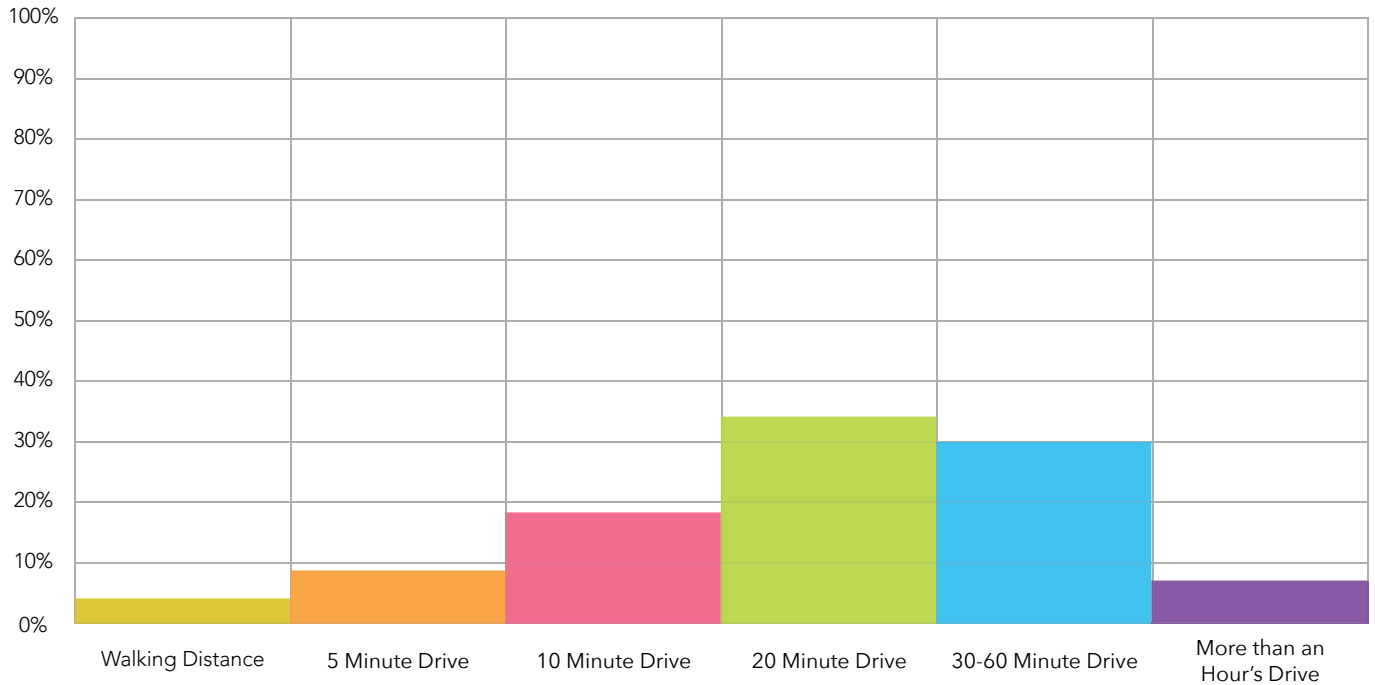
When asked to identify the barriers against working with young people some common themes emerged: resources, Garda vetting procedures, lack of locations, funding, and lack of facilitator training, child protection.

Q7: If you are providing training, where do activities typically take place?



Of those who are offering workshops to young people, location is a factor certainly. Some 34% work in private premises that are rented or owned; 30% work in schools, 19% in youth clubs, 19% in other locations, 15% in arts centres and 11% in community centres. It shows how lack of location can be a deterrent when the highest proportion of activity is happening in locations that are costly.

Q8: How far do you think people would travel to a class/workshop/event?

