

# Artsreach

## KINDRED & COMMUNITY

### Case Studies on the Social Impact of Artsreach

on Dorset's Rural  
Communities

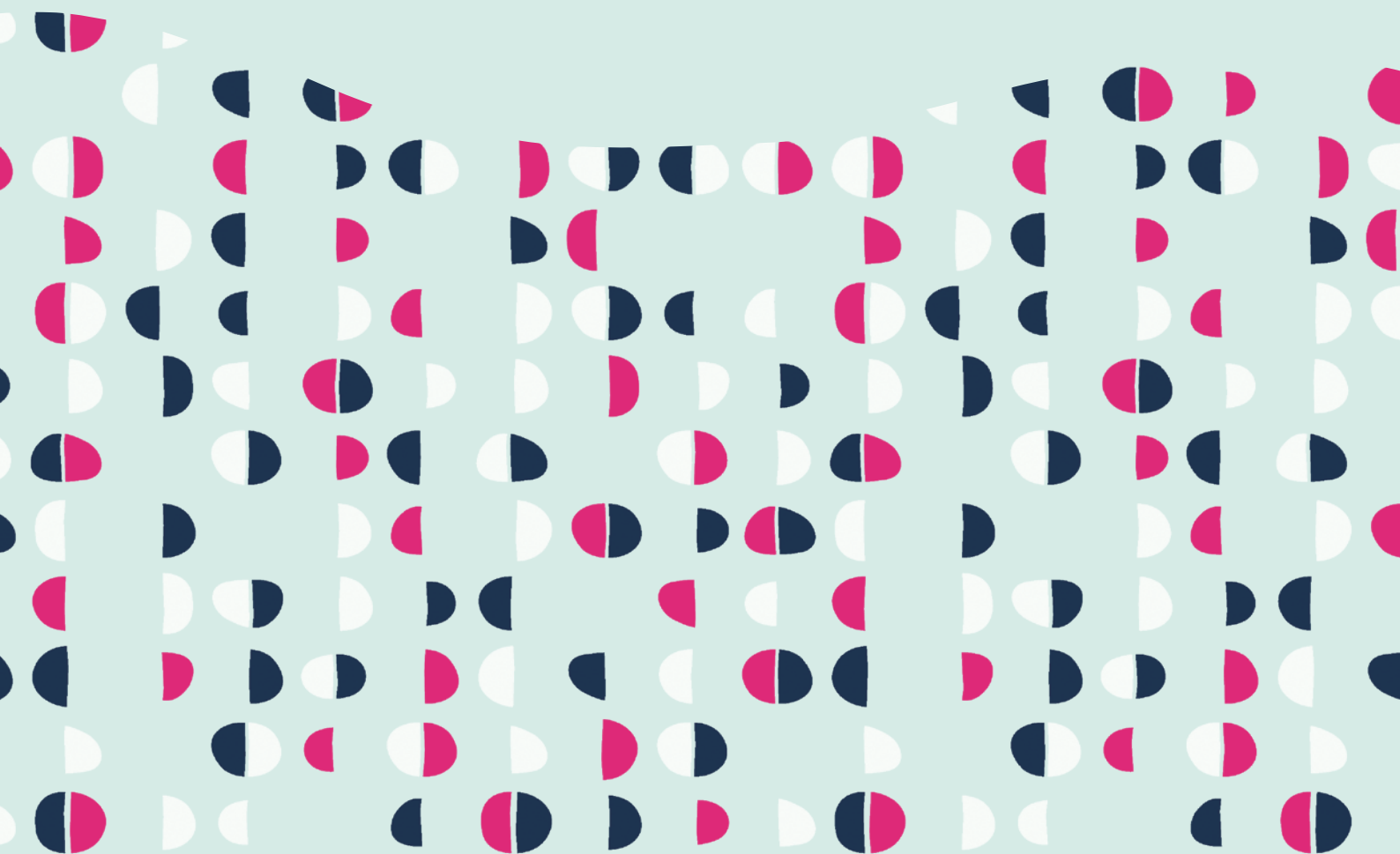


CREATIVE  
PRACTICE  
CONSULTANCY  
Arts & Education

# Contents

---

Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Research Method .....	7
The Case Studies .....	9
Analysis of the Cards .....	19
Conclusion .....	21
References .....	24
Appendix – the case study questions .....	25



