

ARTS &  
*Homelessness*  
IN COVENTRY

A REPORT ON THE HOME FESTIVAL AND  
LEGISLATIVE THEATRE INITIATIVES LED BY  
ARTS AND HOMELESSNESS INTERNATIONAL  
DURING COVENTRY CITY OF CULTURE 2021.

Report by Professor Nadine Holdsworth  
and Dr Jennifer Verson

What does HOME



mean to you?

# CONTENTS

Summary of Key Findings	02
Introduction	03
Context: Laying the Groundwork	05
Theoretical: Frameworks	07
Key Findings	08
Changing the Narrative	12
Access to Creativity	15
Convivial 'Inclusive' Spaces	17
Community of Care	19
Citizen Democracy	20
Visibility / Amplification	21
Well-Being	22
Legacy	23
The Future: Learning to take forward	24

# Summary OF KEY FINDINGS

## The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project:

- Enshrined the values and technologies of co-production, which promoted a non-hierarchical structure and enabled inclusive, dialogic and open decision-making.
- Demonstrated how the arts can surface and unsettle the 'stigma optics' that lead to negative perceptions of homelessness and a degraded sense of self for those who have experienced homelessness.
- Opened up opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness to design, lead, participate in and access diverse creative processes and projects.
- Revealed the importance of developing skills and convivial relationships in safe spaces over a long period of time, which were transferable to less safe public-facing spaces that amplified activity and enhanced feelings of affirmation.
- Nurtured an ethics and aesthetics of care that utilised and enhanced pre-existing mutually supportive infrastructures and newly forged relationships in the city to encourage a wide spectrum of engagement.
- Set in motion the mechanisms, culture and skills to enable people who are or have been homeless to participate in citizen democracy.
- Facilitated opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness to be seen and their voices amplified via co-production, access to venues with cultural capital and global networking leading to enhanced empowerment.
- Showed how a diverse set of creative forms can foster positive experiences of self-discovery, affirmation and enhanced well-being.

# Introduction

In recent years homelessness has been escalating due to structural factors such as the poor provision of social housing and the expensive private rental market, as well as austerity measures that have seen harsh cuts to welfare and a freeze on housing benefit.

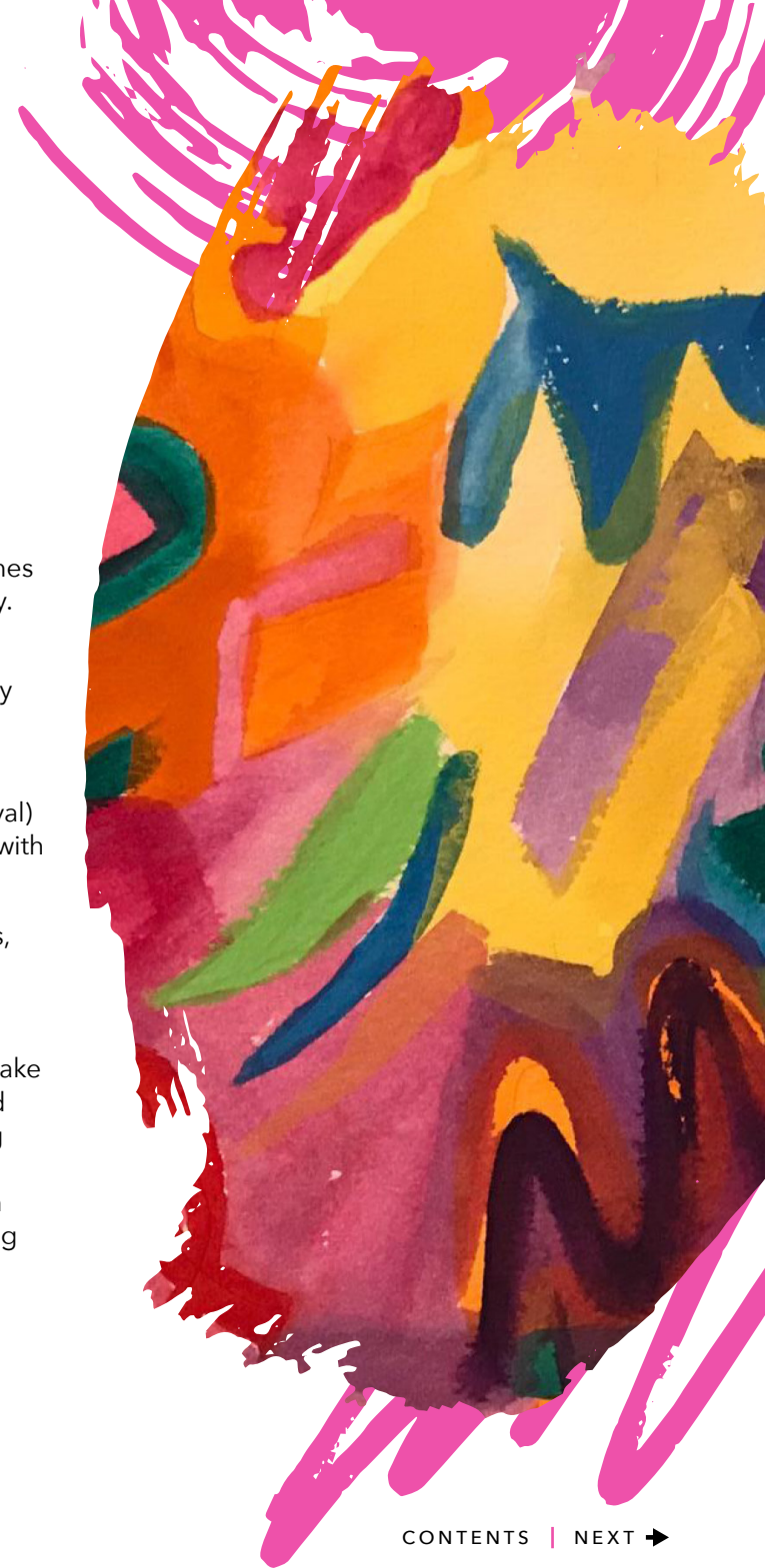
Launching its 2019-2022 strategy, the homeless charity Shelter declared that the 'housing crisis is now a national emergency'.<sup>[1]</sup> In Coventry, homelessness has been proving particularly acute. At the end of 2018, the city had the second highest rate of homelessness in the region. Tackling homelessness is far more complex than simply providing accommodation. Since 2012, Arts and Homelessness International (AHI) have advocated for the role that arts and creativity can play in helping to build resilience, agency, well-being, skills and social connections for those who are or have been homeless. AHI also promotes the benefits of co-production methodologies across all its work arguing that those who have experienced homelessness should be central to decision making processes and delivery. AHI is co-produced with 50% of its board and staff made up of people who are or have been homeless. In 10 years, AHI has developed into a powerful force in the arts and homelessness sector by globally networking projects, engaging in capacity-building, delivering training and mentoring and contributing at a strategic and policy level in homelessness services.

This research report examines initiatives pioneered by AHI, supported by Coventry City of Culture 2021 (CoC2021), to re-think and re-position how arts and creativity can change perceptions, policy and outcomes for those who are or have been homeless in Coventry. It centres attention on two initiatives specifically:

- A Legislative Theatre project to refresh Coventry City Council's homelessness policy and rough sleeper strategy via co-production methodologies.
- HOME: arts and homelessness festival (HOME festival) that ran from the 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to coincide with World Homelessness Day on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

It examines key findings resulting from these initiatives, the co-production methodologies they employ and explores how multiple stakeholders narrate and understand their participation. It concludes by highlighting the legacies of this work and learning to take forward. This report is based on a three-year study and draws on a mixed method approach to data gathering and analysis including participant observation; semi-structured interviews; vox pops; photo elicitation and creative methods of documenting events including diary entries and photography.

<sup>[1]</sup> [https://england.shelter.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_strategy/strategy](https://england.shelter.org.uk/what_we_do/our_strategy/strategy) (accessed 15 June 2022)



**Coventry Sleep Out:** Homeless charities St Basil's, Coventry Cyrenians, YMCA and Heart of England collaborated on a sleepout in the Coventry Cathedral ruins to raise awareness and funds.

**Agency:** An exhibition and community newspaper developed by the socially-engaged artist Anthony Luvera featured self-assisted portraits of people in the city who have experienced homelessness.

**Open Mic Variety Night:** A showcase of music, poetry and performance performed by people who have experienced homelessness held in Coventry Central Library.