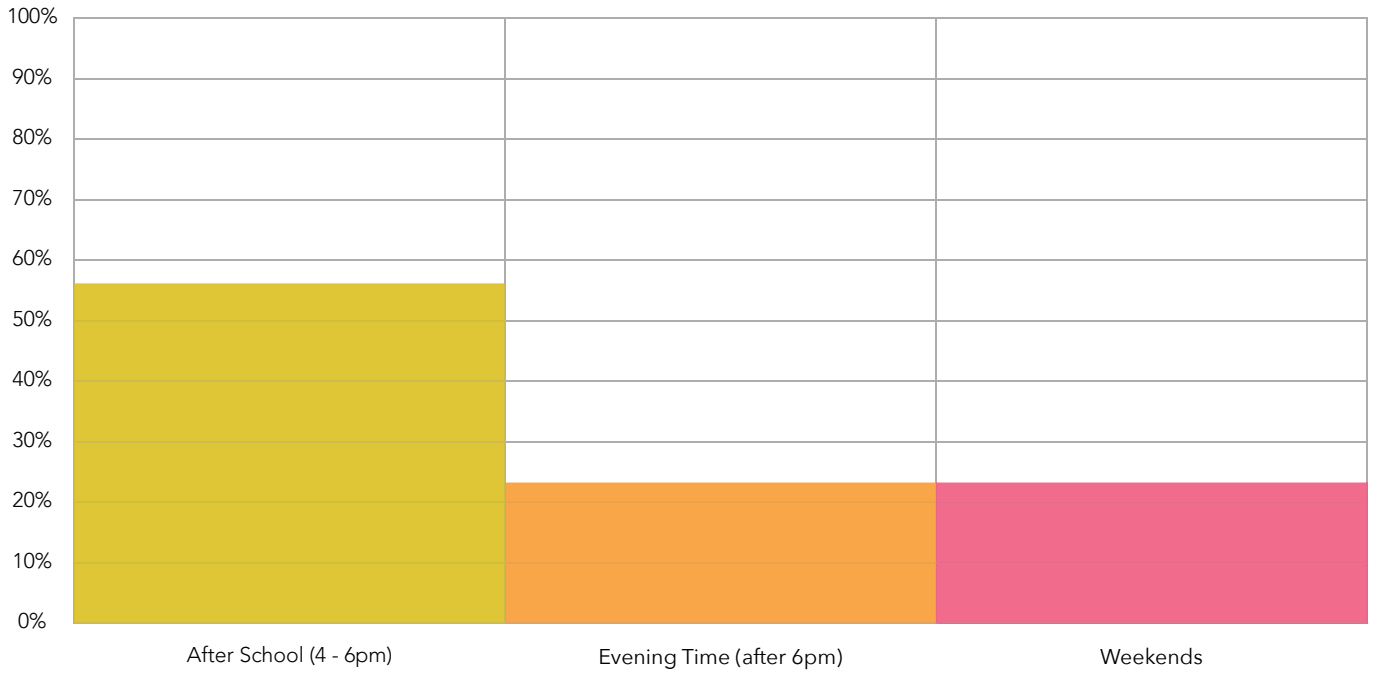


This data again highlights the focus on driving to a location for arts activities which in itself places a socio-economic precondition for arts engagement.

The question of engaging with disadvantaged or marginalised communities is also thought-provoking. A total of 55% of artists have engaged with disadvantaged or marginalised communities, while 22% have not but would consider it. This shows the scope for engagement across the artist community of Offaly and could be a way to ensure inclusivity.

