



## Evaluation of Artlink Central in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale

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Families Outside  
May 2009



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## 1. Introduction

1.1 Artlink Central is a registered charity founded in 1988 in the belief that involvement in the arts is life-enhancing and should be available to all. It enables a wide range of marginalised and special needs groups to work with experienced professional artists on high quality art projects in the Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire areas of Central Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Artlink Central has delivered art workshops in prisons in Scotland for the past twelve years and therefore has extensive experience in working within the prison environment.

1.2 The work in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale was originally designed to be a part of the Arts and Restorative Justice Programme introduced there in 2007. The purpose of this programme was to build educational arts activities that teach core life skills to female offenders, increase their self-esteem and improve their mental well-being. Challenging and creative arts projects offer the prisoners new experiences to improve social and communication skills and develop their ability to make positive changes to behaviour and attitudes. Engaging in professional art requires commitment, concentration, self-discipline, motivation and dedication. Artlink Central's evaluation in 2008 noted that:

*The arts are often considered soft option subjects. That viewpoint is far from the case and does not take into consideration the application of arts to achieving core and life-skills. The arts can deliver new and challenging ways of learning and problem solving. Through the arts an individual can look at self-image and relationships with others and use a diverse variety of media to address a wide range of issues.*

The ultimately aim is for the projects to help the women to be better equipped to make the transition into education, training or employment, both within the prison and on release.

1.3 This evaluation is based on the work in Cornton Vale from April 2008 to April 2009.<sup>3</sup> At this time Artlink Central's work moved from the umbrella of restorative justice and instead was managed by education. During this period, eleven courses took place,

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Sarah Chester, Director of Artlink for her provision of feedback and summary reports from participants and artists and her help in arranging interviews with artists, as well as substantial support in directing researchers to appropriate sources of other research and literature. We would also like to thank Norma Leadbetter, Jim McFarlane at the Links Centre and Alistair McCallum in Cornton Vale for helping to arrange and facilitate interviews with the women. Artlink Central would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sue Brookes (former Governor of HMP & YOI Cornton Vale), Dan Gunn (Governor of Glenochill), and Alan Hamilton along with Ian Gunn, the Governor of Cornton Vale when the project began.

<sup>2</sup> [www.artlinkcentral.org](http://www.artlinkcentral.org)

<sup>3</sup> Artlink undertook its own evaluation of its work from April 2007 - 2008 entitled 'Creating Connections – All About You and Me', which is available on request.

ranging from making ceramics and screen printing to samba music workshops, makeup workshops and radio plays. The courses take place over five days and normally take fifteen hours to complete. The main objectives of this work, like the original work set up in 2007 was to support the women in developing core life skills, increasing self-esteem, and improving well-being.

1.4 This first section of this report briefly reviews the relevant literature, which highlights the benefits of having prisoners involved in the arts. The second section then describes the findings from the current evaluation.

1.5 The first part of the research findings presents participants' views of the projects based on semi-structured interviews with thirteen participants along with a summary of over 100 participant feedback forms collated by Artlink Central.<sup>4</sup> The second part then presents views of prison staff and artists who took part in the courses either as facilitators or in the establishment of the project itself. Ten artists and eight prison staff were interviewed, and summary reports on each project based on the artist's observations were also analysed.<sup>5</sup> Information about Artlink Central's work was also taken from a short report by Penny Johnston from the Under-21 Visiting Committee.

### ***Who is the project for?***

1.6 Artlink Central was originally set up in Cornton Vale with a view to working with young offenders, as Artlink Central and prison staff believed these were the most volatile and needy group in the prison. Although work with young women alone continued for a short time, from February 2009 this seemed no longer to be the case: the project has since widened to include older offenders, which seems to have worked well. The reason for this was that staff had difficulty getting young offenders to attend the projects. Feedback from both prison staff and artists noted that young offenders appeared to have a 'group mentality' with the result that if one person decided not to attend any more then they would all stop attending. Both prisoners and staff also felt that having the mix of both young and old prisoners helped the dynamic of the group, calming the younger ones down and allowing for more productive work to take place.