**Visual Art Exhibition:** An exhibition of multiple artworks created by Coventry artists who have experienced homelessness held at the Belgrade Theatre in partnership with ONE festival of homeless arts.

**International Arts and Homelessness Summit:** A three-day programme of talks and workshops exploring the arts and homelessness sector, policies and practice curated and hosted by AHL.

**'Home Grown' Film Night:** A showcase of short films about community garden projects in Coventry.

**Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency (Ruff Tuff):** A theatre production by Cardboard Citizens at the Belgrade Theatre featuring a Community Choir of people who have experienced homelessness in the city.

**Send a Smile:** An exhibition of postcards from around the world created by people experiencing isolation in temporary accommodation and hostels during periods of Covid 19 lockdown.

**Homeless Monopoly:** A giant interactive game exploring multiple experiences of homelessness developed by Coventry and Warwick universities in collaboration with Coventry Cyrenians.

**Flash Mob:** Dancing outside Coventry's Transport Museum involving various community dance groups from the city and the general public.

**Creative Hub & Family Fun Day:** An opportunity to participate in a range of arts and craft activities led by people who have experienced homelessness.



In spaces small we dwell  
Our lights are bright and full  
Filling this existence well  
With our laughter never dull  
Chances given to all  
To make this city shine  
Forcing borders to fall  
Our hearts and souls entwine.

By Ken Hornblow

(Anthony Luvera's Agency displayed on Warwick Row, Coventry, 8-28th October 2021)

# Context: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

One of the stated aims of Coventry CoC2021 was to 'empower every Coventry resident - regardless of age, background or postcode - to reap the benefits of cultural participation'.<sup>[2]</sup> This aim was evident in a strand of work that emphasised values of inclusion, co-production, arts for social change and grass-roots development. Concerted effort was made to bring marginalised and disenfranchised groups into the fold of CoC2021, which resulted in projects including the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre process. There is no doubt that being part of CoC2021 was significant as it gave these projects more scope for success given the funding available, heightened status, organisational infrastructure, and a time-limited framework to make change happen.

Organisationally, the CoC2021 programme was supported by three producing teams: Caring City; Collaborative City and Dynamic City. HOME festival evolved from within the Caring City team, initially via the senior producer Jacqui Gavin, who was succeeded by Sophie George in July 2021. Familiar with the work AHI had previously undertaken for Cultural Olympiads during London 2012 and Rio 2016, Jacqui Gavin approached AHI in the summer of 2019 to work on a proposed arts and homelessness strand within Coventry CoC2021.

Importantly, CoC2021 funded AHI to conduct a mapping and auditing exercise of the pre-existing arts and homelessness ecosystem for people who are or have been homeless. AHI consulted with Coventry City Council as well as local homeless centres and services, charities and artistic organisations in the city. This audit found that

*'There is a striking buy-in for arts and creativity having a role in the homelessness ecosystem. It is rare to find that this buy-in exists in all sections of the system from the Head of Homelessness at the Council through the voluntary sector and projects to homeless people themselves'.<sup>[3]</sup>*

**My Coventry is my home  
A beautiful city in which to roam  
Steeped in history... Diversity  
A warm welcome for all**

**Memories from family  
Who served in the war  
Coventry rose from the ashes  
For the sake of us all**

**My city is stronger than ever  
With communities coming together  
Exciting times ahead  
City of culture... Well Said**

Poem by Tracy Villiers

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://coventry2021.co.uk/about/our-partners/> (accessed 30 May 2022)

<sup>[3]</sup> [https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-11\\_Coventry-Arts-Homelessness-Review.pdf](https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-11_Coventry-Arts-Homelessness-Review.pdf) (accessed 30 May 2022)

From the start, the mapping exercise demonstrated AHI's commitment to understanding and valuing the sector and its needs, as AHI's co-director Matt put it, *'So, not going in there with any assumptions, but going in there to facilitate a conversation and then to understand...what people wanted to get out of City of Culture and generally, the arts and homelessness sector'*.<sup>[4]</sup> This exercise was crucial in outlining opportunities and challenges in the current provision, but it was also about relationship-building and gaining trust – forging connections with people from Coventry City Council (CCC) and those who were already making creative things happen on the ground including Ben, an arts worker for Crisis Skylight, and Emma, artistic director of Underground Lights, a community theatre for people who have experienced homelessness and mental health issues.<sup>[5]</sup>

The buy-in from CCC was particularly notable given the fact that AHI had previously noted that there is 'usually a disconnect between...excellent participatory practice and policy where creativity is rarely valued at a strategic, civic level. This creates fragmentation and pockets of good work where creativity is an "add on" to homelessness services rather than embedded into them'.<sup>[6]</sup> The confluence of factors including Coventry's year as City of Culture, a commitment by CCC to a more person-centred empathetic approach to its homeless services and the expertise of AHI meant that there was an appetite for exploring ways that creativity could be embedded. This led to a project to 'refresh' the Council's Rough Sleeper Strategy using a Legislative Theatre framework. Originating from the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal, this framework uses theatre to spark conversations about inequitable systems and to identify potential solutions that can lead to change in policy and practice.

## Key themes that emerged in the Coventry Arts and Homelessness Review

-  Processing trauma
-  Arts and well-being
-  Building confidence and agency
-  Diversity and togetherness
-  Self-expression
-  Capacity-building in the arts and homelessness sector
-  Community participation
-  Safe and accessible cultural space
-  Changing stigmatising narratives
-  Social integration
-  Legacy

Whilst AHI's audit was completed in February 2020, a global pandemic, COVID-19, was on the horizon, which radically transformed the landscape of arts and homelessness in the city. Initially attention turned to the provision of front-line services and the implementation of the Government's 'Everybody In' policy that called on councils to 'accommodate all people sleeping rough or at risk of sleeping rough, and to find alternative accommodation for those in shelters where they could not easily self-isolate'.<sup>[7]</sup> In Coventry, the Days Hotel became a hub for those previously rough sleeping or experiencing precarious housing. During this time a multi-agency approach, working in close proximity, enabled comprehensive needs assessments and the fostering of closer working relationships between staff and residents.

AHI and Crisis Skylight generated an arts-based programme for the Days Hotel lobby, some provision moved online and innovative methods were devised to engage people creatively during lockdowns. One initiative between Underground Lights, Belgrade Theatre, Artyfolks, Crisis and Coventry CoC2021 saw art packs being sent to people via Days Hotel, Housing First and other temporary housing solutions to facilitate creativity. During this time AHI also established the Coventry Arts and Homelessness Forum to enable an online space for connection and sharing in Coventry's arts and homelessness sector. These methods, supported by arts workers with specialist skills in trauma-informed work, facilitated an emergent creative community rooted in care ethics that promote trust and conviviality.

<sup>[4]</sup> Matt, interview with Jennifer Verson, 25 November 2021

<sup>[5]</sup> The findings of this mapping exercise were documented in the Coventry Arts and Homelessness Review, <https://artshomelessint.com/research/coventry-arts-homelessness-review/>

<sup>[6]</sup> 'Arts and Homelessness Civic Plan', document from Arts and Homelessness International, 2021

<sup>[7]</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/lessons-learnt-councils-response-rough-sleeping-during-covid-19-pandemic> (accessed 30 May 2022)

# Theoretical:

## FRAMEWORKS

Attitudes to homelessness are subject to what sociologist Imogen Tyler describes as 'stigma optics', which 'devalues people, places and communities'.<sup>[8]</sup> The 'stigma optics' that circulate around homelessness are largely associated with 'deviance-based explanation' or 'sin talk', which perpetuates a reductive and homogenising perception of the lifestyle choice victim whose circumstances are down to individual vulnerabilities and failings such as addiction and substance abuse.<sup>[9]</sup> These reductive characterisations are persistently dehumanising and mask the complex factors behind homelessness and the multifaceted trajectories and myriad issues faced by people experiencing homelessness. Stigma is powerful, with Tyler writing about the ways in 'gets under the skin of those it subjugates' and how it 'changes the ways in which people think about themselves and others'.<sup>[10]</sup> This research report will explore how the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project set about challenging these 'stigma optics' by offering dynamic and creative interventions that sought to present homelessness and those who had experienced homelessness in a different light.