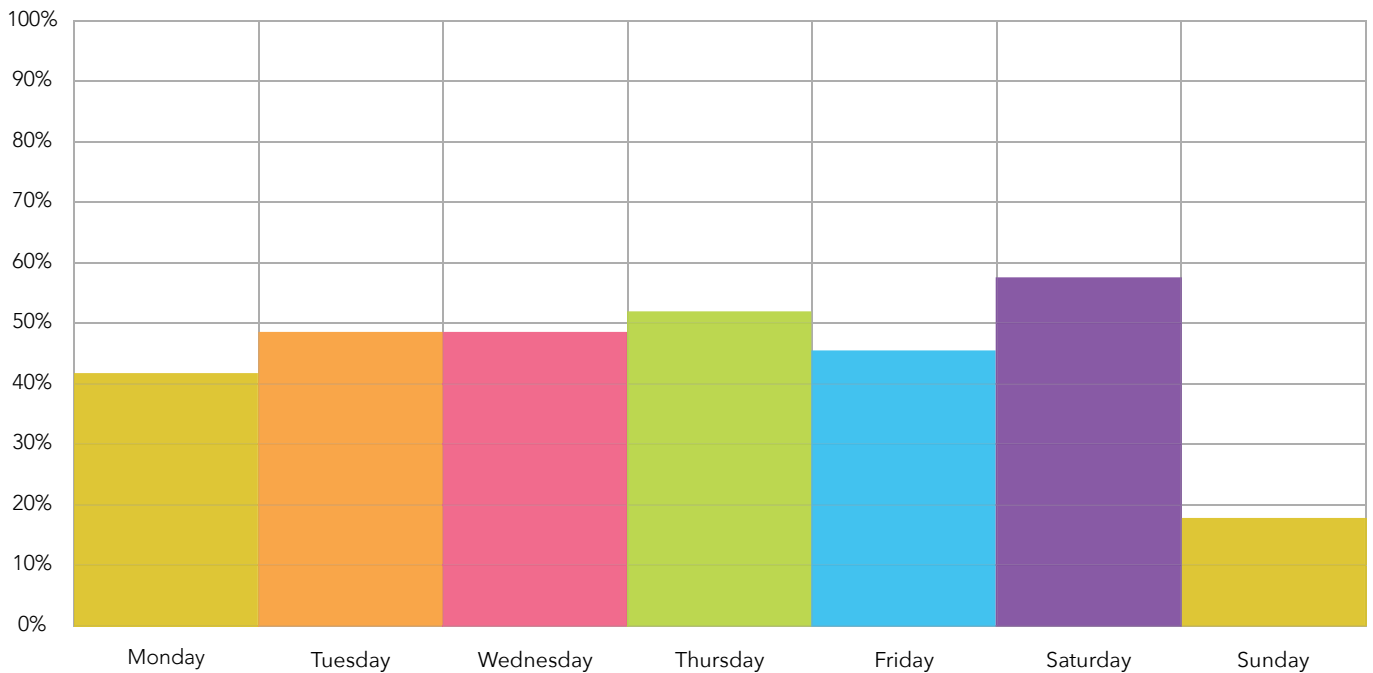


Q10: What time of day do you consider best for engaging young people in art classes, workshops or events?



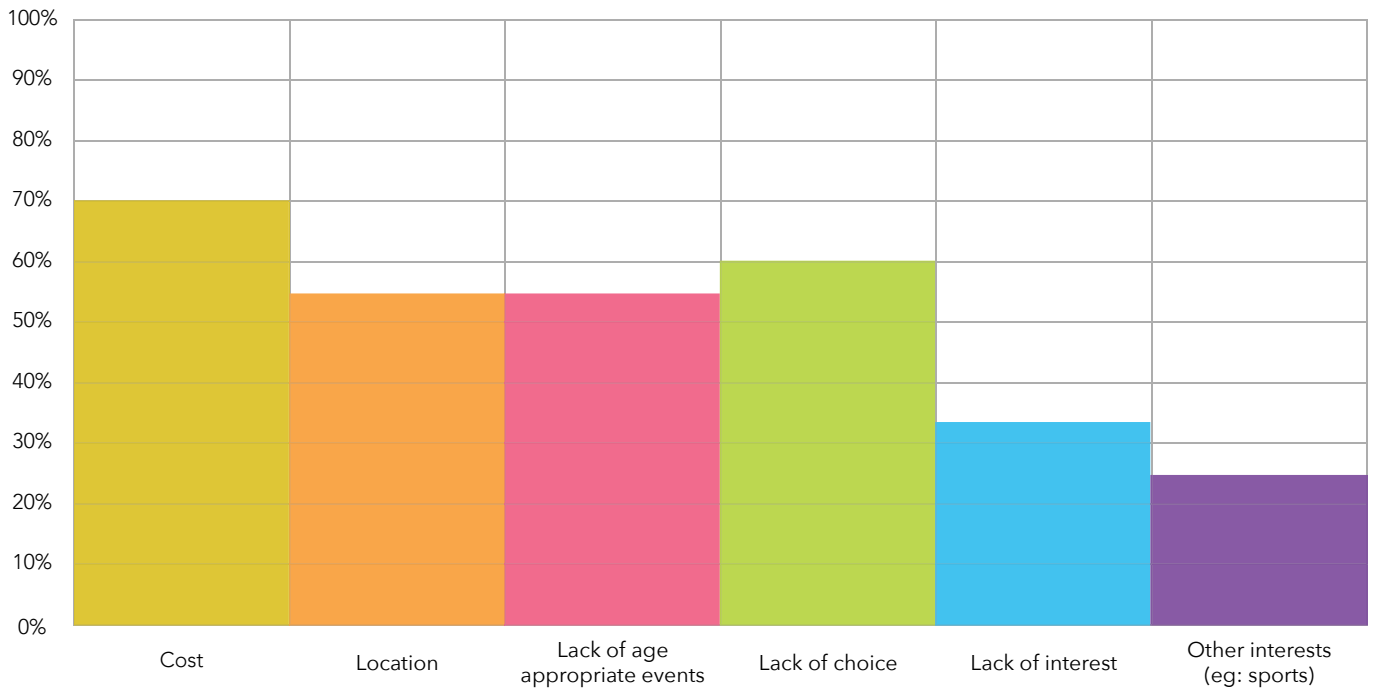
There were similar responses to those from young people and parents, with 53% of artists having a preference for weekdays from 4-6pm, 23% favouring weekdays after 6pm, and 23% preferring weekends.

