



**Summary of discussions held during Workshop 2 –
Healthy Communities**

18th April 2013


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The In Harmony Liverpool Research Network held its second research workshop on Thursday 18th April 2013. Entitled ‘Healthy Communities’, this event focused upon the emerging health-related impact indicators from the In Harmony Liverpool programme, which together suggest the potential to contribute to improved health and wellbeing within the West Everton community on a long-term basis. The Philharmonic team is subsequently keen to develop a longitudinal research programme in association with academic colleagues that tests this tentative hypothesis. Indicators to date suggest for example a strong attitudinal shift within the community concerning parental responsibility and proactive engagement with health professionals at preventive stages – such findings were discussed at the workshop during a presentation by the programme’s evaluation team.

Other presentations on the day included an introduction from Professor Jude Robinson (Co-investigator) of the University of Liverpool on behalf of the academic team leading the network. Jude provided some useful context on her own relevant research interests, including a recent project exploring the health impacts of group reading experiences in association with The Reader Organisation¹. Findings resonate strongly with qualitative data from the In Harmony Liverpool evaluation, especially concerning ‘motivational’ indicators such as improved confidence and self-esteem. Jude stressed that there remains a need however to “move beyond symptom impact” in such studies; to develop participatory methodologies that reflect the inherent qualities of the community-based interventions being assessed; to seek to identify “directly attributable” consistent changes in health values *and* behaviours; and to be open to and accepting of the fact that this may not in fact be achieved (programmes may not be having such anticipated outcomes), but there can still be useful learning outcomes for communities involved and health impact research more generally.

These research challenges and opportunities were echoed by Justine Karpusheff during a presentation on research exploring the impact of creative approaches in mental health care undertaken on behalf of Mersey Care NHS Trust. Justine gave numerous examples of powerful narrative evidence from the Shift Happens² report, and discussed the tensions between the persuasiveness of such data that reflects the ‘lived experience’ of individuals compared to the perceived reliability of large-scale statistical studies in the health care sector – a challenge that will be instantly recognisable to researchers in the field and that recurred throughout our discussions. As a counter-balance to this challenge, Anne-Marie Martindale of the Liverpool Health Inequalities Research Institute gave an informative presentation on a systematic review of the literature on participatory arts interventions on health. From a methodological perspective, Anne-Marie described how selection procedures in the review were based on the quality of how the evidence is used and presented in relevant studies (including qualitative and quantitative approaches), rather than the quality of the interventions themselves (the subjects of relevant studies). It was agreed by participants from policy and practice communities that it is equally important to consider the quality of research presented as evidence of impact and effectiveness when making funding decisions and justifying any investment already made.

The full group discussion that followed presentations reiterated the need for longitudinal approaches that consider the impact of In Harmony Liverpool as a 20-year immersive programme, set within the numerous situated contexts that apply, particularly within a community that has inadvertently become a ‘go-to’ regeneration neighborhood, with a legacy of short-term project-based interventions (a feature shared by other In Harmony Sistema England initiatives³). It is important to acknowledge for example that as the programme becomes more habitual than ‘novel’,

¹ For more information please see <http://www.thereader.org.uk/what-we-do-and-why/research.aspx>

² <http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Shift-Happens2.pdf>

³ <http://www.ihse.org.uk/>

impacts are likely to be less ‘big bang’ and require more subtle or nuanced evaluation research techniques. Other changes in the city are causing a demand for high quality evidence and a rigorous re-examination of public spending, including closure of the Primary Care Trust and transfer of public health department to the city council. The relative cost of cultural interventions such as In Harmony Liverpool should also be acknowledged, including the scale of “emotional labour” involved, and economic costs compared to other interventions. This is the first intervention in the West Everton community to be assessed on a ‘before and after’ basis and was commended as a “brave commitment” by all partners. Despite the obvious social and economic characteristics reflected by deprivation and health statistics, other cultural conditions such as the relative stability and sense of loyalty within the West Everton community were discussed.