Those who are or have been homeless also experience the ramifications of what James Thompson calls a 'careless society' in which individuals and groups are disregarded due to a lack of political and social care resulting from a failure of mutual regard that leaves people marginalised and isolated. In a deliberate rebuttal of these conditions, care ethics emphasises 'attachments between individuals and groups, where there is a felt responsibility for the other and concomitant commitment to aid that other'.<sup>[11]</sup>

As such, care ethics highlights the inter-relationships between people, the power of togetherness and debunks the myth that 'society is composed of free, equal, and independent individuals who can choose to associate with one another or not'.<sup>[12]</sup>

This research report will consider how care ethics is a useful lens through which to frame and understand the ways in which the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project were rooted in a practice and aesthetics of care.



(t-shirt printing during the HOME Festival Family Fun Day)

<sup>[8]</sup> Imogen Tyler (2020) *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality*, Zed Books, p. ?

<sup>[9]</sup> Jamie Harding (2020) *Post-War Homelessness Policy in the UK*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 21

<sup>[10]</sup> Imogen Tyler (2020) *Stigma: The Machinery of Inequality*, Zed Books, p. 7

<sup>[11]</sup> James Thompson (2020) 'Towards an aesthetics of care' in *Performing Care: New Perspectives on Socially Engaged Performance*, Manchester University Press, p. 41

<sup>[12]</sup> Virginia Held (2006) *The Ethics of Care: Personal, political, and Global*, Oxford University Press, p. 14

# Key FINDINGS

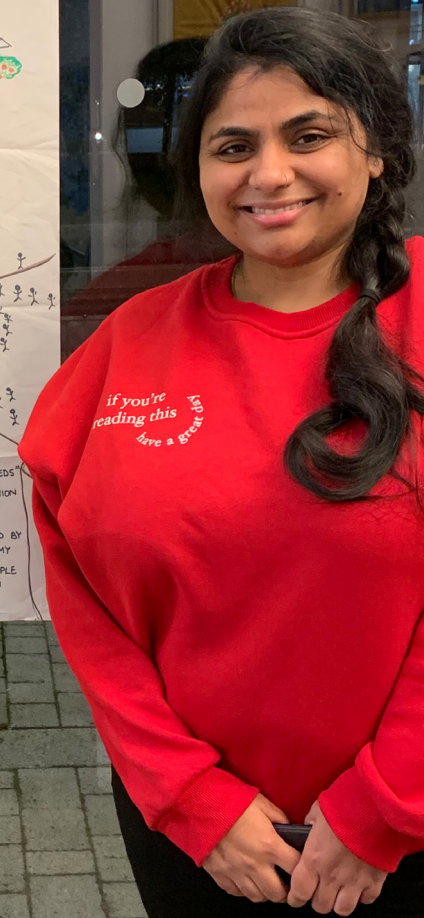
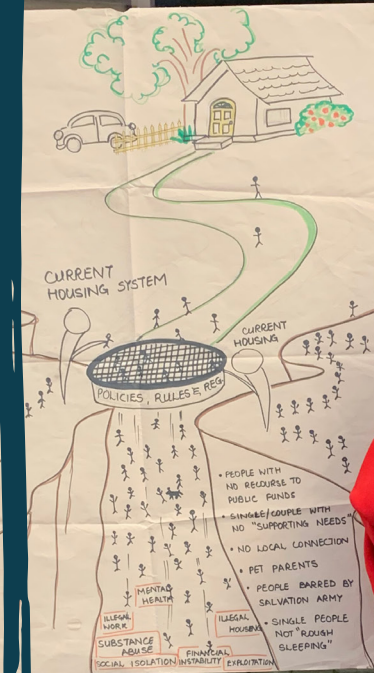
**The success of the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project can be directly attributed to the values and technologies of co-production, which promoted a flat democratic structure and enabled inclusive, dialogic and open decision-making.**

A prior condition for AHI's involvement in CoC2021 was a commitment to co-production, which they explain with the following rationale:

'To ensure equity and inclusion, all projects with people who are or have been homeless should be co-produced from design to delivery and beyond i.e. created with the people it is designed for. Co-production is about ownership, equality of power, enabling people to shine and to be themselves without fear of failure.'<sup>[13]</sup>

Discussions on co-production can focus on potentially negative dimensions such as the difficulty of destabilising entrenched hierarchies, as well as the human, financial and time resource it takes to implement properly. The HOME Festival and Legislative Theatre project served as models of what can be achieved with a persistent commitment to power-sharing and the application of AHI's co-production methodology, which stresses 'Freedom within a Framework' where there is some 'scaffolding' of parameters to create a safe space for people to contribute their ideas and thoughts with freedom. Importantly, people's ideas need not only to be heard but to be implemented so that they can see themselves in the end result.

The commitment to co-production from the outset meant that the technologies for realising meaningful co-production were braided through the ethics and mechanics of the Steering Group, which relied on proactive and supportive recruitment by catalysing figures to ensure meaningful co-production. The Steering Group, which came together monthly from February 2021, was made up of people working and participating in the arts and homelessness sector, 50% of whom had experienced homelessness.



<sup>[13]</sup> [https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-07\\_Co-produced-Arts-and-Homelessness-Practice-Guide.pdf](https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-07_Co-produced-Arts-and-Homelessness-Practice-Guide.pdf)



## The Purpose of the Steering Group:

- Set up to provide direction on the festival.
- To organise and curate the festival
- To provide capacity building for projects wanting to present at the festival
- To agree on the distribution of funds for the festival to projects and individuals which apply or via City of Culture.
- To update the forum on progress on the festival including opportunities and successes.
- To carry on the work beyond the festival

(Slide presented to the Steering Group during the first meeting, 18 February 2021)

The Steering Group adopted an assets-based approach, which sits as 'an alternative to needs-based approaches to development' based on the ability to mobilise 'existing (but often unrecognised) assets... [especially] social assets: the gifts and talents of individuals, and the social relationships that fuel local associations and informal networks'.<sup>[14]</sup> Everyone in the Steering Group had experience, knowledge, skills and networks to share. Early in the process a 'skills audit' was conducted to facilitate reflection on what members brought to the table, what they'd like to develop, a process followed up in later one-to-one conversations.

## Skills audit:

- What do we get 'for free' because we're who we are?
- Draw a quick self-portrait (this can be a stick person or whatever you can do)
- Decorate your self-portrait with the things you can do, like doing and skills you'd like to develop.

Significantly, members of the Steering Group who were not currently employed were paid for their time, a move that recognised labour and skills and professionalised the process. Research data indicates that people felt that their input was valued, with one member emphasising how it felt *'really good to get my point across about what homelessness is all about'* and their evident pride that *'we more or less co-ordinated the whole thing, put it all together'*.<sup>[15]</sup> Others expressed their thrill at seeing ideas that originated in the group, coming to life.

Throughout, the Steering Group exhibited a deep and sustained commitment to humane processes that acknowledged different life courses and utilised a trauma-informed approach. At the start of every meeting the group was reminded of the 'housekeeping rules' that included respect, confidentiality and the allocation of a safeguarding officer, as well as the potential for 'time out' from the meeting. There was a recognition that some members of the group had experienced multiple traumas consistent with the homeless experience and that these might resurface in the meeting and, more importantly, could be accommodated and supported with time and care.

## DO YOU WANT TO BE PART OF THE 'HOME: ARTS AND HOMELESSNESS FESTIVAL'? COVENTRY CITY OF CULTURE, 8-16 OCTOBER 2021

Do you like art, poetry, music, craft...? Do you want to show your work or try something new? Or volunteer?

Come along to an Inspiration Session to find out how to take part in this unique festival which is being designed and delivered by people who are or have been homeless.

The meeting is free and open to anyone whether you are or have been homeless, support staff, arts orgs, artists and members of the public. Drinks and snacks provided free of charge.

Due to COVID restrictions, there is a maximum capacity at the venue so please email [mat@with-one-voice.com](mailto:mat@with-one-voice.com) or call him on 07572 781887 to book a place (or to receive a Zoom link).