Q11: What days do you consider most suited to running workshops for young people?



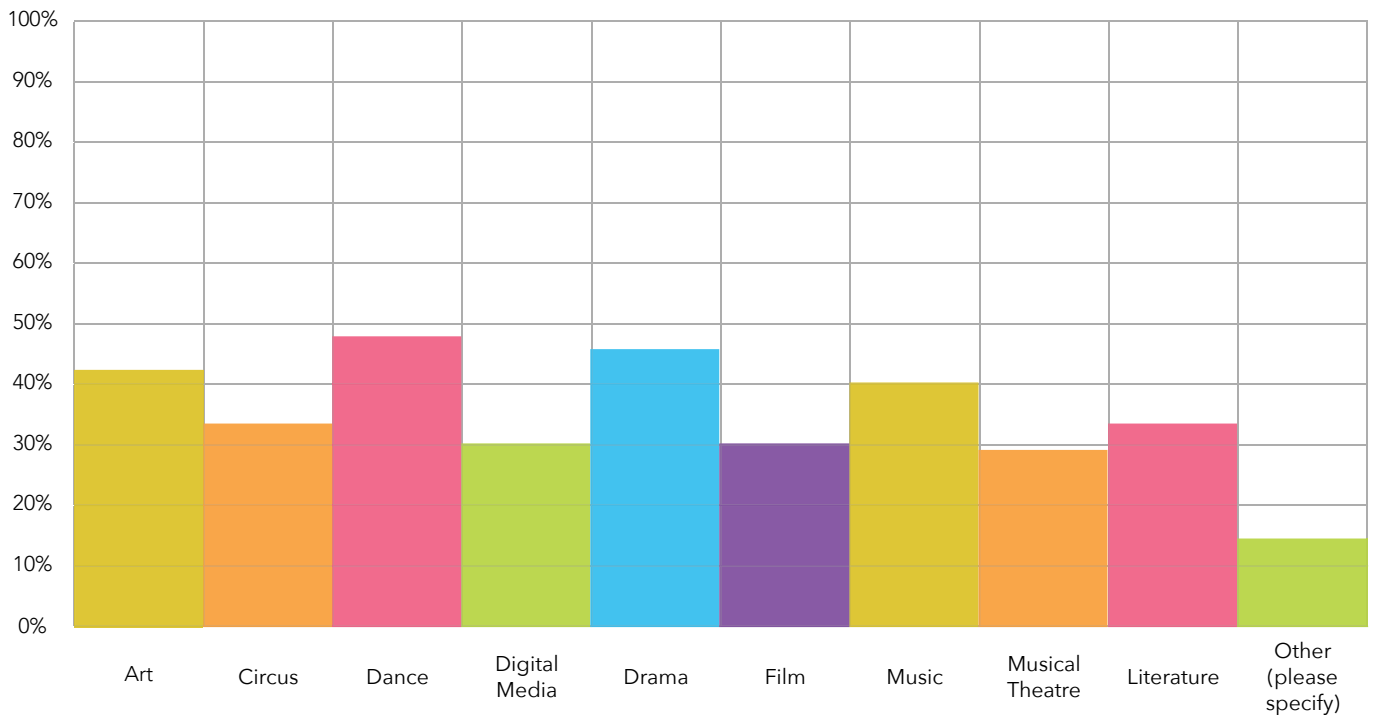
When asked to specify exact days, Saturday was the most popular answer with 55% of answers, followed by Thursday at 51%, Tuesday and Wednesday both at 48%, Friday at 44%, and Monday at 40%. Sunday was the least popular day, which is consistent with other surveys, and accounted for 18% of answers.