1.7 Artlink Central does not appear to have any restrictions on whom they work with: women who have committed very serious offences take part in the same activities as those who are on remand or who have committed less serious offences. Based on interviews with both prisoners and staff, this does not seem to have any negative effects. The artists are not aware of the offence history of the participants, which benefits the courses in that participants are not categorised or judged on the basis of their offence.

### ***The benefits of arts in prison***

1.8 Prisoner numbers have continued to increase in Scotland. On 1 April 2007 the figure stood at 7,238, but by April 2009 had increased to 8,100.<sup>6</sup> Based on figures from 2007-2008, each prisoner place costs £32,358 per year (Scottish Prison Service 2008). The prison population in Scotland generally comes from the most deprived backgrounds (Houchin 2004). Many prisoners lack in educational attainment, and between 20-30% of offenders have learning difficulties or learning disabilities that interfere with their ability to cope within the criminal justice system (Loucks 2007).

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Sarah Chester, MBE, Director of Artlink, for providing this information.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks again to Sarah Chester, MBE, Director of Artlink, for this information.

<sup>6</sup> [www.sps.gov.uk](http://www.sps.gov.uk)

1.9 Monaghan (2005) estimated – conservatively – that 25% and 33% respectively of those in prison in Scotland have below functional levels of basic literacy and numeric skills. More specific research in England shows that many offenders’ basic skills are rudimentary. Half of all those in custody are at or below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year old) in reading; two-thirds in numeracy; and four-fifths in writing. These are the skills required for 96% of all jobs (SEU 2002). In short, most people in prison have little prospect for the future and have often given up on the idea of education.

1.10 Research shows that female prisoners such as those in HMP & YOI Cornton Vale are particularly vulnerable, with many having mental health problems, histories of physical and sexual abuse, self-harm and addiction to drugs (see for example Loucks 1998; Scottish Office 1998; Corston 2007). Andrew McLellan, the Chief Inspectorate of Prisons, stated in 2004 that “This is not a cross section of society: these are very damaged women.”

1.11 A number of studies have shown the arts to be an effective a way of helping with mental health issues (Matarasso and Chell 1998, Ruskin 2006).<sup>7</sup> Factors that lead women to start taking drugs often include the influence of a partner and a perceived need to use drugs as a coping strategy against abuse (Benda 2005). The arts can be used as a way to help people to find different ways of coping and improve mental health and well-being.

As pointed out by the former director of Arts In Corrections, California, “... the arts are a low cost, high touch, non threatening intervention that have produced measurable results” in the areas of reduction of psychopathological behaviour, reduced incident rates, reduced recidivism, improved educational performance and increased self-esteem (Cleveland 2003, cited in Hughes 2005: 37).

1.12 Wilson *et al.* (2008) reflect the increasing awareness that the arts can be a powerful and highly valuable activity for prisoners. Allen and colleagues (2004) found that benefits can be direct, such as improved writing skills, or indirect, through improved social skills such as working as part of a team or increased self-esteem. In their evaluation for the Anne Peaker Centre for Arts and Criminal Justice, Cheliotis and Tankebe (2008) also found increased self-esteem, a sense of achievement and improved likelihood to move into education.

1.13 The arts can provide routes into learning for those alienated from the formal education system. Miles (2007) pointed out that a dance-led programme with young offenders and young people at risk of offending in Bradford, for example, is seeing the majority of its graduates going on to college or re-engaging with school. In the report, *Offenders’ Learning Journey for Juvenile Offenders*, the Offenders Learning and Skills Department at the Ministry of Justice in England (2004) highlighted the importance of being able to offer young offenders the opportunity to gain qualifications in the arts, if this is something that they would like to pursue, and for service providers to work hard to help maintain the learning process from the prison into the community. The report notes that the arts “provide an opportunity for self-expression and can thereby assist in maintaining good order”.