# 1. Executive Summary

---

**In early 2023 Artsreach commissioned Creative Practice Consultancy, based in Lyme Regis, to undertake a case study evaluation of the social impact of its work.**

Two Creative Practice researchers carried out four case studies in late winter/spring 2023, visiting three rural communities and one cultural organisation. Data was collected in a number of ways and included semi-structured interviews, observation of volunteer and audience engagement at shows, and several opportunities for interviewees to feedback to the researchers orally and in a short written format. Twenty four people, who have volunteered for between 6-16 years in staging Artsreach events, were interviewed in all. Most of them also volunteer for other organisations.

Almost all interviewees viewed local access as important and felt that the low cost of Artsreach events provided audiences with a very affordable evening out to see a diversity of shows they perhaps wouldn't normally pay to see at a larger, more traditional venue.

Involvement with Artsreach was perceived to contribute to well-being by nurturing a supportive sense of purpose among volunteers, and in three cases helping to alleviate the effects of work-related stress or chronic illness. Most interviewees felt that Artsreach events brought communities together, especially those living alone. Other benefits interviewees cited included the revival of a village museum as a result of expertise gained through Artsreach events, increased usage of the village hall, and profits ploughed back into village activities and organisations, such as equipment for playgroups, sports and youth clubs.



Interviewees at the three village case studies, some audience members and a performer, said that the diversity of Artsreach performances and meeting performers from different cultures had positively affected appreciation of diversity among Dorset audiences. Interviewees at three of the cases felt that the loss of Artsreach events would diminish the social life of their communities – in one case as much as the loss of a post office or shop. Interviewees at the cultural organisation agreed that they had gained a stronger sense of identity in Dorset as a result of their establishment through Artsreach.

Almost without exception interviewees valued the relationship with Artsreach, and its professionalism, and enthusiasm.



'Most interviewees felt that Artsreach events brought communities together, especially those living alone'

Photo by Rachel Dunford





## 2. Introduction

---

In early 2023 Artsreach commissioned Creative Practice Consultancy, based in Lyme Regis, to undertake a case study evaluation of the social impact of its work. In part this was a follow up to a previous social and economic study which recommended a deeper enquiry into the nature of the Artsreach's social impact (Wood, 2019: 24). It was also a response to the priorities and obligations expressed by Arts Council England and Dorset Council, both of which fund Artsreach. Moreover, Artsreach trustees and staff wished better to understand and refine the effects of its work.

Artsreach is a cultural organisation which brings high quality cultural activity and family shows to rural communities across Dorset. Its performance programme is managed by a small staff team at their base in Dorchester,

supported by a network of around 40 volunteer promoting groups, staging around 140 professional events annually, including live performances, streamed events and creative participatory workshops for adults and children. Led by a local promoter, these volunteer teams support the staging of Artsreach events; typically advertising and promoting events in their community, and running the event on performance day, including staffing a bar, cafe or car park, as well as liaising with performers and often providing them with a meal or accommodation.

Most events take place in village halls, but also within pubs, churches, libraries, village schools, outside venues and small and medium Dorset arts venues, such as the Royal Manor Theatre, the Mowlem Theatre, and the Exchange.

The social impact of the arts is of prominent contemporary interest, sparked by Matarasso's seminal work, *Use or Ornament?: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (1997). Subsequently he turned his focus specifically on the social impact of the rural touring sector in *Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities* (2004).

More recently, a national report on rural touring by Coventry University, *CONCERTA: Contribution to Community Enhancement Through Rural Touring Arts* (2019), lists some social impacts of rural touring, namely: supporting the development of new social networks, building skills, driving improvements in local facilities (p54), the development of venues (p77), building community capacity (p81), and reducing isolation (p92).

The research described below was designed to explore whether the social impacts listed by Matarasso, and CONCERTA were in evidence in Artsreach's work.

Artsreach is funded by Dorset Council, whose cultural strategy hopes to achieve: 'An improvement in health and wellbeing and a decrease in social isolation in our communities.' (Dorset Council: 2021). The Arts Council England (ACE) in its cultural strategy for the period 2020-2030, *Let's Create*, requires funded organisations such as Artsreach to: 'adapt to...the needs of the communities [it] serve[s] and develop an understanding of the value [it] create[s] for your... community.'