Q14: What do you see as the biggest barriers to young people engaging with the Arts?



Cost was identified as the biggest barrier to youth participation with the arts by 70% of artists surveyed, followed by lack of choice at 59%, location at 55%, lack of age-appropriate events at 55%, lack of interest at 33% and other interests such as sport at 25%.

Q13: What type of workshops or performances for young people would you like to see more of in Offaly?



Artists gave a broad cross section of interests when asked to identify what they would like to see more of for young people in Offaly. The results are as follows:

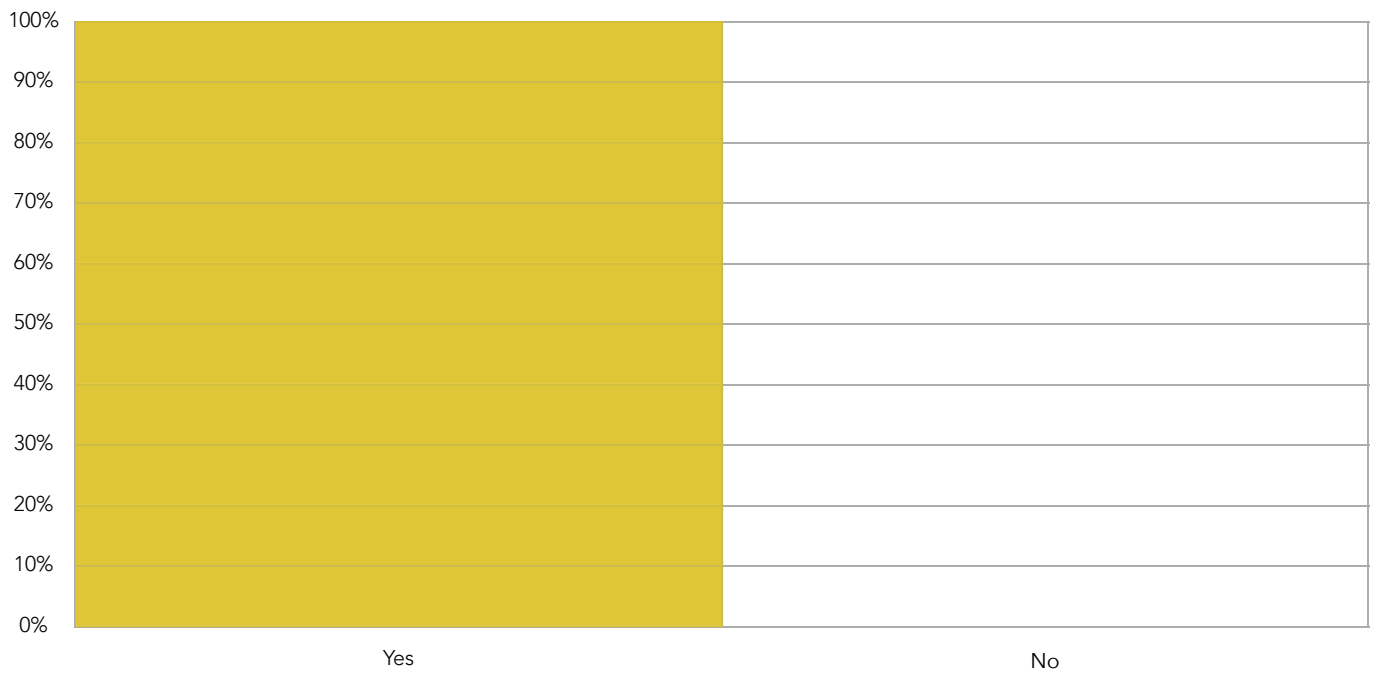
- Dance - 48%
- Art - 44%
- Film - 44%
- Music - 40%
- Circus - 33%
- Literature - 33%
- Digital Media - 29%
- Musical Theatre - 29%
- Artists also named photography, street art, spectacle and contemporary theatre as other interests that should be explored.

Q14: Can you identify supporting factors that would encourage you to run workshops with young people?