TUESDAY 29TH JUNE 4-6PM  
TUESDAY 27TH JULY 6-8PM

CENTRAL METHODIST HALL, COVENTRY  
THIS EVENT IS IN PERSON AND ONLINE



(Flyer advertising the HOME festival inspiration sessions)

<sup>[14]</sup> Alison Mathie and Gord Cunningham (2002) 'From Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-Driven Development', <https://sites.google.com/site/metodosconversacioneslocales/assetbasedcommunitydevelopment-abcd> (accessed 20 June 2022)

<sup>[15]</sup> Susan, interview with Jennifer Verson, 11 November 2021

The technologies of co-production extended to the Inspiration Sessions run by AHI in the Central Methodist Hall in Coventry, as well as lower key creative drop-in sessions in temporary accommodation and hostels designed to encourage wider engagement. The informal events in Central Methodist Hall employed a set of explicit practices and implicit atmospheres to put attendees at their ease. The Inspiration Sessions were staged as lively 'town hall' style meetings during which interested parties, residents and support workers from local homeless centres and services such as Change, Grow, Live; Spring Housing and Emmaus Coventry were introduced to the HOME festival and invited to share ideas and aspirations for what this might involve on sheets posted around the room.

AHI's co-produced facilitation ensured that this was an open and inclusive space where people took time to listen - 'there is no bad idea' - and the spirit was one of mutual respect and problem-solving. The Inspiration Sessions in support services and temporary accommodation including Steps for Change and Gateway were less successful in securing wider participation due to minimal turnouts and superficial participation. Reasons for this included a lack of timely publicity, a failure to enlist place-specific catalyst figures to act as brokers, and a sense that these interactions were divorced from the grass-roots, member-led groups that provided vital infrastructural support and momentum.



(Inspiration session, Central Methodist Hall, 27 July 2021)



(Outcome from an Inspiration Session held at the Central Methodist Hall, 27 July 2021)

It is clear that the co-production values and models of best practice pioneered by AHI and played out during the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project will impact wider policy and practice in homeless services in Coventry. Ben, an arts worker with Crisis Skylight, reported how it has

*'massively expanded my practice in terms of co-production, it's massively expanded my ability to advocate for co-production...so I have completely changed the way that my learning offer is designed now, now it is completely co-produced.'*<sup>[16]</sup>

Councillor David Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, spoke warmly of the flat democratic structures he encountered in the follow up Steering and Scrutiny Groups that grew from the Legislative Theatre project whereby, *'I think everybody had ownership of the conclusions we reached there. Everybody felt sort of invested in it which I think is really important'*<sup>[17]</sup> He also stated his aim to extend co-production into other areas under his remit, including refugee and asylum services. As he said 'we do talk about engagement but what does that actually mean? For me, unless people feel that they are part of it, then actually there is no point, I don't think we are getting the best from people.'<sup>[18]</sup>

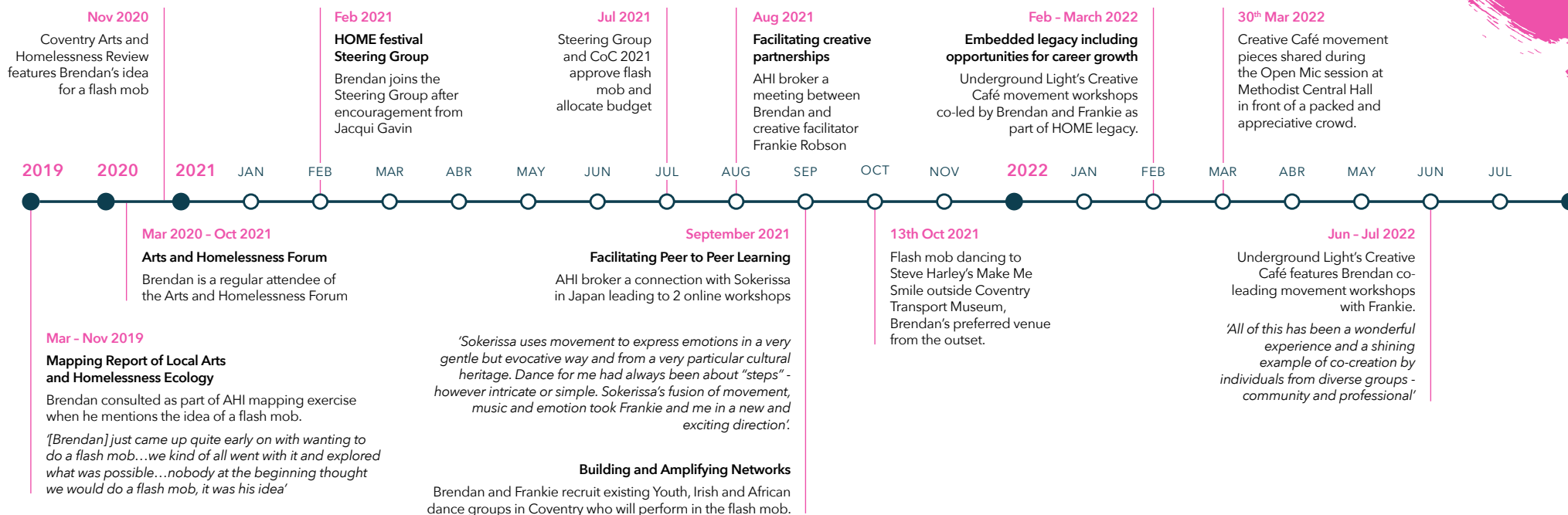
The timeline of Brendan's Flash Mob tells one story of how explicit co-production technologies intersect with an asset-based approach and an aesthetics of care to craft durable personal and organisational impacts.

<sup>[16]</sup> Ben, interview with Jennifer Verson, 1st December 2021

<sup>[17]</sup> David Welsh, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 14 January 2022

<sup>[18]</sup> David Welsh, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 14 January 2022

## Brendan's Flash Mob Timeline: CO-PRODUCTION IN ACTION



# Changing THE NARRATIVE



The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project demonstrated how the arts can surface and unsettle the 'stigma optics' that lead to negative perceptions of homelessness and a degraded sense of self for those who have experienced homelessness.

Conversations with those who had experienced homelessness featured topics of shame and stigma with references to people feeling 'forgotten', 'crap' and like 'shit on shoe'. As one person eloquently put it: 'When you see a slug after the rain you want to avoid it, you don't even want to put your feet near it - that's how much you want to avoid it and many who have this experience are made to feel like that.'<sup>[19]</sup> In stark contrast to experiences of dehumanisation and resulting feelings of worthlessness, a central aim of the HOME festival was

Speaking of the strong, dignified portrait she chose of herself for Agency, Bernie asserted her intention to challenge 'stigma optics' when she said, 'I wanted to have that facial expression to say I was homeless but look at me now, there's hope and that you aren't defined, who you are or your value in society isn't defined because you are homeless.'<sup>[21]</sup>

Challenges to 'stigma optics' and negative perceptions informed many choices about the tone and content of the HOME festival. Owen Clayton has written about the ways that the media and charity campaigns often resort to a 'shorthand' of images that stand in for homelessness, very often portraying 'a person who is rough sleeping as a victim who lacks usefulness and agency' set against a drab urban environment.<sup>[22]</sup> Alternatively, the HOME festival visual identity comprised a composite of segmented strips of artwork - painting, photography and poetry - the result is a colourful patchwork of images that indicate agency, joy, action and heterogeneity rather than reductive tropes of passive, socially excluded and abject figures. Moreover, the CoC2021 website featured the images behind the artwork so the individual pieces of art could shine independently - vivid, beautiful, proud - indicative of AHl's rallying cry to spotlight 'what's strong, not wrong'.<sup>[23]</sup>

*'to change the perception of homelessness from something that could be perceived quite negatively into positive perception of homeless people, that they are human, that they are people, they are not just blank faces that you walk past all the time, they are people with their own histories, with their own talents.'*<sup>[20]</sup>



<sup>[19]</sup> Somya, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 30 November 2021

<sup>[20]</sup> Hayley, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

<sup>[21]</sup> Bernie, vox pop recorded by Nadine Holdsworth, 12 October 2021

<sup>[22]</sup> Owen Clayton, (2020) 'Introduction' *Representing Homelessness*, Oxford University Press, p. 16

<sup>[23]</sup> <https://coventry2021.co.uk/what-s-on/home-arts-homelessness-festival/> (accessed 1 June 2022)

All too often, those experiencing homelessness are defined by what they do not have – a home – that leads to people being seen as inhabiting a negative state that bleeds into all other aspects of their lives. These dehumanising processes leave people feeling like they are ‘a thing, a problem that needs to be eliminated’ rather than fully functioning three-dimensional human beings that have ideas, aspirations and a basic human right to access creativity.<sup>[24]</sup> The Steering Group aimed to relegate persistent images of down-trodden figures defined only by their experience of homelessness to the scrapheap. Conversations focused on ways to convey joy, positivity and a spirit of celebration – smiling became a key theme. Brendan’s selection of Steve Harley’s song ‘Make Me Smile (come up and see me)’ for the Flash Mob ‘was an opportunity to expand on that theme’ and during the event ‘there were police dancing there were young people it was such a moment of joy and celebration’, which is what he campaigned for all along (see Brendan’s Flash Mob timeline).<sup>[25]</sup>

Beth and Hayley from Underground Lights initiated ‘Send a Smile’ during a period of Covid-19 lockdown to invite people to design and send postcards with messages of positivity. AHL helped to amplify and network this project globally and the result was an impressive outpouring of postcards that, again, might be understood in relation to care ethics. The postcards were driven by a sense of interdependent human relations and an impulse to lean into (unknown) others at a time of hardship.

