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## **Cohesive Magic, Creative Collective Expression: Community Arts in Ireland and Their Beneficial Role in Youth Work and Community Development**

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### **Abstract**

Community arts have been in evidence in Ireland for over three decades; however, this form of artistic practice has been largely overlooked from social studies perspectives. There is a dearth of social studies scholarship on community arts within the Irish context, which may be explained in part by participatory arts becoming the more dominant practice in recent years. Therefore, this article works to introduce youth work, community development and social studies students and practitioners to community arts and to try and spark interest in this type of arts-based practice. The paper seeks to provide an understanding of community arts and to differentiate community arts (focused on and emerging from communities) from participatory arts (focused on individuals and groups and emerging from organisations and/or institutions). The history of community arts in Ireland is outlined and the contribution of community arts to youth work and community development is focused on. Drawing from international empirical research the paper highlights the beneficial role that community arts can have, in the contexts of youth work and community development. To conclude, the article argues that community arts can play an important role in youth work and community development because this type of arts-based practice facilitates collective community expression and can help stimulate social change from the ground up. The paper encourages youth work, community development and social studies students and practitioners to examine any preconceived ideas they have, that might inhibit them from helping facilitating community arts projects and set these aside; in order to, explore opportunities to foster cohesive magic and creative collective expression to bring about social change.

*Keywords:* community arts, arts, Ireland, youth work, community development

## Introduction

Irish communities have been coming together to create art works for millennia (Charles-Edwards, 2004; Harding, 2007; Finlay & Harris, 2018). From early megalithic and rock art of the Stone Age, to Celtic art of the Bronze and Iron Ages, from the manuscripts and fine metal work of Early Christian Ireland, to more recent traditional arts of Irish music, song, dance, and oral arts such as ‘agallamh beirte’ (dialog in verse) and ‘lúibíní’ (short verses between two or more people) (The Arts Council, 2018, p. 2). There is evidence of communities engaging in creative practices throughout Ireland’s past. According to Blatt-Gross (2017), such ancient communities were engaged in arts practices as part of rituals that functioned as (among other things) exercises in group bonding. Whilst it is clear Ireland has a deep and ancient artistic heritage, the concept of community arts as we understand them today, is a relatively new one. This paper explores this concept of community arts, in order to provide youth work, community development and social studies students and practitioners with an understanding of community arts and to differentiate community arts from participatory arts. The main argument advanced throughout the paper is that community arts originated from a need for communities to express ideas, issues and problems that were of importance to them, in order to bring about social change; however, in recent years community arts have been side-lined and greater investment has been placed in participatory arts, which are focused more on individuals and groups and are apolitical in nature. By side-lining community arts, there is a danger that some communities lose their voice. The following section explores the emergence of community arts in Ireland.

### The Emergence of Community Arts in Ireland

The timeline of Ireland’s ancient artistic heritage can be traced from the Neolithic period, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, through the Early and High Christian Periods, through a decline during the Anglo-Norman invasions, through to a revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on to the present day (Charles-Edwards, 2004; Harding, 2007; Finlay & Harris, 2018). Community arts, as understood within this paper, are a relatively new phenomena within Irish society. The reason for this is due, in part, to the fact that the arts were not always equally accessible to everyone within society. The arts were and remain luxury commodities. According to Holden (2008, p. 30) the regular enjoyment of the arts and culture “is far from being universal, and it is far from being equally distributed”. Wealth is required to enjoy and/or engage in them. As Garber (2008, p. 1) states “artists have always had patrons”: wealthy individuals who provided the artist with money in order for them to create art works. Historically, those without wealth were excluded from the creation, participation or possession of “professional” art works (professional because money was exchanged for them). Holden (2008, p. 30) argues this remains the case today with “those who engage with the arts” continuing to be “drawn overwhelmingly from educated and social elites”. The working classes were excluded from the arts due to their socio-economic status and this was further compounded by the absence of depictions of the working classes from art works throughout much of history. Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca 1528-69) (also known as Peasant Bruegel), a Dutch painter, is considered one of the first artists to depict the working classes in his paintings; his work in turn, was said to appeal “to the man in the street” at that time (Friedländer, 1981, p. 137). Bruegel’s paintings of the ‘Peasant Wedding’, ‘Peasant Dance’ and ‘The Hunters in the Snow’ depict the working classes in scenes from 16<sup>th</sup> century daily life and it is these works

