



Executive Summary

Think Tank: The Future of Music in Criminal Justice Settings - 1st & 2nd November 2022

Overview

Think Tanks are facilitated and curated discussions held at Britten Pears Arts' unique site at Snape Maltings involving a broad range of stakeholders and cross-sector groups exploring specific themes.

This interdisciplinary focus may include academic, health, social care, arts, culture and fundraising sectors aiming to embrace a wide range of perspectives and stimulate fresh thinking on contemporary topics in the arts, health and wellbeing.

Through connecting cross sector worlds, exploring cultural differences and establishing a common language, our Think Tanks facilitate knowledge exchange, contribute to culture change and lay foundations for research, project development and collaborations.

Through these Think Tank events, Britten Pears Arts aim to be a strong voice in a changing landscape, helping shift culture away from siloed thinking to co-creation so that arts, health and wellbeing can flourish and be embedded in research, policy development, training and delivery.

Think Tank: The Future of Music in Criminal Justice Settings

There is a substantial legacy of arts and culture in criminal justice settings and significant knowledge and expertise has been amassed over several decades. Innovative work in this field is being commissioned by organisations working in partnership with specialist companies and artists, and new approaches to artistic practice and to wider audience development have emerged.

We took the opportunity to bring together a range of stakeholders for an in-depth discussion on the future of music in criminal justice settings, to explore how we can develop and strengthen this creative activity across all areas of the criminal justice system; how we can put people with lived experience at the heart of delivery and continue to enrich the cultural landscape for us all.

We aimed to ask some key questions:

- What assumptions are we making around equity of access in terms of music making and learning?
- What are the models for creating music in this environment - one to one, social, psychological etc.? What new models are emerging?
- What are the motivations for music in criminal justice settings? E.g., reconnection, reform, rediscovery, recovery?
- What are the constraints and opportunities for music in criminal justice settings?
- How does a punitive environment affect our approach and outcomes to music making in criminal justice settings?
- How do we create conditions for high quality work in a competitive tendering environment?
- What is the value of preventative work (e.g., in Pupil Referral Units) or working with ex-offenders.
- How best do we support artists working in this environment?
- How best to we support / encourage prison staff to engage with this and advocate for this work?

Britten Pears Arts in Criminal Justice Settings

Britten Pears Arts has had a relationship HMP Warren Hill for over 20 years, both as a Young Offenders Institute and as a Category C adult male prison. The music programme aims to create positive experiences for prisoners, help raise their confidence, and provide a space to build new skills by collaborating with professional musicians.

The impact of the pandemic on prisons has been enormous, with shifting and prolonged lockdown measures disrupting the regular regime and prohibiting external visitors. Over the last two years, the Community Team at Britten Pears Arts have worked closely with the Arts team at Warren Hill to adapt to changing circumstances and provide prisoners with a creative outlet during lockdown.

In August 2021 our team was allowed back into the prison to restart our work. We noticed that prisoners were coming forward who had never engaged with Britten Pears Arts before and with this came a huge mix of experience. This Think Tank will play a part in informing the future direction of our work.

Delegates

This event, facilitated by Katherine Zeserson, included: Dr Kirstin Anderson, *Lecturer in Criminology, Edinburgh Napier University*; Dr Sara Ascenso, *Lecturer in Musicians' Health and Wellbeing, Royal Northern College of Music*; Dr David Atkins, *Lecturer in Psychology, University of Suffolk*; Catherine Birch, *Senior Lecturer in Music, York St John University*; Bruce Cole, *Community musician and teacher, Independent - retired from University of York*; Nikki Crane, *Lead for Art, Health and Wellbeing, Kings College London, Independent Arts Consultant*; Michael Goodey, *Musician in Residence, Facilitator and Trainer, Irene Taylor*

Trust and Noise Solution; Rachel Graham, Project Director (Music Specialist), TiPP; Yve Riby-Williams, Singer Songwriter, Producer, NAALA/Britten Pears Arts; Tyrone Steele, Criminal Justice Lawyer, JUSTICE; Sally Taylor, Chief Executive, Koestler Arts, Alison Urie Director Vox Luminis

Unfortunately, invited delegates from HMP Warren Hill and the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance were unable to join us at the event.

Key Findings

Purpose

- The arts and music in criminal justice settings is about flourishing not fixing people. We are concerned with access, privilege and dignity. Music making engenders autonomy, relatedness and competence.
- Music in criminal justice settings needs to come out of the margins and into the mainstream.
- There is an ethical question about how we represent people we work with, developing sensitivity, respect and delivering trauma informed practice.
- Creative arts as a conduit to personal development, learning and growth is not widely understood or respected.
- The arts have been embedded in integrated care; we would like to do the same for arts and music in criminal justice settings.
- There is a need to work with the wider community, raise awareness about the value and positive effects of music in criminal justice settings for all stakeholders; to change the narrative and shift attitudes.
- We need to take music beyond the prison walls.

Policy

- The recent government Prisons Strategy White Paper makes no mention of the arts.
- The House of Commons Committee report on the role of education in criminal justice settings 'Not just another brick in the wall' did raise the importance of a broader curriculum to engage disaffected prisoners and that arts could play to support positive outcomes in rehabilitation.
- Creative literacy is as important to human flourishing as numerical and other forms of literacy. It enables people to develop the skills and attributes which enables them to engage fully in society and learning.
- Music on its own cannot address the systemic issues which lead to disadvantage and offending and therefore should not be expected to solve these issues.