This case study research is designed to deepen that understanding.





# 3. Research Method

---

Two Creative Practice researchers carried out four case studies in late winter/spring 2023, visiting three rural communities and one cultural organisation. The case studies were recommended by Artsreach staff on the basis of places where they believed the richest data could be collected. The staff specifically suggested that one case study be based on a large group of Dorset singers and musicians which had been brought together as a result of an Artsreach participatory project. After the project's conclusion some 10 years ago, the group had decided to continue playing and performing together. Artsreach supports the work by contributing to the group's publicity material and including their performances in Artsreach programmes. Clearly this case formed an outlier in contrast to the three village communities of the other cases.

The researchers conceived of the group as another volunteer community in itself, with the potential for providing rich social impact data, and interpreted the case study on this basis.

Data was collected in a number of ways and included semi-structured interviews, observation of volunteer and audience engagement at shows, and several opportunities for interviewees to feedback to the researchers orally and in a short written format – the 'three word postcard' (see p19).

The two researchers each visited two venues, and conducted semi-structured interviews with volunteers hosting shows in their community (performances in all cases in the respective village halls), and with the members of the choir and musicians' group referred to above. In order to provide an element of quality control and consistency, both

researchers participated in observing and interviewing the choir and musicians' group together, this being the first case study event.

The researchers also invited audience members to approach them and talk informally about their impressions of Artsreach at the shows – before the shows, in the intervals, and on occasion after the shows.

Finally, cards were distributed among the interviewees, who were invited to write down three words which they associated with the impact of Artsreach.

The researchers assured all of the interviewees that their contributions would be recorded anonymously, so that all of them could talk freely about Artsreach, whether negative or positive. Anonymity proved to be appropriate since there were a small amount of sensitive data, for example about individual health conditions, and references to attempts at partnership with schools. For this reason, each case study location is given a fictional name, taken from proper names in Thomas Hardy short stories; 'Tollamore,' 'West Poley,' 'Corvsgate,' and the 'Long Ash Quire and Players.'

The Long Ash Quire and Players were first formed around 10 years ago as Artsreach's contribution to the South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The original aim of forming the group was to re-create 'West Gallery' church music as eloquently described in Thomas Hardy's novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Led by two professionals long associated with Dorset, the Long Ash Quire and Players continue to perform throughout Dorset and now number around 50 performers. Artsreach supports them still by programming performances and contributing to printing and publicity.



The researchers' intention was, as far as possible, to work through a list of questions they had designed in order to illuminate forms of social impact (see Appendix 1). Almost all of the interviewees were keen to contribute, and this, whilst providing useful insights, often took the conversation away from the pre-designed question structure. Nevertheless, the interviews were mostly audio-

recorded for accuracy of recall and notes were written up and shared between the researchers soon after the interviews. The interviews are organised and summarised below (Section 4) using the headings within which groups of the questions were clustered. During the interviews some of the distinctions between these headings became blurred in the course of conversation.

## 4. The Case Studies

---

### 4.1 Local background

These questions sought to reveal something about the interviewees; how long they had been involved with Artsreach, what is the extent of their volunteering, what, if anything, do they get out of Artsreach activities, and to what extent this work had re-commenced after the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

At **Tollamore** the interview was with four volunteers, including the Artsreach promoter, before a sold-out evening performance by a jazz ensemble in the village hall to an audience of over 100. The team had around six years' experience with Artsreach shows and had also staged Artsreach childrens shows and workshops, which had widened their audience profile.



There was a consensus among the interviewees that Artsreach had made a distinctive contribution to well-being by being part of village recovery after Covid. Post pandemic it had been 'quiet' but the return of Artsreach shows had led to a 'vibrant' revival of activities, which had galvanised the volunteers.