that led to him being celebrated as a “chronicler of the humble pleasures of rustic life” (Flamand, 1968, p. 75). However, it is not until the emergence of Realism (an art movement originating in France that sought to depict the world truthfully and accurately) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that we begin to see regular depictions of the working classes and scenes of everyday life in art. It is important to state that while access to the arts (those created by professionals) may have been limited to those with the necessary social, cultural and economic capital to do so; this is not to say that the lower or working classes didn’t have any form of arts in their lives. However, there is generally a distinction made between the arts of the professional art world, what Holden (2008, p. 10) refers to as “the high arts” (“opera, ballet, poetry, literature, painting, sculpting and drama”) and the arts created by everyday “folk” at home: folk arts. In this regard, we can find examples of folk arts in all societies (Becker, 1982), including Ireland.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century marks a dramatic shift in access to the arts, with traditional arts establishments being challenged by new political perspectives and the more readily available art forms of film and photography. Madyaningrum and Sonn (2011) point to political fractions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as the genesis for community arts. At this time, socialist factions began to argue that cultural resources, such as the arts, should be accessible to all classes (ibid). These socialist thinkers argued that access to cultural resources was an essential part of creating an egalitarian society that was humane and just (ibid). One of the earliest community arts centres was established by Edina Savage in New York as part of the “Harlem Renaissance” (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 64). Established in 1938, the “Harlem Community Art Centre” was a federally funded project that provided art education to children and adults from the Harlem community for free or little charge (MAAP, 2008). However, it was not until after World War II and the emergence of ideas about cultural democracy (everyone having equal access to culture and the arts) that the generation of cultural and artistic expression shifted from “institutions of cultural power” to individuals and communities (Tate, n.d. b, p. 1). In 1948, the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 27 of the declaration states that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (U.N., 1948, p. 7). These ideas about cultural democracy provided the necessary impetus for community arts to emerge. Thus, it was during the 1960’s and 1970’s that community arts, as they are understood today, began to emerge in the United Kingdom and Ireland (Kelly, 1984; Fitzgerald, 2004; Matarasso, 2011).

Records about the emergence of community arts in Ireland remain thin. This is largely due to a failure of community arts itself to “secure its own memory” and “articulate and distribute its values and work” through textbooks or other means (Fitzgerald, n.d., p. 1). Fitzgerald (n.d.) argues that people were too busy doing community arts to record and analyse what it was exactly they were doing. Unfortunately, today there remains little scholarly work on community arts within the Irish context (Fitzgerald, n.d.), a reflection perhaps of a shift toward participatory arts over community arts (explained in greater detail further on). Nonetheless, the history of community arts in Ireland can be traced to “pockets of arts practice” within communities and the emergence of theatre and activist groups in the 1970’s (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 70), reflecting similar occurrences in Britain at that time (Matarasso, 2011). Community arts emerged out of a need for collective community action, a desire to challenge the dominance of authoritative institutions and bring about social change (Matarasso, 2011). Formal recognition of community arts in Ireland can be pinpointed to a specific event, a seminar hosted by “City Workshop” (a theatre group) that occurred in 1983 in Dublin (Fitzgerald, 2004). In total, fifteen organisations attended the seminar and this represented the

majority of community arts groups working in Ireland at that time (ibid). Following the City Workshop seminar, a second meeting of community arts projects took place, and this resulted in the establishment of a collective of community arts projects called “Creative Activity for Everyone” (CAFE) (ibid). Around the country, other regional meetings of community arts projects occurred in Cork, Waterford, Galway and Belfast (Fitzgerald, 2004). The first Irish conference on community arts took place in the North Star Hotel, Dublin in 1984 (ibid). In 1985, The Arts Council formulated a policy in relation to community arts. At that time. The Arts Council took the position that there were “two views of the nature of art” (The Arts Council, 1986, p. 33). The first view, “The Renaissance View” was concerned with “the finished art object”, which was of “paramount importance, its value detached from the means and methods of its production” (ibid). The second view was in relation to community arts, which it stated, “concerns itself specifically with the historic moment, with the circumstances - political, economic and spiritual - of the society out of which, and for which, art is made” (ibid). It is important to note that this understanding of community arts is one articulated by an agency of the State and was not necessarily reflective of how community arts practitioners saw themselves. Across the water in Britain, there was a subtle, but important shift away from the use of the term community arts toward the term participatory arts during the 1990’s (Matarasso, 2011). This shift in terminology marked a change from “the politicised and collectivist action of the seventies towards the depoliticised, individual-focused arts programmes supported by public funds” (Matarasso, 2011, p. 216). It was around this time that the usefulness of term community arts was also coming into question in Ireland and a transition toward participatory arts was instigated; however, Fitzgerald (2004, p. 79) contends that community arts remain instrumental and that communities have “the right to have a voice and the right to give voice”.