Process

- Music in prisons was an area of the arts most effected by Covid and returning to prisons to introduce music making since the pandemic has been difficult.
- We need to better understand the needs of the system and people involved in it, as well as having better dialogue with policy makers and funders about the value and purpose of music in criminal justice settings.

- Finding key people is vital. We need to train and involve HMPPS staff and identify champions. However, the turnover of staff and low staff to prisoner ratio makes the practicalities of music making difficult. There are layers of access and bureaucracy to navigate.
- Music leaders and staff are wary of triggering emotional outpouring and subsequent effects; there is fragility and vulnerability in the space. There is also a suspicion about the value of music in prisons. We can learn from other arts and identify shared models of learning on challenges and opportunities.

Praxis

- More research – a mapping of projects, evaluation mechanisms and case studies - would be valuable as a stronger evidence base for this work.
- We need to build community for music in criminal justice settings – networking, training, learning from other arts, building conversations, learning together and sharing good practice.
- It is valuable to influence policy, systems and people. This involves awareness raising, advocacy and campaigning.
- Artists themselves can be upskilled to be leaders and catalysts, to empower people to find their spark and tell their story.
- There is limited funding in this area, we are all aiming for the same pot of money, collaborative working across the arts could be a way forward.
- There is an opportunity to work across education, health, welfare, youth justice and probation. To bring sectors together.

Quotes

Working in the system

“Playing music in prisons doesn’t address debt, poverty, addiction or other reasons that people end up in prison. It doesn’t address the impact of systemic disadvantage, including the prison system itself. As such, music is mistakenly seen as a reward. It helps people survive incarceration. We must acknowledge that we have a role in the system. We are a form of care.”

“It’s not radical to want to change a system that harms people by design.”

“Creating hope in a place where it is suffocating is a challenge.”

“Are we just propping up a system, making things bearable? Can we be a little more radical rather than pacifying? It’s not our job to normalise this experience.”

“If things can't be changed from the outside in, then maybe we can change them from inside out.”

“We have to do what we can, where we are, with what we have.”

“Maybe people need reminding that happy people tend to behave better.”

“There are so many tensions within our practise. We are still operating inside a system we can't change and rub up against. Prison doesn't address why people are in prison. So, what can we do on the ground beyond the tension of punishing vs flourishing. Can we do something which incorporates communities and shifts narrative?”

“Our job is to juggle this complexity, not to control. We create agency within people. We navigate uncertainty and ambiguity. We can do what we can to change culture from inside. Sometimes we can be outcome driven, sometimes we are just going in and doing the work.”

“We could have heard very similar dissonances and resonances in mental health system. Should we abolish these systems, or should we be making them bearable? This is a systemic problem. Everyone wants to dismantle and rebuild in a way that is fairer, clearer and kinder.”

Measuring success

“Sharing is key, but it is difficult to share music within the walls. Half the point is unlocking doors both metaphorically and physically.”

“We are often asked for clinical outcomes which are impossible to fulfil. But many people say music is the only thing that gets them through.”

“What counts as success in a project? Who is reaping the benefits of a successful outcome? How do we make sure the fruits are far more evenly distributed?”

“We saw positive functioning and flourishing. Is there a research piece in identifying what success means for different stakeholders?”

“There are so many ways we document and evaluate work in prisons, but they don't recognise the very thing that's special which is the music in that context. One question to think about is who is this for and what is it we want to capture? There has been an expectation that this work has to evidence that people won't reoffend.”

“If we find it difficult to access the criminal justice system this might be due to disagreement about the value of this work and lack of evidence. We need to provide positive evidence – this comes back to ‘escalating positivity’. The more we have that conversation, the more change we will see.”

Value and Purpose

“We all deserve music in our lives. Music is a right and creativity is a source of human flourishing. People in prison are worth this work. Those in custody deserve this practise as much as anyone else.”

“Are we truly facilitating the voices and views of those in prison? We need to find the voices not being heard, advocate for wider opportunities and escalate positivity.”

“What would happen if access to music was regarded as a mandatory benefit in our culture?”

“Nobody should be judged by the worst thing they have ever done. All of us here fundamentally believe that everyone deserves a second chance and creativity can help them get there.”

“We need an attitude shift from fixing to flourishing to change the existing narrative.”

Connection and Collaboration

“So many organisations are doing this work and we don’t know each other. This is the first time I have been in a room with other practitioners and researchers in this field and I have been doing this work for 10 years. This conversation needs to continue.”

“Coproduction and cocreation will help create legacy”

Outcomes

People endure incarceration in a system that is understaffed and overcrowded. Music and other arts have too often been seen as either placatory or held to such high expectations of ‘fixing’ individuals in a complex and interconnected system of which it only plays a small part. It is time for music making in criminal justice settings to come out of the margins and into the mainstream; to be valued as a means of human flourishing rather than human fixing. It is a collaborative, relational activity involving all those involved in the system and in our communities. We all deserve access to music. It is not a privilege. Creating music develops dignity and enables expression. Music is transformational in helping to build resilience and understanding.

- We need to find ways to continue this conversation, find mutual support and share ideas.
- Musicians need access to greater understanding of the criminal justice system and the constraints, culture and frameworks in which they operate.
- We need to find ways to collaborate and cocreate so we can bring music making in the criminal justice system into the mainstream and facilitate an attitudinal shift.
- There as a research opportunity for mapping projects and identifying effective and meaningful evaluative frameworks so we can exemplify good practise.

For more information, please contact

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