The researchers also interviewed four volunteers staging another jazz quartet, at **West Poley**, where around 70 people regularly attend events, an estimated 30-40% being from the village community. This team had between five and 16 years' experience working with Artsreach, and some declared that they had been involved from the first Artsreach show in the village. At that time one volunteer had seen an Artsreach event at another

venue and, being experienced in organising arts events in the past, saw this as a good way of promoting the arts in a more rural setting and avoiding lengthy travel for local audiences. The interviewees volunteered for other organisations - the village hall committee, the pub quiz organisers, and young farmers, for example. It gave the volunteers a huge sense of enjoyment, - especially from the gratitude of the audience after a show - new and long-standing friendships and a sense of purpose. The interviewees judged that the pandemic had affected the community 'hugely' at the time and that it is still taking the older community some time to feel relaxed about returning to events.

One of the leaders of the **Long Ash Quire and Players** reflected on the pandemic:

*"I do think the pandemic has been a factor too, both in confirming for people in the group how important the companionship aspect of our music is"*

At **Corvsgate** researchers interviewed six volunteers at a physical theatre show, including the co-promoters, all of whom volunteered for other groups and organisations. This group has about ten years' experience supporting village events, the last seven of which have included Artsreach shows. Here, the average audience numbers 60-70, of which 60% is local, according to the interviewees. They believed that audiences had fully returned after the pandemic. As with other cases, enjoyment was felt to be the main benefit:

*"Mainly we enjoy the coming together; we have got to know each other better as an organising group – a social group"*

After a concert celebrating the work of Dorset poet William Barnes, researchers interviewed a self-selected group of ten performers from the Long Ash Quire and Players. Seven of the ten interviewees had been involved for around ten years, when the Quire and Players were formed.

The group's positive responses to the questions reflected their long-term commitment to the Quire and Players.

Contributions from the Long Ash members clearly suggested a predisposition among them to join things, volunteer and participate in group activities. There were individuals who belonged, or had done, to the Hardy Players, the William Barnes society, a range of music groups and others who volunteered at Hardy's cottage, or on the Dorset Ridgeway. But the activities of the Quire and Players had directly prompted several interviewees to take up new pastimes - particularly but not solely in music - and to learn new skills. One had learnt to play the concertina and several had gained the confidence to join other performing groups. One person added:

*"[Our] supportive huddles lead on to more extensive friendships. Now we're in touch and do other things together"*



## 4.2 Access to arts locally

This conversation questioned whether the low cost of Artsreach events and the proximity of access added anything to social and community benefit.

At Tollamore and Corvsgate they highlighted the environmental benefit of reducing travel by providing cultural provision close to home and described the complexity of their journey to other urban centres in Dorset to see shows, contrasting it with the reliable high quality of Artsreach performances, staged so close to home.

*"People don't necessarily want to travel. We know that."*

*"...what's the point of driving an hour to see something?"*

This was echoed by several audience members who emphasised the accessibility of shows in local venues. Four people at West Poley had driven in from a nearby village which also stages Artsreach events, but their conception of local access

included a radius around the immediate village community. They viewed local access as important and felt that the cost was low and provided a very affordable evening out, which meant they got to see shows they perhaps wouldn't normally pay to see at a bigger, more traditional venue and that this was broadening their arts experiences. The volunteer team there had previously increased prices, better to cover costs, but the cost of living crisis had prompted them to reduce them to the recommended Artsreach price of £10. They added that, since there is no public transport in the village at all, local access to arts is vital.

There were only two or three isolated statements about the local accessibility of being part of the Long Ash Quire and Players. It was important to one contributor to be able to get home in a reasonably short time after a concert.

*"We are not touring all over the country. We can get home afterwards. Doing it in your own county is a joy"*

### 4.3 Benefits

This section tried to unpick the concept of 'well-being' as related to Artsreach activity, principally but not solely for the volunteers. It also tried to identify material benefits arising from Artsreach work.

A range of contributions among the Long Ash Quire and Players can be grouped under the heading of 'well-being' and help to define what the interviewees have come to understand by the term. Two people made reference to the substantial role that being in the organisation had played in helping them to recover and recuperate from chronic illness.

Another contributor described the activities of rehearsing and performing as diverting him from worrying about work or other issues. Moreover, several contributions described the supportive culture within the group, whereby all abilities were welcomed and nurtured and none were judged on their abilities.

This nurturing atmosphere applied as much to small sub-groups, which had naturally formed within the Quire and Players, as within the entire company.