Today in Ireland, there are a large number of arts centres and participatory arts projects throughout the country many of them in receipt of funding from The Arts Council of Ireland. Established in 1951 under The Arts Act, The Arts Council encourages interest in Irish arts and channels funding from the state to Irish artists and arts organisations. It is important to note that The Arts Council acknowledges that their statutory role “is grounded in our remit from Government, informed by perspectives from the arts community” (The Arts Council, 2005, p. 11). In a recent report by CHL Consultancy Company commissioned by The Arts Council there were 138 year-round arts venues in existence in Ireland in 2019 (CHL, 2019). Arts centres or venues are defined by CHL (2019, p. i) as a “year-round, multi-disciplinary spaces which support a range of professional art forms”. Of these 138 arts venues throughout Ireland, 102 of them were classified as multi-disciplinary spaces where more than one art form was regularly offered, and the remaining 36 offered one art form only (CHL, 2019, p. ii). According to CHL (2019), local authorities are the primary funders of arts centres and venues, funding 105 venues nation-wide. The Arts Council provides funding to 49 arts venues (ibid). Some of these arts centres state they facilitate community arts projects, such as, Axis Ballymun and the Grainstore DLR Youth Arts Facility (Dublin) and the Courthouse Arts Centre (Wicklow). However, the majority of the arts centres listed in the CHL report are focused on arts participation. Whilst the CHL report provides a recent snapshot of arts centres and venues around Ireland, it is not a full reflection of community arts in Ireland. Whilst encouraging greater access to, and participation in, the arts is important and valuable, community arts (as they will be defined in the following section) cannot truly emerge from a targeted project where

funding is made available for lay people to make art and that is administered from the top down. The following section works to define community arts and distinguish it from other arts-based practices.

### **Defining Community Arts**

Before we can arrive at an understanding of community arts, it is important to first make clear what “community” and “arts” refer to. Goel (2014, p. 1) states that the term community can simply refer to a group of “people living in a place who have face-to-face contact with each other”. However, Goel (*ibid*) points out that this definition is rather essentialist and that it does not capture the full meaning of the concept. Limiting the term community to a particular geographic place would exclude a multitude of other social groups that define themselves as communities, for example: online communities, religious communities and communities of shared experiences or interests. Therefore, Goel (2014, p. 2) suggests that term community can include “place-based” and “interest-based” communities, and other “forms of new and emerging communities”. Blatt-Gross (2017, p. 51) suggests that central to the notion of community is that of “taking responsibility not only for oneself, but also surrounding people, places and things”. In this regard, Blatt-Gross (2017) associates community with care and caring. Moreover, a key characteristic of a community is that some form of social interaction occurs between its members. Knight et al (2005, p. xvii) provide a succinct definition of community that helps us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the term, suggesting it refers to “an interdependent group of people defined by a common place, intention, tradition or spirit”. In this way, communities can be thought of as cultures, comprised of shared meanings and values, which are important and powerful to its’ members (Knight et al, 2005). Drawing from the above sources and for the purposes of this paper, the concept of community will hereafter refer to an interacting group of people who care about their surroundings and who are connected by a shared common-feature(s), experience(s) or interest(s).

The arts have been defined in many different ways. For example, Knight et al (2005, p. xvii) describe the arts as “human behaviour that involves the intense interpretation of life through language, dance, painting, music and numerous culturally specific forms” of expression. In this way, the arts can be thought of as powerful tools for communicating messages about the human experience (Blatt-Gross, 2017). The arts can be understood as an umbrella term for a variety of artistic disciplines and practices, that includes but are not limited to, *the visual arts* (such as painting, drawing, sculpting, printmaking, crafts, textiles, photography and film making), *the performing arts* (opera, music, song, theatre, circus, drama, dance and movement) and *the literary arts* (literature, poetry, and other creative forms of writing). Art without the “s” is typically used when referring only to one of the visual arts. Community-based art is understood as “any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social, economic and political power of that community” (Knight et al, 2005, p.xvii). In this way, community art can often represent “a very public form of communication” (Blatt-Gross, 2017, p. 56). Madyaningrum and Sonn (2011, p.358) describe “community art” as a “cultural practice” which involves the production of art by “local people” as a means of bringing about “social change”. In this way, community art becomes “a force for social change” shifting power dynamics by moving “agency away from institutions and even

artists, and giving ordinary people the ability to create meaningful change in unprecedented ways” (Tate, n.d.a., p.1)