*‘I think one of the things that I really enjoyed was hanging up the postcards from around the world and just seeing some of the positive messages...was so inspiring some of the things that they were writing...one of them “I’ve got onto the housing list” – it’s like yay well done you – it’s so beautiful, I have never met this person’.*<sup>[26]</sup>

During the HOME festival the postcards were exhibited in civic and community spaces in the city: the Police Museum, the City of Culture Shop, The Belgrade Theatre – these gestures of kindness radiating positivity in new contexts.



<sup>[24]</sup> Hayley, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

<sup>[25]</sup> Email exchange with Brendan, 31st May 2022

<sup>[26]</sup> Hayley, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

(Send a Smile Exhibition, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry)

While significant qualitative data supports the integration of arts and homelessness into the fabric of CoC2021, as demonstrated by the number of activities that people with lived experience participated in over the year, it is less clear how this impacted on the public. Some of the big public facing events where people with lived experience were central to the design and production had messaging that would not be entirely clear to a passer-by from the general public. Other large public facing events, which had very clear messaging around housing and homelessness, were either not co-produced or had less robust co-production processes. However, the research data does point to the ways that these kinds of creative interventions have the potential to impact the general public. Responding to Agency, a CoC 2021 City Host commented

*'hopefully it will make people stop and look and read, just value people as people, because I think we walk around the city and there's a homeless person, there's another homeless person and we ignore them...So, it's just making people into real people isn't it, with real stories and being able to have empathy for their situation'.<sup>[27]</sup>*

People who found homelessness a dehumanising and degrading experience certainly valued the opportunity to be seen differently: *'So to them I'm not just a homeless person, or a person who is unemployable, for them they can see that there is more. They can associate a positive attribute with me'.<sup>[28]</sup>*



<sup>[27]</sup> Coventry City of Culture City Host, vox pop with Nadine Holdsworth, 12 October 2021

<sup>[28]</sup> Somya, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 30 November 2021

# Access TO CREATIVITY

The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project opened up opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness to design, lead, participate in and access diverse creative processes and projects.

Opening up creative opportunities for groups who have been marginalised in society, subject to the 'stigma optics' and negative perceptions discussed above, often gets framed in terms of an instrumentality versus access to the arts as a generally good thing debate. As Matt from AHI articulated it:

*'I believe projects can have a measurable purpose or just exist for their own sake - to be beautiful moments of self-expression and creativity. The HOME festival achieved both from legislative change to people letting their hair down and dancing in a flash mob. Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture*

*Media and Sport once said that arts should create stats and stories and Home and the Legislative Theatre project did this.'*<sup>[29]</sup>

This section considers some of the 'arts for its own sake' and the tangible impacts that emerged.

For some participants the creative opportunities made possible by the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project enabled them to try new things and for others this activity became an extension of creative encounters that they had previously engaged with via the pre-existing arts and homelessness ecosystem in the city. Early craft-based activities with Crisis Skylight and others represented a significant theme in stories and memories that participants told about their experience of the HOME festival. These activities laid a foundation for structured activities developed by the Steering Group where people with experience of homelessness proposed and led or co-led craft-based activities and creative workshops during both the Summit and Family Fun Day. By listening to ideas, encouraging ambition and focusing on people's capacity to contribute this led to notable skills development in organisation, planning, teaching and session management. These activities also opened up convivial spaces for dialogue with members of

the public that worked in complex ways to change perceptions that the public might have had about homelessness and who becomes homeless.

During conversations participants narrated a developmental trajectory which started for some with Crisis Skylight arts workshops, Underground Lights or at the Days Hotel during the first Covid-19 lockdown, which helped to foster relationships and trust. This developmental trajectory can be illustrated by the experience of Tracy who was a founder member of Underground Lights, advised on and tested 'Homeless Monopoly', became a member of the HOME festival Steering Group and during the festival performed in *Ruff Tuff* and ran craft workshops as part of the Creative Hub and Family Fun Day. Relationships and behaviours developed in their trajectory led to feelings of pride and also achievement often attributed to the realisation that these activities were part of a larger CoC2021 whole.

<sup>[29]</sup> Matt, interview with Jennifer Verson, 25 November 2021

An interesting theme emerged in interviews, which cut across participants working in the sector and people with lived experience, of how theatre and creativity was something enjoyed when they were younger but had been left behind and re-awakened through the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project. This chimes with Ben's observation that, *'I suppose, as well, some of our clients didn't have the best experience at school. With a lot of people, lots of people leave creativity behind in the sort of teenage years, other things take over.'*<sup>[30]</sup> The opportunity to rekindle interests traced back to school was motivating factor to get involved and valued by many:

*'I did a theatre studies A level myself. Back in the early 90s, yeah 30 years ago, that's not something I've done much in intervening times...so it was nice to resurrect that part of my background as well.'*<sup>[31]</sup>

*'I loved drama when I was at school, I was always in a play, I got an A\* in my GCSE in drama.'*<sup>[32]</sup>

Findings also suggest that the HOME festival broke down barriers to creativity by offering an inclusive ecosystem of activities and multiple 'ways in' that enabled participants to access their favoured modes of creative inspiration and artistic expression whether painting pictures, doing drama, writing poems, crafting objects or making music. These opportunities to rekindle or to experiment with new creative outlets and ideas had a profound impact on participants embarking on a period of self-discovery and growth that enhanced their sense of themselves as creative individuals with one participant referring to people *'opening surprise packages of themselves.'*<sup>[33]</sup> Many, if not most, of the participants engaged with more than one activity and in these different activities, they played different roles. Multiple roles and ways of interacting facilitated by creative activities can be directly correlated with the success of co-production. It's also clear how activities have created transferable skills in arts-based employment which has created tangible results in the six months following the festival.

<sup>[30]</sup> Ben, interview with Jennifer Verson, 1 December 2021

<sup>[31]</sup> Mike, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 22 November 2021

<sup>[32]</sup> Donna, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 29 November 2021

<sup>[33]</sup> Somya, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 30 November 2021

(International Arts and Homelessness Summit,  
Central Methodist Hall, 11-13<sup>th</sup> October 2021)





# Convivial

## 'INCLUSIVE' SPACES



The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project revealed the importance of developing both skills and convivial relationships in safe spaces over a long period of time, which were transferable to less safe public-facing spaces that amplified activity and enhanced feelings of affirmation.

Whilst this was done in a variety of ways there are some common factors:

- Co-production with artists who have high aesthetic demands (*Agency, Ruff Tuff*)
- Co-production in spaces with cultural capital (*Family Fun Day, Visual Art Exhibition*)
- Drama and visual art activities in accessible low cultural capital spaces with a trauma informed approach and robust safeguarding measures (*Underground Lights Creative Café and drama workshops, Days Hotel*)

Research identified a set of both explicit practices and implicit atmospheres which enabled this movement. In terms of spaces, the Belgrade Theatre and the Central Methodist Hall were familiar to people from their drama groups and Creative Café with Underground Lights, which helped people to feel welcome in these spaces when taking part in other events including the International Summit. Inclusiveness and conviviality emerged as themes which permeated the descriptions used by people to describe experiences of places and spaces that were part of HOME:

*'The Central Hall is important not for just like the rehearsals, also the fact of anybody is welcome there and if you are feeling out of sorts, you are feeling lonely, down or something, there's always something going on there that you can join into and feel welcomed.'* <sup>[34]</sup>

The practice of coming together for drama workshops and craft activities was developed over a long period of time through the work of Underground Lights and Crisis Skylight, Ben describing the latter as *'just getting people around a table and very friendly and very kind of, very informal*

*and holistic learning environment'*.<sup>[35]</sup> These tables and spaces of creativity nurtured conversations, incubated friendships, developed confidence in teaching, and provided informal places for the exchange of information and mutual aid.