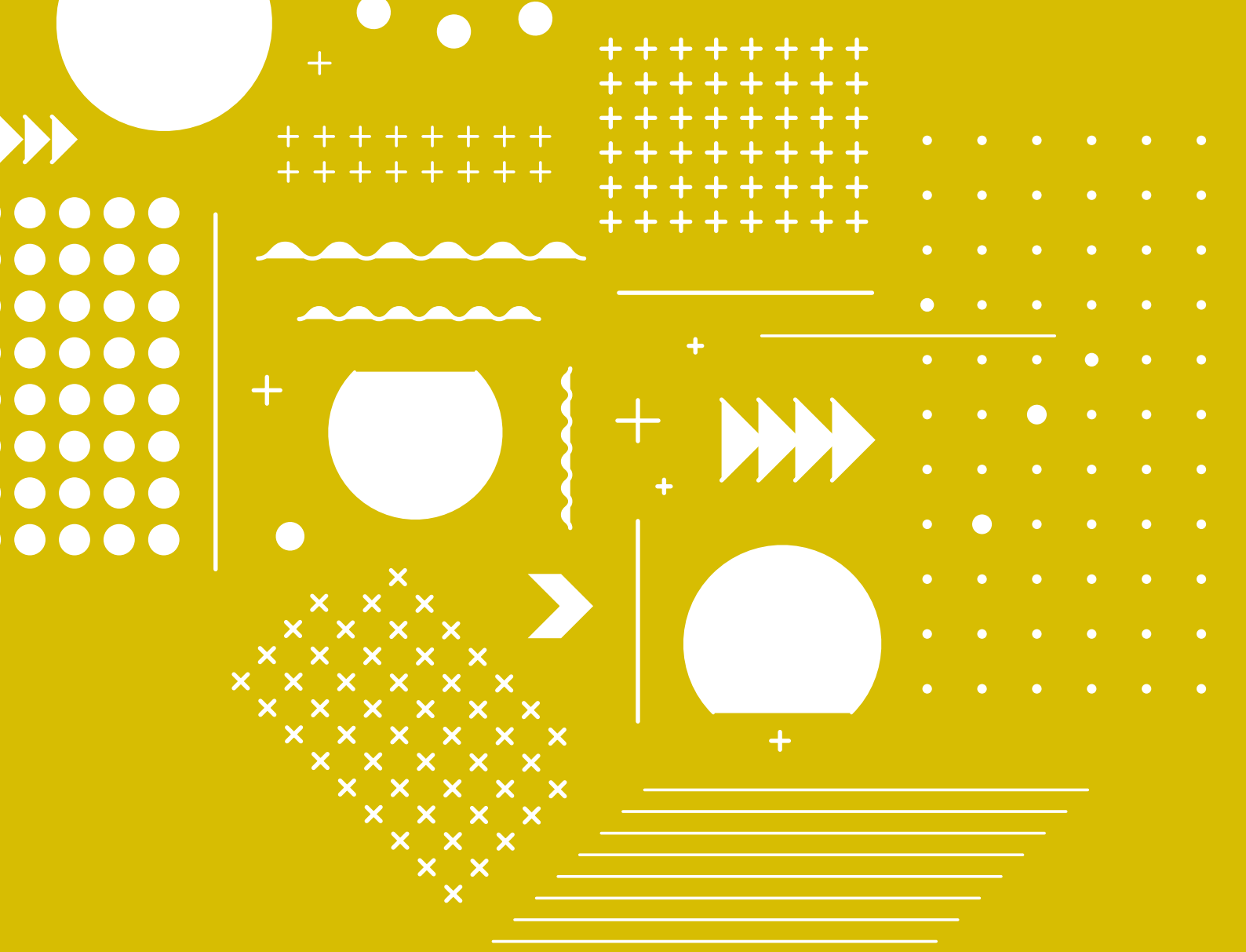
Supportive factors followed a general theme as presented in the word cloud above. Generally, artists felt funding options were the biggest supportive factor that could influence their work with young people. Another area identified by many was the issue of a location, which can act as both a venue to conduct work but also to store appropriate materials. Many people meshed the two issues together, suggesting funding applications be made for the purchase of equipment and materials that could be used in community contexts for work with young people. Training was the next biggest supportive factor that artists felt could assist them in their roles; training in facilitation skills, workshop management and confidence-building opportunities to make the leap from artist to facilitator. In essence, all the feedback points towards providing a training opportunity where artists could learn the essential components of project delivery, everything from handling administration to public relations, to procedures around child protection and Garda vetting. Many mentioned the idea of having a workshop assistant, and again this points towards the reality for so many artists working alone in the community. There is a strong thirst to share knowledge and skills, and core training opportunities in the form of continuous professional development could enhance both the artist experience of life in Offaly and potentially the young people with whom they may work.