When we combine the definitions of community and the arts provided above and synthesise them with an understanding of community-based art, we can formulate a useful definition of community arts for use by youth work, community development and social studies students and practitioners. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, community arts are defined as *arts (visual, performance or literary) that emerge from a community, created with the intention of bringing about social change and saying something about that community, their interests and/or issues relating to them and their experiences*. It is important to distinguish community arts from other types of arts-based practices, such as, therapeutic arts, which have a therapeutic focus and are not the subject of this article. The aim of community arts is to give voice to communities and to bring about positive social change, whether at a micro or macro level. In community arts, the focus is on the community and their interest(s) or issue(s) that they wish to give voice to. Community arts can occur in a multitude of places, including community and parish centres, youth service facilities, family resource centres, disability support services and other social support services. At this point, it is important to distinguish community arts from arts participation or participatory arts.

The Arts Council (n.d., p.1) understands arts participation “to include a broad range of practice where individuals or groups collaborate with skilled artists to make or interpret art”. In this regard, the aim of arts participation or participatory arts projects is to engage individuals or groups in arts practices and/or appreciation. In other words, in arts participation, the focus is on getting people involved in making particular types of artwork or in getting them to engage with a particular form(s) of the arts. Participatory arts are instigated by organisations, institutions and the State rather than the community. It is a subtle distinction, but an important one. Community arts emerge from the community and from “ordinary people” (Tate, n.d. a, p.1), arts participation is about engaging in the arts and working with professional artists. There is, of course, an area where the two can meet and overlap. For example, a community arts project can include arts participation in its aims and objectives. but fundamentally community arts should emerge from and enable communities to express or explore interests and issues important to them. Matarasso (2011, p. 226) argues that arts participation and participatory arts are about the individual and are a “depoliticised response to their situation”. When problems are depoliticised, discourses around the causes of social inequalities are often moved toward ideologically neutral terms and their discussion (Matarasso, 2011). Moving towards participatory arts over community arts could result in communities losing opportunities to articulate issues and problems important to them. There is a danger that in side-lining community arts that communities will lose collective avenues for voicing their concerns and interests, and lose opportunities to bring about social change.

It is important also to take an opportunity to point out the difference between the arts and an event or spectacle, which is intended for entertainment. Holden (2008, p.16) states that the arts are “not the same thing as entertainment”; this because the arts are supposed to “take us beyond everyday life” and in this regard they are considered “special”. However, it might be worth pointing out that “special” is subjective. What might be special to one person might not be special to another and vice versa. Nonetheless, there is a difference between what is considered the arts and what is considered entertainment. One relates to cultural and artistic expression (arts), the other relates to passing time enjoyably through watching or spectating

(entertainment). The following section explores how community arts are situated within youth work and community development. This section also signposts to places where more information can be found about Irish community arts projects.

