

# Executive summary

The arts have long been used to help rehabilitate offenders or improve the life chances of those at risk of getting involved in crime. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to support the transformative power of the arts, and yet arts charities have traditionally struggled to provide hard evidence of their effectiveness, particularly in achieving criminal justice system targets.

In the current funding environment, arts charities in the criminal justice sector are under increasing pressure to provide evidence of their impact on re-offending. Re-offending costs the government between £9.5bn and £13bn a year, with two in five adults being convicted again within a year of release. Following cuts to its budget, last year the Ministry of Justice announced plans for using payment-by-results more widely to reduce these costs.

In late 2010, the Arts Alliance commissioned NPC to explore whether the value of the arts in criminal justice could be shown through economic analysis. To do this, we selected three arts charities that work with different groups of offenders. The three projects that we look at provide savings to the public purse as well as improve the life chances of the people helped.

## Clean Break

Clean Break is a theatre company for women who have offended or are at risk of offending. Its activities include commissioning new writing, putting on theatre productions, running an education programme and campaigning on behalf of women prisoners and ex-offenders. Our analysis focuses on its education programme, which aims to provide women with the skills, qualifications and confidence to lead crime-free lives.

We estimate that for every £1 invested in the programme, £4.57 of value is created for society over one year. A large proportion of this comes from savings to the criminal justice system through reduced reoffending rather than from the benefit of employment and qualifications to the women involved.

## Only Connect

Only Connect is an arts charity that supports prisoners and ex-offenders to create arts projects, belong to a community, and educate young people at risk of getting involved crime. It aims to help them transform their lives and the lives of the next generation. We focus on its work with participants who have been released from prison.

We estimate that Only Connect more than halves re-offending, from an estimated 57.5% without the charity to 25.9% with the charity. This generates savings of over £3.2m to the criminal justice system over six years. Put another way, for every £1 invested, Only Connect saves the criminal justice system £3.06 over six years.

## Unitas

Unitas uses creative activities to help disadvantaged young people get back into education, employment or training. We focus on its Summer Arts Colleges—intensive education projects for young people at high risk of offending. Using arts-based activities, they aim to reduce offending, improve literacy and numeracy skills and get more young people back into mainstream education, employment and training.

We estimate that Unitas prevents 322 young people from committing 139 offences during the programme and in the following months. Forty six young people improve their literacy skills and forty two improve their numeracy skills as a result of the programme. For every £1 invested, Summer Arts Colleges create £5.89 of value to society over young people's working lives. This is mostly due to the longer-term benefit of improved literacy and numeracy skills for the young people involved, rather than shorter-term savings to the criminal justice system through reduced offending.

For all these findings to be more conclusive, there needs to be better impact measurement. Economic analysis can be a powerful tool for valuing the arts in criminal justice, but charities, funders and the government need to prioritise better data collection and access so that the effectiveness of the arts in criminal justice is better understood.

## Recommendations

Charities should first clarify the change that they want to make and start collecting data to provide solid evidence of impact. Charities that have already started to measure their impact should check whether this evidence allows them to understand and communicate the difference that they make as well as possible.

To do an economic analysis, charities need to collect high-quality data on outcomes and costs. Ideally, they also need a robust estimate of what would have happened without them. Even then, for charities that mainly have an effect on soft outcomes and are several steps removed from directly influencing re-offending, economic analysis is unlikely to be an appropriate tool.

Funders should support arts charities in the criminal justice sector by funding promising interventions and funding proper monitoring and evaluation of these approaches. Government also has a role to play in helping charities by providing better access to criminal justice research and data.

## Challenges and opportunities to measurement

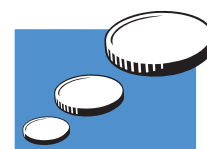
These case studies provide us with ways of better understanding the opportunities and challenges of economic analysis for arts charities in the criminal justice sector. The limitations of the analysis—the most significant being the absence of a robust estimate of what would have happened with the charity—mean that the returns on investment given here should not be compared or used as conclusive evidence of the charities' impact.



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