These practices and atmospheres of conviviality supported participants to undertake new challenges as they moved from safe community spaces to less familiar public civic spaces. The table as a crafting space created a structure that was familiar and replicable for people. During Creative Hubs at the Central Methodist Hall and the Family Fun Day, the table as crafting space was repurposed for hands-on creative activities such as making friendship bracelets and jewellery box houses that generated informal spaces for conviviality between participants and the public.

While the conviviality which imbued the HOME festival does not explicitly address the structural barriers experienced by people who are either sleeping rough, homeless, or at risk of homelessness, this research demonstrates that conviviality develops and enables the skills and behaviours necessary for people who have experienced homelessness to take up space as active agents whether that entailed running craft workshops or engaging in the co-production of policy via the Legislative Theatre process.

<sup>[34]</sup> Cecelia, conversation with Jennifer Verson, 6 June 2022

<sup>[35]</sup> Ben, interview with Jennifer Verson, 1 December 2021

## CIVIC SPACES

### BELGRADE THEATRE

- The Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency
- Visual Arts Exhibition
- Send a Smile Postcard Exhibition

### COUNCIL BUILDING

- Legislative theatre rehearsals
- Steering Group Meetings

### POLICE MUSEUM

- Send a Smile Postcard Exhibition

### COVENTRY CENTRAL LIBRARY

- Variety Night

### COVENTRY CATHEDRAL RUINS

- Coventry Sleepout
- Homeless Monopoly

## PUBLIC SPACES

### TRANSPORT MUSEUM PLAZA

- Flash Mob

### BELGRADE PLAZA

- Family Fun Day
- Homeless Monopoly

### STREET

- Agency
- Creative Hub
- Send a Smile Walking Tour

## COMMUNITY SPACES

### METHODIST CHURCH HALL

- Arts and Homelessness Summit
- Homeless Monopoly
- Creative Hub
- Legislative Theatre

### CITY OF CULTURE SHOP

- Agency Planning Meetings
- Send a Smile Postcard Exhibition

### FARGO VILLAGE

- HOME Grown Film Night

## VIRTUAL SPACES

- Steering Group
- Arts and Homelessness Forum
- Flash Mob

# HOME festival

# Creating

## A COMMUNITY OF CARE

The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project were rooted in an ethics and aesthetics of care that utilised and enhanced pre-existing mutually supportive infrastructures and newly forged relationships in the city to encourage a wide spectrum of engagement.

In the HOME festival, care ethics manifest in multiple ways via approaches to recruitment, organisation, programming, working relations and activities. It was evident in the time made for conversations, careful listening and decisions about spaces that were familiar and accessible as discussed above. The implementation of care ethics relied heavily on AHI identifying and co-opting catalysing figures who had already established effective relational networks via their paid and volunteering roles in the city. These figures had a particular impact on recruitment and retention in projects. People who became integral members of the HOME festival spoke of their initial reluctance to get involved, but how being approached, encouraged, reminded and supported to attend enabled them to explore previously untapped creativity and, perhaps more notably, to claim and hold public space to communicate

their identities as artists and to develop reciprocal relations with others. Having been 'shown faith', as one participant put it, activated personal growth born of enhanced self-belief and this, in turn, strengthened the relational infrastructure for others - 'Shattered so many barriers within me. Made new friends. Built a new support system. Became part of support system for others'.<sup>[36]</sup> This sense of a mutually supportive infrastructure or network was particularly evident at the Open Mic Variety Night. Each act was warmly encouraged, 'everybody shared, really openly and really beautifully and they supported everybody else who shared as well, that was just a real pleasure to see'.<sup>[37]</sup>

The Legislative Theatre project can also be understood in relation to an 'aesthetics of care' that relies on building relationships over time. This deep and extended process brought together members of Coventry City Council's Housing and Homelessness team, the rough sleeper unit, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre and people who had experienced homelessness to co-produce a piece of theatre as a springboard to long-term policy change and the further integration of co-production in homeless services. Workers from the homeless sector indicated initial scepticism as their previous experience of co-production had been superficial, largely paying lip-service to a current buzzword in the sector that ended up as tokenistic consultation rather than a

commitment to disrupting hierarchies and sharing power. Alternatively, this process, facilitated by Katy Rubin, allowed people to share thoughts, experiences and the felt labour of navigating employment within or interaction with homeless services in the city.<sup>[38]</sup> Care for others means being open to their reality and attentive to their experience and this process enabled people to regard each other in new ways that foregrounded their different encounters with structures and processes. For Rachel this meant an opportunity to show the impact of navigating systems: 'to be able to see what it's like approaching those services, in a kind of live and embodied way' to highlight the dehumanising nature of these encounters.<sup>[39]</sup> The project also emphasised common humanity. Asked to share a significant memory from this project after six months Donna responded: 'realising that the council are "people" too'...I always thought of council workers as "them" and "us" before...it was literally a lightbulb moment!<sup>[40]</sup> Councillor Welsh also spoke of the importance of 'breaking down barriers' as a way for people to be invested and engaged in decision-making.<sup>[41]</sup>



(Co-produced panel, International Arts and Homelessness Summit, Central Methodist Hall, 11-13th October 2021)

<sup>[36]</sup> Somya, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 30 November 2021

<sup>[37]</sup> Ben, interview with Jennifer Verson, 1 December 2021

<sup>[38]</sup> Katy Rubin is an artist and civic change practitioner. See <https://www.katyrubin.com/>

<sup>[39]</sup> Rachel, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 22 November 2021

<sup>[40]</sup> Memory exercise conducted with Donna, 18 May 2022

<sup>[41]</sup> David Welsh, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 14 January 2022

# Citizen DEMOCRACY

## The HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project set in motion the mechanisms, culture and skills to enable people who are or have been homeless to participate in citizen democracy.

During the Legislative Theatre project, a coalition of people came together to review legislation, policy and practice with a view to systems being improved, not only by the personnel with decision-making authority, but by the people who are directly impacted by those decisions. This approach enshrines the values articulated by AHL in their Co-Produced Arts and Homelessness Practice Guide - 'with people not for them; nothing about us without us; walk with, don't speak for'.<sup>[42]</sup> During this process, the resulting Steering Group, the on-going Scrutiny Group and follow up workshops facilitated by AHL in the sector, people who have experienced homelessness have agency and the power to be part of change. Change articulated in the City Council's three commitments to:

1. To train and employ more people with lived experience in the council
2. An Integrated Model of Partnership Working including a 'no wrong door' approach and better sharing of data
3. To make the Homeless Forum fully co-created over time

It would be easy to take the success of the Legislative Theatre project for granted but a variety of participants narrated mixed feelings about the ethics and long-term impact of earlier iterations of Augusto Boal-based co-production produced as part of CoC2021.

This research also identified how co-production has the potential to unsettle entrenched ways of working as when Rachel recalled the good-humoured derision that greeted a suggestion by the Head of Housing and Homelessness for another meeting: *'it was funny, it was the first thing that came to mind'*.<sup>[43]</sup> There was a sense that the group had shone a spotlight on other ways of working productively together to enact citizen democracy - the automatic default of a council meeting had been debunked. As Somya put it: *'Progress. Not stagnant. Not just me but also the system. "Bringing new blood in"!!!'*<sup>[44]</sup>

These citizen democracy outcomes are explicit in the Legislative Theatre project but are implicit components of a wide range of the creative activities undertaken in the HOME festival. The research found that HOME festival challenged and contributed to repairing the dehumanisation of people who had experienced homelessness so that they felt empowered to contribute. Over the course of two years participants developed skills to advocate for themselves, participate in public and in the civic life of Coventry. This was largely down to confidence-building via the diverse ecology of creative activities. Participants developed confidence in public speaking through drama and open mic sessions.

The Variety Night included solo singing performances, puppet shows, poetry readings, monologues, and stand-up comedy about the refugee experience. Performers described their fear about standing up in front of a packed room and over and over again demonstrated resilience overcoming this fear in order to take up space. Another of these confidence building activities was leading creative sessions for the public. Facilitating craft sessions nurtured teaching skills, improved communication skills, and supported nuanced intercultural habits of speaking to people with varied heritage backgrounds. These creative sessions additionally functioned as cultural interventions that gently but explicitly impacted on the 'vibe' of CoC2021 where institutions such as the Belgrade were adjacent to and implicitly connected to accessible vernacular craft activities. The proximity of these activities was critical in this respect as participants moved from leading workshops in making friendship bracelets in front of the Belgrade to being part of a main stage production in *Ruff Tuff Cream Puff Estate Agency*. In this situation, the proximity of the activities created an ecology of interventions which amplified the impacts of both activities.