### **Community Arts in Youth Work and Community Development**

Community arts align with principles of youth work and community development. Youth work and community development are characterised by working with particular groups of people where they are situated and in a developmental way, in order to bring about change. At the centre of community arts are people and communities, much in the same way as youth work and community development. As D’Arcy (2016, p. 7) contends “the moment the young person ceases to be our primary consideration our work with him/her ceases to be youth work”. Some youth workers have expressed their view that the arts are an effective way of bringing people and communities together (Howard, 2017). Community arts projects can provide opportunities for youth workers and young people to get to know one another, to build relationships and to act as “springboards for conversations” (Howard, 2017, p. 1). It is important to state that these opportunities can equally extend to other professionals working with children and young people in other settings, such as social care. Community arts in Ireland tend to have features of community development, such as, collective processes “that emphasises participation, action for social change and a focus on communication” (Combat Poverty Agency, 1996, p. 5). Elsewhere, community arts have been recognised as a strategy for community development, used in areas such as community strengthening, sustainable development, public housing, active citizenship, social inclusion, cultural diversity, and health promotion (Madyaningrum & Sonn, 2011). Youth work and community development are focused on tackling issues relating to marginalisation and disadvantage, and bringing about social change (Jenkinson, 2000; Crickley & McArdle, 2010; D’Arcy, 2016). Community arts are a means of empowering groups of people and challenging social structures, by facilitating access to a form of creative public expression, so that people themselves can bring about social change. Community arts are in fact cultural democracy in practice. However, Holden (2008, p. 30) states that “promoting universal access to culture means working with people where they are, and not expecting them to come to the culture”. In this way, community arts are perfectly situated to assist in promoting universal access to culture. Holden (2008, p. 32) argues that “culture should be something that we all own and make, not something that is “given”, “offered” or “delivered” by one section of “us” to another”. This is why community arts should emerge from within the community, created with the intention of bringing about social change and saying something about that community, their interests and/or issues relating to them and their experiences. Some examples of community arts projects can be found on a number of organisational websites, including The Arts Council; National Youth Council of Ireland; Community Arts Partnership; Visual Artists Ireland; and, Creative Europe Culture, to name but a few. The Community Arts Directory for Dublin provides a good list of projects within Dublin and the Community Arts Partnership provides a directory of community arts projects in Northern Ireland. However, these lists/directories are by no means exhaustive nor reflective of the breadth of community arts within Ireland. It would be beneficial to have a comprehensive and accurate nationwide directory of community arts projects, one that clearly distinguishes community arts projects from participatory arts. The following section explores the beneficial

role of community arts, in particular focusing on youth work and community development contexts.

### **Beneficial Role of Community Arts**

There is an increasing body of literature to demonstrate the beneficial role for participants engaging in community arts projects (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016) and the value of the arts to wider society (O'Hagan, 2015) and vulnerable groups (Pattoni, 2014). Blatt-Gross (2017, p.55) maintains that community arts have the power of “cohesive magic”, in other words, the arts can unite communities in a special or unique way. The benefits of engagement in community arts range from individual to collective betterment, and from, community to broader positive societal impacts. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016, p. 7) state that participation in arts and culture help “shape reflective individuals” who have “greater understanding of themselves and their lives” which, in turn, helps to increase their empathy toward others. Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) highlight the beneficial role of the arts as a tool in helping to build peace after armed conflicts and in working toward healing and reconciliation between conflicting communities. They also draw attention to wider socio-economic benefits of the arts in urban regeneration projects and in shaping “vibrant creative and cultural quarters” (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016, p. 8). Furthermore, Crossick and Kaszynska (2016) contend that participation in the arts has been extensively evidenced to improve the health and well-being of participants. This has also been noted by Pattoni (2014) who has drawn attention to the beneficial role of the arts in helping to bring about positive health and well-being impacts for individuals and groups in social care settings.

In a two-year qualitative study into young people's participation in five different community arts projects in Denmark, Nielsen and Sørensen (2019) found that young people “on the edge of society” who were experiencing marginalisation, perceived positive benefits to their participation in community arts projects. The young people in these youth work projects participated in a variety of art forms (both visual and performance) and for these young people, who expressed “difficulties fitting in” to society, their participation helped bring about a newfound sense of “belonging” (Nielsen & Sørensen, 2019, p. 211). Moreover, Nielsen and Sørensen (ibid) state that the young people's participation in community arts facilitated them “becoming *someone* in the context of *something*” [sic]. For young people experiencing marginalisation, this is an important outcome. The study also demonstrated a number of other positive effects, including young people receiving positive recognition for their artistic accomplishments and exposing them to alternative arenas for social change (Nielsen & Sørensen, 2019). An ethnographic study of three youth work projects in the United Kingdom conducted by Howard (2017, p. 1) found similar benefits for young people engaging in arts projects, particularly in relation to using the arts as a “means of expression, experimentation and identity formation”. The study found that young people experienced a greater sense of belonging and affinity toward others through their participation in the arts. Howard (2017, p. 1) determined that the arts provided important opportunities for young people to “try on” alternative identities and “get their voices heard and get their messages across”. However, Howard (ibid) cautions against the arts being targeted at particular groups of young people and the arts being used instrumentally as a tool for “repairing” young people instead of empowering and inspiring them. Moreover, Howard (ibid) warns against an over-emphasis of the economic impact of the arts in relation to youth work; arguing that prioritising “measurable outputs” and

“value for money” endangers the “sustainability and future funding of youth and arts projects” and “may be detrimental to the democratic and responsive nature” of community arts. It is worth noting that targeting particular groups with community arts projects contravenes and contradicts the very notion of community arts emerging from a community. To use the arts in this way is indicative of arts participation rather than community arts.