Q15: Would you consider training or upskilling to be better equipped to facilitate youth arts?



The overwhelming yes from 100% of artists surveyed on their willingness to upskill and train in youth arts facilitation, again reinforces the appetite amongst the creative community to share learning in appropriate youth-centred venues. It is an inspiring response from artists and an action on this point could have direct, long-term consequences for the young people of Offaly and their introduction to arts and culture.





PROFESSIONAL'S SURVEY



Appendix 1.4 - Professionals Survey

Eleven professionals who work with young people in a variety of youth work contexts participated in the online survey. A total of 63% of those surveyed work with 17-24-year-olds and 36% work with 13-16-year-olds. Meanwhile 45% work with a mixture of the age groups, plus younger children.

When asked to list the art form preferences of their groups, the following was the result, with position in list indicating preference from most preferred to least: digital media, music, film, circus, art and literature.

A total of 82% had run an arts-themed project in their work and 18% had not. Of those who had run arts projects, 67% had accessed funding from local authority, 11% from the Arts Council, 11% from fundraising initiatives and 43% mentioned other sources including the following: The Trench Trust, Birr Lions Club, Birr Stage Guild, Eradication of Poverty Grant, LCDP, SICAP, HSE and Youth Matters.

On a scale of 1-5, the average rate of improvement in confidence levels as a result of engagement in an arts project, was 4, or 80%. The average improvement to social interaction and social skills was rated at 4 on the 1-5 scale, or 80%. Participants' problem-solving skills and decision-making skills improved by 3 on the 1-5 scale, or 60%.

Some 60% of those surveyed rated the participation levels in arts projects as high and 40% rated the levels as medium.

When asked to consider what were the biggest barriers to running arts projects, the results had similarities to artists' responses. The cost and funding of a project was seen as the biggest barrier, followed closely by a fear of the unknown and lack of arts skills. Transport and the ensuing cost was an identified barrier, as was engaging the support of parents. Interestingly, professionals did not identify key barriers that artists mentioned such as locations, places to store equipment, facilitation skills, information on vetting and child protection practices. What this highlights is the potential of a partnership approach to engaging young people with the arts. We have a wealth of experienced professionals working in the supported structures that lend to good practice in youth work settings with fixed locations, storage facilities and staff with required training and policies in place around how to work with young people. It would seem sensible to advocate for partnerships between organisations, to allow artists to work in the community, supported by youth workers for projects that can develop confidence, self-esteem and decision-making skills amongst the young people.

When asked to express what were the greatest advantages for young people to engage with the arts, professionals were overwhelmingly positive listing the following as outputs: freedom of expression, access to creativity, self-reflection and personal growth, better mental health and wellbeing, access to opportunities that are inclusive and challenging, happiness and inner confidence.

Professionals were very consistent with what would support them to run arts projects, naming the following as key factors: access to skilled artists and facilitators, funding, the artist to come to their centre, more workshops, more variety and projects that recognise diversity.

A total of 91% of those surveyed would be interested in collaborating with another group or organisation to engage with the arts and 9% would not.

Overall, the feedback was very positive and speaks to the overarching guiding research on the value that arts engagement has for young people. However, it also highlights the sense of frustration that many key workers feel about the lack of opportunity for the young people, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

People discussed the imminent need for change, and the following is a sample of the closing comments:

- "A conscious and dedicated investment into new or existing programmes."
- "Local art projects reaching out to rural communities is key."
- "Investment in the arts is sorely lacking in the Midlands."
- "Overall, I think inclusion of young Travellers within any youth arts strategy is imperative. This is a group with so much to offer creatively and culturally. The under-representation of Travellers within mainstream arts has a hugely negative impact on how young people see themselves and reinforces the belief that the arts are not for them."

The Makings

Fostering Youth Creativity

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