In seeking to demonstrate therefore the economic value of In Harmony Liverpool, the implications and secondary impacts of improved health and wellbeing are important (e.g. reduced crime; improved mental health) in relation to longer-term cost-savings. The expertise of a health economist would be integral to such research, in assessing for example the impact of increased proactive use of primary care resources (in the preventive context described above) rather than reactive over-use of arguably more expensive emergency services. In this context the programme already has a useful infrastructure in relation to its collaborative model and partnerships with key agencies including health care providers. Other initiatives within the city, such as the Decade of Health and Wellbeing⁴, demonstrate a situated tradition, desire and capacity for research of this nature (particularly with reference to arts, health and wellbeing) that has received little national attention.

At this point in discussions our third guest speaker Polly Moseley introduced the ESRC UK Arts & Health Research Network⁵. This project is seeking to facilitate a UK-wide network of academics, service-users and practitioners to develop research projects; develop a UK research strategy for arts in health; promote and encourage excellence in arts and health practice; help to develop the next generation of researchers across the full range of relevant disciplines; act as an authoritative voice on arts in health policy; and to actively improve the review and dissemination of arts in health research. We’re delighted to have connected both networks and look forward to advancing the arts in health agenda together.

Participants were then invited to split into two groups to consider the following questions:

- How **significant** is health and wellbeing as an outcome for In Harmony Liverpool?
- How can health and wellbeing be **framed and researched** as In Harmony Liverpool progresses?
- What contribution can In Harmony Liverpool make in **advancing the arts, health and wellbeing research** field?

Health and wellbeing was considered by both groups as being worthy of further scholarly investigation, with the following caveats and recommendations:

- Baseline indicators need to be established if researching the impact upon children and/or families and/or community as a whole over a 20 year period to fully appreciate the causal impact of the programme (e.g. control group);
- Some consideration of scientific models should be undertaken (e.g. neuroscience fields);

⁴ <http://www.2020healthandwellbeing.org.uk/index.php>

⁵ <http://www.artsandhealthresearch.ac.uk/artshealthandwellbeing/index.aspx>

- Environmental factors are especially important, both metaphorically (e.g. the 'home' metaphor applied to the project) and practically, including the cultural life of the city, its policy frameworks and infrastructural support for initiatives such as In Harmony Liverpool. The level of support provided by the PCT, and central commitment to culture following Liverpool 08 (European Capital of Culture status) for example may have been more difficult to secure in other environments;
- The added value in terms of economic impact needs to be demonstrated to have relevance for health services e.g. social return on investment (SROI);
- A sociological approach is simultaneously required to understand the value to community over time, including how the community remains connected through transition periods (e.g. primary to secondary school);
- In a comparative context, In Harmony Liverpool needs to be considered alongside other forms of cultural participation, both as an either/or and in relation to the "doors opened" by the programme to other cultural experiences;
- Also need to be mindful of wider Sistema phenomenon, and how In Harmony Liverpool has been adapted as a microcosm of a national model. In health and wellbeing terms this raises questions of scale and replicability, within the context of the numerous city and community-based conditions already described. As there is little academic research on Sistema, we need to consider what the incentive was in adopting/adapting an international initiative. As In Harmony Sistema England has developed, was this essentially 'social project' seen as appealing to liberal left-leaning arts and appealing to austerity mentality of Coalition? Has this encouraged 'buy in' to health and wellbeing implications?
- As a health and wellbeing project, it is important to avoid stigmatising the community by presenting another 'academically imposed' research proposal that appears to judge lifestyles and make class-based assumptions. It is similarly important to be sensitive to mental health issues. Framing the study around stress and anxiety, and using impact upon children as the focus, could help to overcome this, and lead to an indirect consideration of behaviours including smoking, alcohol consumption, nutrition and other public health agendas;
- In this context it is also vitally important to respect the level of trust established within the community by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and partners, and to ensure that research is co-produced by new members to the research network, existing partners and community members alike.

Kerry Wilson, May 2013