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<sup>7</sup> Also see [www.nelh.nhs.uk/nsf/mentalhealth/makeithappen](http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/nsf/mentalhealth/makeithappen)

1.14 Benefits of the arts are not just internal to the prison but should and could transfer to the community. In particular they can impact positively upon future offending, especially if this means that the prisoner begins to engage in education. In 2003, the Learning and Skills Development Agency conducted a study of participation in education amongst 211 prisoners at four prisons. Results of this study showed reconviction rates in the first year after release among ex-prisoners who had begun a general education course between 2001 and 2002 were 28%, compared with a national average of 44% for all offenders.<sup>8</sup> Criminological research has also found that prisoners who report high levels of self-belief and confidence in their ability to stop offending were also the most successful in desisting from crime when they left prison (Gendreau *et al.* 1979; Maruna 2005). Hughes (2005) further added that, "... in prevention contexts with young people, evaluation studies provide evidence that arts programmes can reduce offending behaviour and incidents of disruption, help disaffected young people re-engage with education, and sponsor personal and social development." The Corston Report into female offenders (2007) recommends that innovative and creative solutions are used to work with the most vulnerable prisoners; the arts can be a way of doing this.

1.15 The arts can therefore be a very useful pathway to help prisoners enter into education, build confidence and self-esteem, and is a multi-faceted way to support offenders both in and out of prison. The recognition of the benefits of the arts in prison is probably best exemplified by their growing use throughout the world, with well-established theatre and art projects in prisons such as in Italy, America, Germany and Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the Prison Arts Foundation has become part of the core programme of prison activity.<sup>9</sup> In Scotland, a number of different initiatives are taking place such as Theatre Nemo in Barlinnie HMP, 'Fine cell' work in Cornton Vale, which actually culminates in chosen work being shown in an exhibition in London, and of course Artlink Central, which has been working in Polmont Young Offenders Institution and Cornton Vale for over twelve years. The arts are therefore not a new initiative, but the benefits gained from the projects that take place in prison are now gaining both acknowledgement and credibility.

## **2. Research findings: participants' views**

### ***Background***

2.1 Thirteen women who took part in a total seven different projects held by Artlink Central were interviewed for this research. Interviewees were selected simply on the basis that they were still in custody and available to be interviewed. All but one had therefore taken part in Artlink Central courses relatively recently. The one exception was a participant who was interviewed about a project she had taken part in two years ago. The group included six young offenders and six adults, bearing in mind that the projects only open to older women in February 2009.

2.2 Three women were on remand, seven women were in prison for the first time, one for a second time, another for a third time and finally one woman was a 'revolving door' offender, being out of prison for less than two to three months at a time.

2.3 Table 1 is a breakdown of the offences of all the women who are convicted:

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/prisonarchive.html> The LSRC website has been removed, so this information is therefore not able to be taken from its original source, <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/lsergpcsp.html>

<sup>9</sup> To read more information about each of these projects in detail, see Allen *et al.* (2004)

**Table 1: Offences of participants in the research**

Offence	Number of women (n=10)
Murder	2
Grievous Bodily Harm	2
Breach of Community Service	2
Possession with intent to supply	2
Assault and Robbery	1
Assault	1

For those on remand, one woman was charged with murder, while the other two women were on remand for assault. Artlink Central has therefore recruited women who have a range of offences, from the relatively minor to the most serious.

2.4 Table 2 below shows the length of sentence being served:

**Table 2: Sentence lengths of participants in the research**

Length of sentence	Number of women (n=10)
6-12 months	2
13- 24 months	4
25-50 months	1
100-200 months	3

The three women who were in prison for the longest period of time all commented that they liked to take part in the Artlink Central projects as they felt that the effects were more lasting for them. They commented that they could make things for their rooms and could really learn from the experience:

*Those young ones, they don't appreciate what they have in here. I am looking at another eight years, and I appreciate everything that I get in here. It is nice to be able to make things for your room, we (long term prisoners) are gonna get more benefit out of it as we are in here longer (Participant 1, serving a 12-year sentence)*

2.5 All three also pointed out that, because they are long-term prisoners, they have to be a part of a work party and as a result cannot take part in these activities. They said that they need to work so that they can show the parole board of their progress in prison:

*I just feel that because I am working in here and trying my best, I get punished for it. Like I tried to get onto the makeup course, and being into hairdressing it makes sense that I could do it, but I couldn't do it because of the work party commitments (Participant 2, serving a 12-year sentence)*

2.6 Two prison officers also felt that this was an issue for Artlink Central, as well as for many other service providers carrying out courses and projects within the prison, and suggested that 'reserve lists' could be drawn up. Having reserve lists would mean that women could be more flexible in joining groups and would also mean that work parties

could continue as usual. When this suggestion was given to other prison officers, they agreed that this was a good idea and therefore may be something to take forward.