*"It's great to play in a relaxed, non-judgemental but welcoming music group as opposed to when I used to play in more formal classical orchestral groups"*

There was unanimous assent to this conception of the group culture; one interviewee said:

*"It's harmonious in every sense of the word"*

Tollamore's conception of well-being in the context of Artsreach activities was that it encouraged socialisation:

*"The well-being part, I think it gets a lot of people out who wouldn't normally bother. Having the refreshments. Meeting people that they know"*

An interviewee at West Poley reflected on this, saying:

"People come out and enjoy feeling good... [it] breaks down the monotony of life... helps people come together. We kept going during COVID and [well-being] came to the fore then."

Corvsgate's performance arrangements actively encourage socialising, particularly for single people, many of whom come alone:

"We set up café style and then people who don't know each other get a chance to meet; we provide crisps on the table and it makes it more sociable – providing food helps."

A Long Ash interviewee wanted particularly to stress the educational benefits of the group which led to a sustained set of contributions about the ways in which participating in the Quire and Players had stimulated the interviewees' interest in Dorset history and culture, and

contributed to their sense of Dorset identity and belonging:

"In some ways we're restoring a bit of history"

"I came down from the North-west five and a half years ago [and this] body of culture gives you a sense of pride of place and belonging"

"We're putting [audiences] in touch with their roots and we're learning from their roots"

"We learn things about the county which we didn't know before"

"Speaking as a nomadic person who has spent longer in Dorset now than anywhere else the whole Artsreach project, the whole South West Dorset thing... it had a literature group which I joined, a reading group, a writing group - archaeology group which explained all those funny bumps along the Ridgeway. As a complete outsider I now actually feel as though Dorset's my home... where I do sort of belong"



This sense of identity and pride in the local and wider Dorset community was referenced, albeit less specifically, by interviewees at the other case studies. Most commonly discussion ranged around Artsreach events bringing people together in a positive, affirming atmosphere, thus giving volunteers a sense of achievement and satisfaction in their role with Artsreach.

Two audience members at Tollamore said they had relocated to Dorset from Sheffield and London respectively and had found quality performing arts more varied and accessible here rather than in their previous urban offer, consequently they expressed a growing preference for the rural arts they were now encountering in Dorset.

## 4.4 A catalyst for change?

This section was devoted to finding out if any new events or activities had been prompted by involvement in Artsreach.

The promoter at Tollamore explained that the renaissance of the village museum owed something to Artsreach. It had closed during lockdown, having been run for many years by a local volunteer who died during this time. It was feared that the museum would close indefinitely. However, two volunteers used their experience of working with Artsreach to book a range of speakers on history and museum topics for a series of winter talks in the village hall. As a result, there is now enough enthusiasm and support to re-open the museum. The Artsreach experience had given sufficient confidence to local volunteers, therefore, to add to Tollamore's list of activities.



At Corvsgate the view was that the professionalism of Artsreach has been a good model for this village group's other activities:

*"I like being involved with such a professional organisation that is approachable and friendly"*

The interviewees at West Poley listed a range of beneficial changes; increased usage of the village hall, profits ploughed back into village activities and organisations such as equipment for the playgroup and the sports and youth clubs. Corvsgate's team felt the same. At West Poley the pub was said to do well on Artsreach nights because people go before and after. However, there was some disappointment at Corvsgate that their attempts to involve the local school in Artsreach events, including the offer of workshops, had been less successful. West Poley similarly regretted that there wasn't a stronger partnership with the school. Both groups agreed, however, that the schools had multiple priorities and so understood the difficulties in taking on another initiative like supporting Artsreach events.

## 4.5 Justice, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity

This section of the conversation explored the impact of Artsreach on forms of disadvantage in the community, such as disability and low-income households, and in some cases the possible isolation of people living alone. This conversation also explored the extent to which communities were accessing and absorbing cultural diversity through their Artsreach experience.

Tollamore's interviewees felt that the non-intimidatory environment of these shows was one to which people could come on their own.