According to Blatt-Gross (2017, p. 52), the process of art making can play a “constructive role in establishing a sense of community cohesion”. In this way, community arts can offer a means for groups of people to establish connections and commonalities between one another (Blatt-Gross, 2017). Important outcomes for those engaging in community development. Moreover, Blatt-Gross (2017) argues that community arts can be used to help cultivate caring communities, build group solidarity and a sense of collective identity. Chile (2007, p.2) states that there are “positive links between community arts processes and community development outcomes”. In this regard, Chile (2007, p.22) argues that community arts can be used to physically enhance communities of place by “enhancing its beauty and aesthetics”. Infrastructures put in place to support community arts, such as arts centres, community galleries, theatres or working spaces can help to “provide and enhance greater access to gathering places for all members of the community” (ibid). An evaluation of an Arts Awareness Intervention to address poverty and area regeneration using the arts, found:

that participants on arts projects experienced “a dramatic shift in attitude and appetite for arts education and training”, and that arts projects had an impact on self-expression, communication, feeling good, working hard, pride in the making, having fun, and feeling part of the team as well as income generation (Kay, 2000, p. 416).

The above studies indicate that there are clear benefits for young people and communities engaging in community arts projects. Community arts can provide opportunities for youth and community development workers to act as facilitators of social change and opportunities for community arts participants to become agents of social change. There are opportunities here for social care workers too, particularly in harnessing community arts principles and applying them to social care settings. In this way, community arts can be utilised by those in social care contexts as a means of giving voice to communities of service users through collective creative artistic expression.

### **Conclusion**

This article has provided youth work, community development and social studies students and practitioners with an introduction to community arts within the Irish context. The paper has worked to provide an understanding of community arts by arriving at a definition of community arts as *arts (visual, performance or literary) that emerge from a community, created with the intention of bringing about social change and saying something about that community, their interests and/or issues relating to them and their experiences*. The paper has differentiated community arts, which are focused on and emerge from communities working to bring about social change from participatory arts, which emerge from organisations and institutions focused on encouraging the participation of individuals and groups in the arts. The article suggests replacing community arts with participatory arts could result in some communities losing opportunities and the means to articulate issues and problems that are

important to them. There is a danger that by side-lining community arts that communities will lose collective avenues for voicing their concerns and interests. There is also a danger that social inequalities can become re-glossed over or silenced. In this way, there is an opportunity here for youth work, community development and social care practitioners to harness the power of community arts in their work with communities as a tool for giving voice and bringing about social change.

This paper is not intended as a how-to-guide for facilitating a community arts project, rather it is intended to create an understanding of, and perhaps spark interest in, community arts. The article argues that community arts can play a vital role in youth work and community development because they are grounded in collective community expression and align with the youth work and community development principles of working with groups of people where they are situated (whether geographically or socially) in order to bring about change. In this regard, there are opportunities here for social care workers too. This paper encourages youth work, community development and social studies students to examine any preconceived ideas they have, that might inhibit them from helping facilitate community arts projects and set these aside; in order to, explore opportunities to foster cohesive magic and collective creative expression. It is common for people to avoid or self-exclude themselves from the arts-based on a self-perceived lack of creativity or artistic tendencies. According to Becker (1982, p. 14) people “generally believe that the making of art requires special talents, gifts, or abilities, which few have”. However, Becker (1982, p. 15) states that this “belief does not appear in all, or even most, societies” and that it “may be unique to Western European societies”. In this regard, we all have the ability to learn and we can all try our hand at the arts; sometimes we just need some encouragement (and perhaps some courage!). It is important to think about community arts as a process rather than creating a glossy product; the process is the important part, not necessarily the product. The only essential elements required for engaging with the arts are: intention, tools, creativity and time. Intention is required in order to make art works or to meaningfully engage with the arts. Intention is the willingness to participate, it shapes the what, how and why we create or engage with something. In order to create something, we require some sort of tool(s); for example, sound requires an instrument, drawings require a marking making tool, and so on. Creativity is the use of our “imagination to come up with a new idea or a different way to solve a problem” (Knight et al, 2005, p. xviii). We use our creativity every day, often on mundane tasks, however, we are often blind to it. Creativity is the ability to consider *what if?* and the willingness to carry through and experiment. Lastly, in order to engage with the arts, we need time. More often than not, a community arts project will take longer than expected, so allow for as much time as possible and, finally, enjoy the cohesive magic and creative expression that occurs during the process!

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