#### *Factors impacting offending*

2.7 Six women said taking drugs had lead to their offending, one of whom blamed her partner for this. Three women said alcohol was the main factor in their offending, and one woman said her mother had committed the crime.

#### ***Finding out about Artlink Central***

2.8 All thirteen women said they had been approached by a prison officer about Artlink Central. Five women said they did not know anything about it beforehand and came along on the day of the course or the day after it had started. The other five women had been involved in art projects before when they had been out of prison and were enthusiastic about having the opportunity to take part in something they enjoyed.

2.9 Seven of the women felt that the advertising of the project could have been better. One woman had taken part in a project two years previously and said that she only heard about projects after they had happened, which she found frustrating. She felt that Artlink Central and prison staff should be more proactive about letting people know what is happening within the prison. The participant was serving a 12-year sentence for murder and had been in prison since she was sixteen. She explained that she had not had much of a life and that being a part of the play and having a lead role had been the highlight of her life:

*I will remember it for the rest of my life, one of the actors said I had a talent and I could go somewhere. I have never had the chance to do anything really as I have been here since I was 16 and I really loved it. (Participant 2)*

2.10 Four of the women only heard about the project the morning that it had started and felt that this lack of organisation in the recruitment of prisoners lead to many women not taking part. Two women suggested during interview that the women in work parties could take lists back to their halls to see who wants to be a part of the courses. They also felt that those who took part in the projects did not always do so for good reasons: in the summary feedback forms, for example, one artist observed that two prisoners were only doing the project “to skive work duties”. However, the artist noted that, despite this, the two prisoners had enjoyed it and seemed to have got a lot out of it.

2.11 Ross House in Cornton Vale accommodates the most vulnerable offenders, many of whom have mental health issues. Two women interviewed from Ross House took part in the Christmas Crafts workshop and felt that this has been the best thing that they had done in the prison. One of the women pointed out that being in this hall was very stressful:

*Artlink are normal people, and it is good to have that contact because in Ross House you don't get that. You would go in there sane and come out insane. This was a chance to get away from the mayhem, the madhouse (Participant 6, remand prisoner)*

2.12 The Corston Report on female offenders (2007) pointed out that using the arts as a way of working with the most vulnerable prisoners could be a way forward; although this is only a small sample, the current findings suggest that this could be the case. One

prison officer had worked with vulnerable prisoners for ten years and reflected that giving these women even the smallest bit of attention and support paid dividends. She used to carry out a make-up course with these more vulnerable women once a week and said that the women spoke about the course from the day it ended to the day it started up again. The confidence, self-esteem and general 'feeling good' about themselves was unrivalled in comparison to the work with other prisoners.

2.13 The advertisement of Artlink Central's courses and recruitment of women onto the projects would therefore benefit from review, possibly with a more targeted approach discussed.

### ***Mixture of participants***

2.14 All of the women felt that having a mixture of older and younger women was probably the best composition for each of the groups, as it calmed the younger prisoners down and made the work more productive. One young offender felt that, by including the older women, the younger women were more respectful and kept their behaviour in check. Prison staff and artists echoed this view. Despite the provision in the Prison Rules for separation of adults from young offenders, Cornton Vale has often mixed age groups for this reason.

2.15 The mixing of remand and convicted prisoners is more controversial, with these groups generally segregated more strictly, again according to the Prison Rules. The researchers are unaware of any similar mixing of these groups for prison programmes and activities.

### ***Perceived benefits of the courses***

2.16 All of the women were asked to think back about any benefits they had experienced by taking part in the art projects. All of the women listed the following benefits:

- Growth in confidence and self-esteem
- Met new people
- Felt good about myself
- Teamwork
- Had a laugh
- Got a certificate

All of the women said it was difficult to meet people in Cornton Vale. One woman said that, in prison, people were always critical, and you had to 'keep your guard up'. She went on to say that when you took part in one of the Artlink Central projects, in contrast, you could relax and even 'make a fool of yourself'.