*"Because they know that there are going to be people there that they know"*

And at West Poley:

*"It's a social event – a get together; single, older people come together and are happy to come here when they wouldn't go elsewhere"*

One volunteer gave the example of a villager in his 70s who always comes on his own and is comfortable doing so. At West Poley interviewees pointed out their demographic had changed and that Artsreach events had given new people to the area a chance to integrate. At Corvsgate, an interviewee said:

*"We have a Syrian family in the village and we invited them to an Artsreach event as our guests"*

Before the show at Tollamore one of the musicians came, on his own initiative, to say that rural touring in Dorset felt quite different to him than other rural touring schemes; namely in the openness of audiences and their receptiveness to diverse musical styles and genres. Having performed at many Artsreach shows over the years he felt that its willingness to bring an eclectic cultural offer to the county had positively influenced the receptiveness of its audiences.

Quite independently, the volunteer interviewees spent some time on the same issue of the diversity of Artsreach shows.

One said that audiences in Tollamore:

*"Go to things which [they] wouldn't necessarily go to and that makes people a little braver maybe. [They] might not try something if they had to travel a long way for it. They might not take that risk"*

In another's opinion Artsreach's offer:

*"widens everybody's appreciation of the arts, I think"*

The musicians performing at Tollamore were staying locally overnight with one of the local volunteers, a form of hospitality which is often on offer to Artsreach artists in Dorset venues. At Corvsgate the volunteer team host performers too. This prompted one of the interviewees to comment that meeting the artists and offering them a meal or a bed for the night afforded local people chances to socialise with the performers. This helped broaden volunteers' appreciation:

*"We always get to talk to them as well and learn about someone else's life. It enriches my life by talking to them"*



At West Poley there was also appreciation of the diversity of Artsreach acts, which had come in the past from Poland, South Africa, Belgium and Chile. A volunteer declared that working in farming could be very isolating:

*"... so this is a win-win situation – having a nice time and getting to see acts I wouldn't normally see. [There have been] big surprises that you wouldn't normally go to see – I never thought about that – some of the best have been the surprises"*

## 4.6 Counter Factual

This briefly posed the question about the potential effects of not having Artsreach in the community.

At West Poley the volunteer team felt that not having Artsreach would be as serious the closure of the post office or shop.

*"It would leave a big hole in our lives and the village"*

Audience members thought Artsreach events brought people together and supported village life when pubs and other facilities were under threat. By contrast, the Corvsgate team felt that their strengths as a team would be able to offer alternative events if Artsreach wasn't available.

However, the volunteers, especially the promoters, were very keen to say how much they valued the relationship with Artsreach, and how they were fortunate to work with such a professional, helpful and enthusiastic team at Artsreach.



## 5. An analysis of the words used on the cards

In all, 22 people returned the blank postcards distributed at the interviews to write down three words or phrases which they associate with Artsreach. It was hoped that asking for this brief and spontaneous reaction to Artsreach would provide an insight into the immediate personal associations it prompted, complementary to the more considered responses during the interview conversation.

These comments could legitimately be grouped into two principal categories:

an **'enjoyment'** group to include references to **'fun, entertaining, brilliant, rewarding, unexpected, satisfaction'** and **'stimulation;'**

a **'community'** group to include **'friendship, belonging, purpose, inclusive'** and **'community engagement.'**

### FUN

was mentioned most with ten mentions

### FRIENDSHIP

had eight mentions

### COMMUNITY

was mentioned next with five comments

### REWARDING

had two mentions, as did:

### ENTERTAINING

and

### ENJOYMENT

Words mentioned once included:

**purpose • unexpected • brilliant • satisfaction • stimulation • inclusive • quality • variety • community engagement**

Nine of the ten interviewees in the Long Ash Quire and Players returned completed cards and their words warrant a separate analysis, given the unique nature of this case study.

To some extent the words used were the same as in the three other cases: the most commonly used word was 'fun' (4 times) with the word 'enjoyment' closely associated. However, a unique feature of the words returned was a cluster around the group's dynamic: 'friendship' (twice) 'kindred' (twice), 'sociable,' 'collegiate,' 'company,' 'support' and 'inclusion,' all indicated the strength of feeling within a Dorset cultural institution which Artsreach had established in the first place and supported subsequently. The word 'education' was also twice submitted.

