

Joining the Dots: the social value of creative interventions in mental health care

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Under the [Cultural Assets and Social Value](#) work stream during 2014-16, the ICC has developed a two-part initiative to: (i) map cultural community assets in inner city Liverpool; and (ii) develop a collaborative research partnership with Mersey Care NHS Trust to examine the social and economic value of the service's commissioned creative interventions in mental health care. The primary aim of this research programme – *Joining the Dots* - is to evidence the impact of creative interventions upon mental health and wellbeing, and the actual and potential social and economic value created by joint, asset-based working across cultural and health care sectors.

Focusing on the assets available within communities provides a vehicle to strengthen resilience and reduce inequalities, particularly surrounding mental health. An asset-based approach highlights the assets that are already within the community, including community associations and networks such as gardening groups, arts groups, physical activity groups and churches; institutions such as libraries, schools and hospitals; and the people living within communities. Community assets potentially have the power to improve social capital, connect people within communities, provide support and advice, as well as enable collective action.

Following on from a 2005 study undertaken in the planning stages of Liverpool 08, the current mapping of cultural assets in Liverpool aims to understand what has changed since the first study. This work profiles grassroots assets that thrive in the inner city Liverpool area, understanding how these have developed in the decade since the baseline study. The project methodology is adapted from an earlier [asset mapping project in Wirral](#) (Whelan and Timpson, 2014), using a snowballing technique to map cultural assets, starting with known contacts and online databases. Assets are placed on an Access database and assigned categories according to the nature of their work and sector type.

The first stage of the cultural mapping involved analysing the original 2005 database and updating details of assets which have ceased to run, changed names or serve a different function to the original aims and objectives. Mapping is continuing until it is felt that all cultural grassroots organisations are included. There are a range of methods that have been adopted to identify assets, including interviewing contacts, linking-in with existing directories of services (e.g. Liverpool Health Watch's Live Well directory), and the innovative, collaborative and fun Twitter Chase. This event involved teams of staff from local services and university students, actively exploring four different Liverpool neighbourhoods, identifying geographically located services and meeting with individual community members. Throughout the exercise, teams spread the word about the Live Well directory, while Tweeting about location, the services available and benefits of their work. The event resulted in 22 people walking a total 51,640 steps, visiting more than 80 services. Further Twitter Chases are planned to identify and engage with more assets in other Liverpool communities. Once the *Joining the Dots* database

is completed, a follow-up questionnaire will be distributed to all assets aiming to understand more about grassroots culture in Liverpool and the impact of Liverpool 08 on their work.

The cultural asset mapping work will inform the second part of the *Joining the Dots* research programme, by identifying additional cultural interventions and initiatives in the community which can support Mersey Care NHS Trust's creative programme, alongside the service's existing partnerships with cultural organisations including Tate Liverpool, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, FACT, National Museums Liverpool and Everton in the Community. It is hoped that by linking these assets together, they will align with Mersey Care's aim to provide flexible, responsive and proactive community-based integrated services which may prevent unnecessary hospitalisation and facilitate more rapid discharge from acute care settings. The research will assess the extent to which individuals and communities as a whole can support each other to prevent reliance on primary health care services and promote positive mental health. This evidence will subsequently inform cultural planning and enable community-based cultural services to more readily connect with health services across Merseyside.

Social return on investment (SROI) research will then be undertaken (as part 2 of the *Joining the Dots* study), with the aim of enabling Mersey Care NHS Trust to provide evidence on the impact of engagement with culture and creativity upon improvements in mental health and wellbeing; the social and economic value created; and to develop and sustain links with additional cultural assets and services. A cross-section of existing Mersey Care creative partnerships and other identified cultural assets will be selected for further evaluation and SROI analysis.

This evidence base will also support recommendations made within the [Art of Social Prescribing](#) study relating to the feasibility of a city-wide arts-based social prescribing model.