<sup>[42]</sup> [https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-07\\_Co-produced-Arts-and-Homelessness-Practice-Guide.pdf](https://artshomelessint.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-07_Co-produced-Arts-and-Homelessness-Practice-Guide.pdf) (accessed 17 June 2022)

<sup>[43]</sup> Memory exercise conducted with Rachel, 18 May 2022

<sup>[44]</sup> Memory exercise conducted with Somya, 18 May 2022

# Visibility / AMPLIFICATION



The Legislative Theatre Project and HOME festival facilitated opportunities for people who have experienced homelessness to be seen and their voices amplified via co-production, access to venues with cultural capital and global networking leading to enhanced empowerment.

People who have experienced homelessness often refer to their sense of marginalisation and invisibility. They feel unseen and unheard in public life. Specific contributions such as reading poems at the 'HOME Grown Film Night' or providing expert testimony at the International Arts and Homelessness Summit provided opportunities to counter this. Somya, who took part in the Legislative Theatre project, confidently asserted that *'it became about social justice, those who don't normally have the power to be heard, that they can have a platform, that they can actually talk and be treated as equals.'*<sup>[45]</sup> Notions of equality reoccurred in several interviews as people narrated the significance of their voices not only being welcome but integral to the Arts and Homelessness Forum, Steering Group and Summit. Being listened to, being taken seriously has long-term consequences for confidence and enhanced well-being. Ben referred to an *'improved sense of personal autonomy...from being listened to and heard.'*<sup>[46]</sup>

People reported how these feelings of empowerment had led them to take on volunteering and paid roles, but also how their enhanced confidence had the potential to impact on their broader interactions as demonstrated by this reflection:

*'I have a background where I have been too afraid to speak out, because I wouldn't know what kind of response I would get, so it gives me confidence that I can speak out and say things that are fair, you know, it is fair to raise a point, so it helps me grow in that way.'*<sup>[47]</sup>

Participants also narrated that it mattered to them that they were able to traverse the cultural capital of high production value and high-profile events such as *Ruff Tuff* and *Agency* with lower production value events such as the Open Mic Variety Night. Some reservations were expressed about the ways in which people who had experienced homelessness were problematically instrumentalised and marginalised (such as appearing at the periphery of the stage of *Ruff Tuff*), but this was compensated for in other activities where the artistic expressions and products of people with lived experience of homelessness were centre stage.

Overwhelmingly, opportunities to work at scale and in large professional civic venues, facilitated by CoC2021 funding, contributed to positive feedback loops of affirmation. People reported their pleasure at being able to perform in front of family, friends and the general public in venues where there was considerable cultural capital or prestige such as the Belgrade stages.

Referencing *Ruff Tuff*, Sue enthusiastically declared: 'It felt brilliant being on stage and everybody looking at you, crowd cheering, it felt brilliant'.<sup>[48]</sup> Hayley similarly demonstrated pride at seeing her co-curated Visual Art Exhibition and 'Send a Smile' in the Belgrade's public spaces noting, *'I just totally enjoyed the whole process, it was really great, it's great to be part of something that felt really big, I know it's just one little part of the City of Culture, but it felt like a really big deal.'*<sup>[49]</sup> AHI's work globally networking 'Send a Smile' was a prime example of the power of amplification as postcards arrived from Brazil, Japan and South Africa extending the reach and scale of this locally-conceived project. These opportunities offered powerful ways to counter-act the 'stigma optics' that leave people feeling demeaned and worthless - working at scale on high production value projects or projects with global reach made people feel seen and valued for what they can achieve given the right resource and support.



<sup>[45]</sup> Somya, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 30 November 2021

<sup>[46]</sup> Ben, interview with Jennifer Verson, 1 December 2021

<sup>[47]</sup> Sarah, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

<sup>[48]</sup> Susan, interview with Jennifer Verson, 11 November 2021

<sup>[49]</sup> Hayley, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

# Well-being

**The research found that access to a diverse set of creative forms enabled by the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project fostered positive experiences of self-discovery, affirmation and enhanced well-being.**

Whilst the interplay between creativity and well-being is non-linear and nuanced, it was clear that participants valued the opportunity to engage or re-engage with a variety of creative forms. During the pandemic, the organisational scaffolding provided by AHI and put in place by CoC2021 supported Coventry's arts and homelessness organisations to keep people engaged with creative activities, which contributed to strong foundations of trust. In turn, the HOME festival was able to draw on this local ecology. Reflecting on the creative packs distributed during lockdown, Hayley recognised that:

*'I think during the first lock down it became really apparent that creativity and creative acts were getting people through the tough time. So, it's important to ensure that people in our communities had materials available to be able to be creative, to keep nice and calm, spend a few hours being creative and hopefully relieving some of the mental distress from lockdown loneliness and isolation.'* <sup>[50]</sup>

Hayley reported positive feedback about the creative packs from members of Crisis, residents of the Days Hotel, and members of Underground Lights. While there was a specific well-being benefit to the packs, there was a strong and consistent narrative among participants that the arts and creativity they encountered and participated in during the HOME festival also had an intrinsic value that led to varying degrees of personal growth, feelings of self-worth and enhanced well-being. Across interviews, conversations, and observations, participants in the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project narrated feelings of transformative pride in their artistic contributions:

*I am so glad I did. It meant so much to me, it gave me massive confidence boost and especially within my recovery too, it gave me something to focus on, to think I am not that shit actually, I can carve my way back out and not just be mummy anymore, like I can be Donna and that's something.* <sup>[51]</sup>

*Definitely a sense of pride that you know you've done this, and you've entertained people actually about serious issues as well, that's always a good thing.* <sup>[52]</sup>  
Jaye, a case worker with Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, was very clear that he witnessed a direct correlation between his clients' involvement in the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project and their enhanced well-being. He noted that he had *'really seen a change in the clients who are involved, changes in their mental health, their mental wellbeing, their get up and go'*. <sup>[53]</sup>



<sup>[50]</sup> Hayley, interview with Jennifer Verson, 30 November 2021

<sup>[51]</sup> Donna, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 29 November 2021

<sup>[52]</sup> Rachel, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 22 November 2021

<sup>[53]</sup> Jaye, interview with Nadine Holdsworth, 22 November 2021

# Legacy

Reflecting on the HOME festival and Legislative Theatre project, AHI's Matt Peacock stated *'I believe and I think our experience has shown that there can be huge opportunities from something that is big and that everyone knows, an event, but the dangers are that it is a flash in the pan and actually nothing changes afterwards.'*<sup>[54]</sup> AHI's experience participating in large-scale events has informed mindful attention to a conceptualisation of legacy which respects the work and effort of everybody involved and results in lasting changes, both personal and structural. From the outset AHI were clear that the *'day after is the most important day, the legacy continuation.'*<sup>[55]</sup> Whilst time was taken to celebrate what the HOME Festival had achieved, a future-orientated approach has paid dividends.

## Legacy for HOME and Legislative Theatre can be considered in three interwoven strands:

- Legacy projects which developed and needed additional resources
- Sector impacts that appear to be durable nine months after the end of the HOME festival
- Impacts on participants

## Legacy projects which developed and needed additional resource include:

- Constellations of HOME
- A new co-created group of artists called CVllective
- Brendan and Frankie's movement workshops for Underground Lights Creative Café
- 'Tapping In', a tap dance programme run by Crisis
- Underground Lights 'Streams of Consciousness' walking tour
- Coventry-based Choir with No Name
- Co-creation of a mural on the side of the Police Station
- Presence of HOME festival in the final City of Culture parade 'This is the City'

## Sector Impacts include:

- A heightened commitment to co-production rooted in evidence-based learning from HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project.
- An enhanced arts and homelessness ecosystem in the city that has facilitated improved co-operation and resource sharing across the arts and civic sectors.
- AHI and the Scrutiny Group tasked to help co-create the Rough Sleeper Strategy which has involved running sessions with the sector both in public venues and 'in reach' in centres where the Legislative Theatre team have been paid to facilitate interactive sessions with people with lived experience.
- The City Council homelessness department has given their first grants to arts programmes including to Underground Lights for the Creative Café and AHI, UL and Crisis to run professional development workshops with creatives from Coventry who are or have been homeless.