**FUN**  
**ENJOYMENT**  
**FRIENDSHIP**  
**KINDRED**  
**SOCIABLE**  
**COLLEGIATE**  
**COMPANY**  
**SUPPORT**  
**INCLUSION**  
**EDUCATION**





## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this evaluation was to gain, through case studies, a more detailed and textured insight into the extent of social impact prompted by Artsreach's work in Dorset as a geographical area and group of communities.

It should be noted that 'impact' is a gendered notion, subtly masculine, implying force, action and reaction. So current funding imperatives to demonstrate social impact enjoins cultural organisations to identify social changes which are in some material or measurable way positively affected by the funded organisations. This can be difficult to demonstrate and isolate, given the context; can personal responses to the arts *cause* social changes and be shown solely to make that difference?

But we can simplify: at a rational level we suggest social impact in the context of Artsreach, as a rural touring organisation,

means putting something on offer to people in their social lives, a performance, an exhibition, a workshop, an activity. This might be thought of as *threshold level* social impact.

So much the better if the barriers to accessing this cultural menu are low; access is easy because transport barriers are minimal and venues for this cultural offer are local. Low ticket prices reduce the barrier of affordability. On both counts it is clear from the cases that Artsreach's way of working minimises these barriers and optimises accessibility. Moreover *all* interviewees valued Artsreach's work and emphasised its quality and professionalism.

What is on offer also has to be attractive; work which is not necessarily always mainstream or popular but also sufficiently diverse and intriguing to attract an audience or participants.

Once again, the sell-outs for the Artsreach shows the researchers attended provide evidence of its impact. Moreover, across the year's programme, Artsreach shows attract an audience of over 80% capacity.

Also, there was ample evidence that audiences welcomed the diversity of Artsreach performances and some offered more detailed accounts of the wider perspectives gained from interacting with performers from several countries and cultures.

But an added form of social impact, a **second level**, we suggest, would be a cultural organisation's level of success in promoting social participation. There are examples of this in the Artsreach case studies, particularly in the inclusive culture of the Long Ash Quire and Players.

Furthermore, the confidence gained from Artsreach was claimed as the reason for the revival of Tollamore's museum, and several new facilities and activities were partially facilitated as a result of the Artsreach experience.

A **third level** of social impact, we believe, adding distinctive value to a cultural organisation in a geographical area, would be to promote a sense of identity and allegiance in that area, in this case Dorset and/or its towns and villages. All case studies, particularly at Tollamore and within the Quire and Players, revealed evidence of this.

A **fourth** and more challenging level of impact highlighted in Dorset Council's Cultural Strategy, for example, is when a cultural organisation has an influence on health and well-being. A few of the interviewees, particularly during the Long Ash Quire and Players interview, provided testimony that Artsreach activities had an influence in this respect.



Nonetheless, since most of the interviewees were 'serial' volunteers in related organisations other than Artsreach, it seems likely that many of them have a positive, optimistic disposition anyway.

This case study research cannot plausibly admit generalisations across the 40 or more venues to which Artsreach brings performers. It is, however, legitimate to point to comparisons across the cases. Artsreach is seen as a force for good in the life of the local community – it brings people together in novel and unusual ways, sometimes providing 'big surprises' in the shows. This allows people to experience live performances which they would not normally either choose to see or be prepared to pay larger amounts or travel farther to see. Affordability and local access are important to the interviewees, although local does not necessarily mean from a particular village but from the 'locality'.

An awareness of the potential for social isolation and loneliness in rural life was evident from some comments and Artsreach events were seen as a positive force in combating isolation.

The support and professionalism of Artsreach was mentioned on several occasions, and there is clear recognition of the central role it plays in guiding and facilitating these very popular, well-attended events. But, in addition, the commitment, enthusiasm and efficiency of volunteer promoting teams was also notable. Artsreach should maintain its commendable levels of support and informal training for promoters and may feel it advantageous to extend its training and recruitment activities for them. Moreover, Artsreach may wish to extend its efforts in brokering the sort of partnerships with, for example, schools.