## Impact on participants include:

- Individuals with increased confidence and skills taking on voluntary and paid roles in the arts and cultural sector
- Improved social connectivity and a sense that the city is for them for those who participated in projects

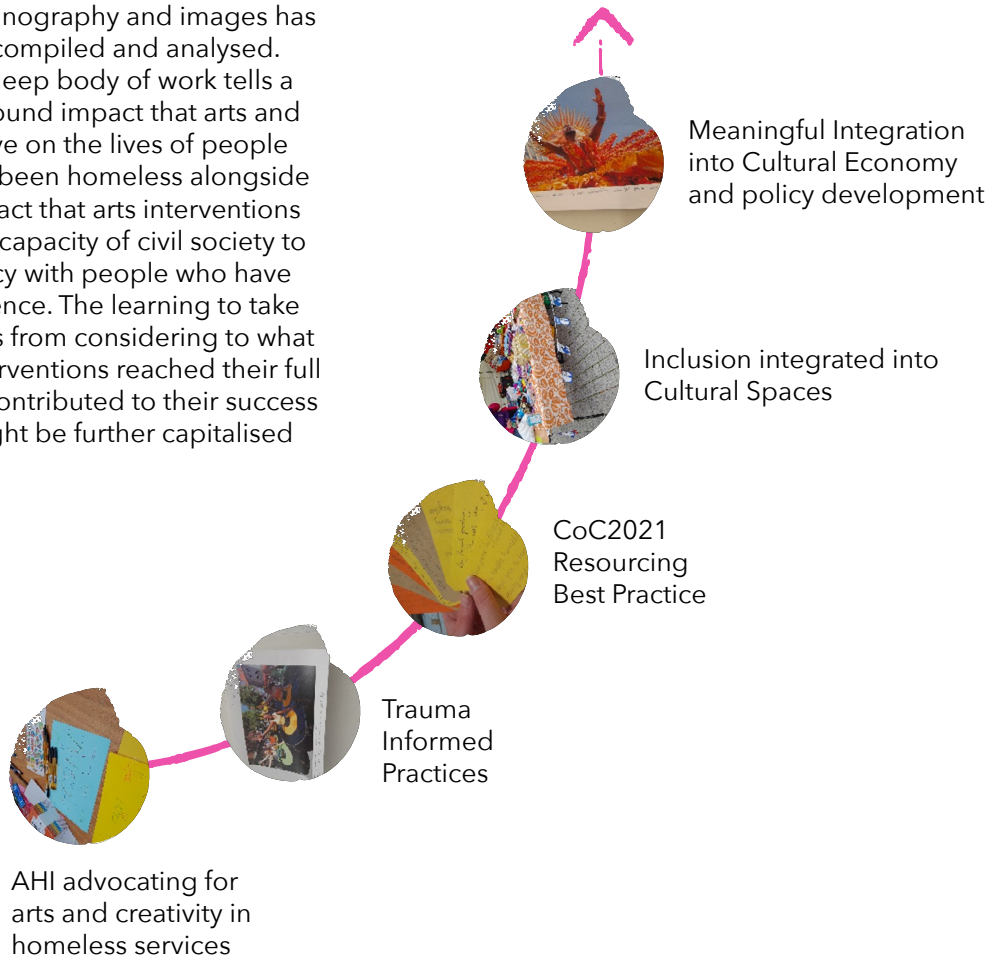


<sup>[54]</sup> Matt, interview with Jennifer Verson, 25 November 2021

<sup>[55]</sup> Matt, interview with Jennifer Verson, 25 November 2021

# The Future: LEARNING TO TAKE FORWARD

During this research a substantial data set of interviews, ethnography and images has been gathered, compiled and analysed. This broad and deep body of work tells a story of the profound impact that arts and creativity can have on the lives of people who are or have been homeless alongside the tangible impact that arts interventions have had on the capacity of civil society to co-produce policy with people who have this lived experience. The learning to take forward emerges from considering to what extent these interventions reached their full potential, what contributed to their success and how this might be further capitalised on in the future.



## RESOURCE

## RESULT

Steering Group

Diversity of Activities in HOME

Coventry City Council commit to co-production

Trusting relationships lead to policy development

Mapping Report

Grassroots Member-led groups drive involvement





## Appropriate resourcing is required to achieve scale and reach beyond those who are already engaged

Long-term resourcing made available by CoC2021 was crucial in enabling AHl to map current provision, develop relationships and to action sustainable co-production technologies. However, there were significant issues with CoC2021's marketing and communication strategy and resource, which meant that the HOME festival was poorly publicised, and the ticketing service was unhelpful.

In addition, over the course of this research the under resourcing of member-led arts and homelessness organisations was a continuous issue and this can be correlated with places where the reach of the HOME festival did not achieve its potential. Matt from AHl was clear that 'I don't think everything has gone 100% well and I still feel regret we didn't do as good as we could in terms of reach, I think generally for the festival. A lot of the participants I feel were the participants who had already been experiencing a certain amount of organisations and their work'.<sup>[56]</sup> Outreach into the larger hostels requires strategic resourcing to support those who live and work in them daily to ensure 'buy in' and sustainable engagement with arts and homelessness practices. A period of focused research in these larger hostels would develop a richer understanding of what the barriers are and the types of resources needed to ensure that the needs and desires of the people who are part of this important infrastructure are involved and engaged with the arts and homelessness sector in Coventry.

## Need for specialised labour and skills of trauma-informed arts workers

The success of the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project has been reliant on the care and skills exhibited by member-led organisations and trauma-informed arts workers in the city who have been able to guide and support participants with lived experience of homelessness to contribute in ways that have been safe and meaningful for them. Building partnerships with member-led groups is a pathway to best practice in the sustainable design of projects. It is clear that some professional aspects of the HOME festival suffered from a lack of trauma-informed practice that ended up putting undue pressure on local member-led organisations that adopt stringent safeguarding policies and practice. In turn, legacy projects have highlighted the fragility of working with participants with multiple needs and the importance of having projects supported by the labour and specialised skills of arts workers within a well-resourced arts and homelessness ecosystem.

## Need to tackle the persistence of 'sin talk'

Embedding arts and creativity in homelessness strategy means replacing the practices and discourses informed by deviance-based models with people-centred and asset-based approaches. Whilst the research data supports the view that the HOME festival and the Legislative Theatre project challenged deviance-based explanations of homelessness, participants themselves were prone to differentiate between the deserving homeless and the non-deserving homeless. Drug and alcohol support needs rendered somebody underserving, while abuse, bereavement, migration, or disability, were seen as deserving reasons for being homeless.

These opinions were captured in interviews and casual conversations. This narrative was particularly present in women who had experienced homelessness and tended to frame their need for specialised accommodation by framing residents of hostels who had alcohol and drug support needs as less deserving. This finding suggests that further training in non-deviance-based approaches may be useful as part of future co-production frameworks.

## Training to Facilitate 'Inclusive' Cultural Spaces

Across the HOME festival and its legacies, convivial 'inclusive' spaces such as the Central Library and Central Methodist Hall have been key to engagement and ownership of creative processes. It's also clear that the Belgrade Theatre became central to the way that participants with lived experience of homelessness talked about having their creativity showcased in a space with high cultural capital. The intensity of the *Ruff Tuff* run was the subject of several people describing the Belgrade as a home away from home. This report has detailed the positive impacts integrating the HOME festival into the Belgrade had on participants. This should, however, be understood in relation to AHl's recommendations for cultural spaces response to homelessness, some of which were evident and others which were less consistently integrated.<sup>[57]</sup> Moving forward it would be worthwhile to extend training to all staff within cultural spaces hosting arts and homelessness projects including front-of-house, security and hospitality.

<sup>[56]</sup> Matt, interview with Jennifer Verson, 25 November 2021

<sup>[57]</sup> <https://artshomelessint.com/research/cultural-spaces-responses-to-homelessness/> (accessed 30 June 2022)



## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the people who took the time to share their insights and experience of the HOME Festival and Legislative Theatre project with us. We gratefully acknowledge all the artists who contributed their artwork and poetry to the HOME logo, which features throughout this document.

This report was made possible by a grant from University of Warwick's Research Development Fund.