As noted in the introduction, Dorset Council's cultural strategy seeks, 'An improvement in health and wellbeing and a decrease in social isolation in our communities,' (Dorset Council: 2021). Moreover, in its Business Plan 2021-4, Artsreach's mission statement includes aspirations to: 'provide a range of arts activities which support the personal, social and emotional wellbeing of a diverse range of residents of all ages,' and to, 'foster community development through involvement in diverse arts activities and increase the use of existing resources and venues in rural areas.'

The evidence from this small-scale case study evaluation demonstrates that Artsreach has made key contributions to achieving these goals.

**Phil Whitehead**

**Dr David Wood**

*For Creative Practice*

*Consultancy, Lyme Regis*

**creativepractice@me.com**

## References

Dunham, P., Henry, N., Warwick, F., Webster, M., Bos, E., Challis, S., Tornari, M., Merendino, A., Broughton, K. (2019) *CONCERTA: Contribution to Community Enhancement Through Rural Touring Arts*. Coventry University, Arts Council England, National Rural Touring Forum.

Matarasso, F. (1997) *Use or Ornament?: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts*. Comedia.

Matarasso, F. (2004) *Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities*. Comedia/ National Rural Touring Forum.

Matarasso, F. (2007) *Artsreach Discussion Paper*. Dorchester: Artsreach.

Wood, D. (2019) *Valuing the Arts in Rural Dorset: The Social and Economic impact of Artsreach*. Dorchester: Artsreach.



# Appendix – the case study questions

Venue..... Date..... Time..... (start) Time.....(end)

Interviewer Name.....

Number of interviewees.....

*Creative Practice* arts consultancy is conducting group interviews with volunteers and audiences participating in Artsreach events, as part of an evaluation for Artsreach. Its funders and, in particular, Dorset Council wants to find out whether Artsreach has any 'social impact' in Dorset. For example, have people developed friendships and networks, developed new skills and a sense of community and identity with Dorset culture. Here are the sorts of questions which the interviewers, Phil Whitehead and David Wood, will discuss with you. If you have time, think about your answers. Thank you!

## **The Coded Version of Artsreach Social Impact Study**

### **The local background**

How many volunteers?

How many people in the local community which typically attend events?

How many on average come to events?

Briefly, is the pandemic still having effects on the staging of AR events?

How long have interviewees been involved in helping to stage AR events (in this venue)?

For how many of you is this your only volunteering activity?

Why did you agree to get involved?

For any of you, did AR encourage you to volunteer to do something else? (e.g. volunteering elsewhere, trying new activities?)

How would you describe what you get out of it – if anything?

Have you got anything personally out of particular events or hosting and meeting particular performers? (e.g. a new insight into a performance genre from overseas?)

Is there anything else you would like to say about either the personal or community influences/impacts of staging AR events.

### **Access to arts locally**

Have any local people commented to you on the cost of AR events and/or the proximity of access to professional performances at your venue.

On a rough one to ten scale (1 = not important, 8 = very important) how important is it that your audience has a short distance to travel to AR events?

### **Benefits**

Can you describe the benefits and/or any disadvantages of staging AR events in your community?

Has involvement with AR led to any new facilities or activities in your venue? (e.g. lighting, sound equipment) How?

A recent survey showed that 90% of respondents felt that volunteering for Artsreach had contributed to their 'well-being?' Do you agree? If so, how?

### **A catalyst for change?**

Can you think of anything that has happened as a direct follow up to a successful AR show or workshop? (e.g. a new group forming to do an activity?)

After a successful AR show do you recall hearing any suggestions or ideas about other events which the local community could start?

Has the experience of hosting AR events encouraged other events, new activities in the community? (e.g. has the central admin of AR in Dorchester demonstrated how to organise other events?)

### **Justice, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity**

Do you think that low income homes locally can come to AR events? Have you encountered any evidence of that?

Do AR events make any difference to other disadvantaged people locally, (e.g. those who are disabled, isolated or with health problems)?

AR performers come from a variety of countries and cultures. Does this have any influence on your community?

### **Counter Factual**

If the local community benefits from the activity in the (venue/village hall) roughly what proportion of that is down to AR events, do you think?

If there were no AR in your community would it be worse off? Would any other facilities or events not happen?

On a postcard write up to 3 words which you associate with volunteering to help with Artsreach events.



[www.artsreach.co.uk](http://www.artsreach.co.uk)



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Dorset**  
Council