2.17 One young offender said that meeting other prisoners was good for her, as being in the same hall all the time could be draining. One woman from Ross House said that she had been experiencing adverse attention from the other women in her hall due to the charges she was facing. Being a part of the course allowed the other women to see a positive side of her that they had previously ignored, and as a result they stopped being so horrible to her. One woman had been able to reconcile her differences with another woman through one of the courses. Four Chinese women had taken part in the courses. During an interview with one of them, she observed that, until the course, they



had 'kept themselves to themselves', but that they were now mixing better with other prisoners.

2.18 All of the women felt that getting the certificate was fantastic, particularly as the Governor of the prison handed this to them personally. The participants regarded this support from the prison as invaluable.

2.19 Those who took part in the music classes pointed out that they learned about new instruments and about different cultures. The highlight for them was putting on a concert for other prisoners. Participants in craft classes were pleased to have been able to make something for their rooms and in many cases also for their children. Six of the women said that it gave them something to look forward to, and eight said it helped them to take their mind of things, to de-stress and, in their opinion, improved behaviour in the halls. Two women admitted that they generally were problematic in the halls – one admitted that she regularly 'thrashes' her room - but during the course she said she felt calm and that she did not feel like causing trouble. Another woman was a prolific self-harmer and explained that, when she was taking part in art, she felt calm and in control and therefore found it therapeutic.

2.20 Nine women said that simply being out of their cells was a benefit of the course. A few added that they had been able to forget they were in prison for the short period of time they were engaging in the project. Seven women commented that taking part in the classes helped them improve their listening skills, and one said that it improved her oral communication. Two women simply said that it 'brought out the best' in them. Six women said that they had never had the opportunity to take part in any thing like this before. One said that she had never completed anything in her life, and to see the course through was quite an achievement. Two women said that they would never forget the experience and that it was one of the best things they had ever done in their lives:

*I hope that this gets lots of funding as it is probably the best thing I have done since being in here; it was so so much fun. Drugs robbed me of my life and personality, and this type of thing made me remember what I used to be like and what I can be like. (Participant 10)*

### **Long-term impact**

2.21 Five women said that they did not know if the project would have a long-term impact but that they really enjoyed it:

*It might not help many people long term, but for me it was one of the best experiences of my life and I have not had many of them. (Participant 10)*

Four women said that they would definitely do it again and that they realised for the first time that they had a talent. One woman explained that she had never been good at school and had 'written off' education but that Artlink Central had showed her that education could differ from what she had expected and that she could go back to education in the future.

2.22 All interviewees felt that they had grown in self-confidence, and one woman said specifically that this would impact her in the long term. Three women said that just being

able to have a good experience made a difference in their lives, as they had not had the opportunity to do this in their 'normal' life. One woman said that it really had changed her, as it had made her think about what she could be.

### ***Recommending the project***

2.23 All of the women said they would recommend the project to others. The main reasons for this were that it was fun to do and that you get to achieve something you would otherwise not have the opportunity to do. One prison officer recommended that the testimonies of the women who took part should be made more public to encourage uptake from other prisoners. This is something Artlink Central could take on board for the future.

### ***Involvement of prison staff***

2.24 Prison officers supervise the course for the artists and, until last year, different staff were used each time. In February 2008, a more consistent approach was adopted with the same prison officers supervising each time. One of the prison officers involved has a background in the arts. Prisoner participants strongly felt that having this person involved helped them to enjoy it. Indeed, all of the prisoners felt that having a prison officer who was willing to participate helped the atmosphere, and four women felt that this involvement helped them to see prison officers as 'human beings' and to respect them more as a result:

*Having him involved helped us to join in and you see them as human beings, they let their guard down (Participant 5)*

2.25 Interviews with prison staff, discussed in more detail in the next section, revealed a difficulty in getting staff for the projects due to timetabling. Projects like Artlink Central are also regarded as an 'add on' rather than as part of the core programme. One prison officer spoke about the reality that things can and do change at the last minute and that this lack of strategic support was frustrating. Therefore, although the women clearly believed that having prison staff involved was important, prison officers do not always have the support or the time they need to fulfill this role. The more consistent approach to staffing since 2008 had improved things, however.

### ***Views about the artists***

2.26 All of the women said that the artists were excellent and professional but nevertheless very approachable. Three women commented on how good they felt when they had heard the artist's praise. Indeed, one woman said she had never really had any praise before, so this was a welcome novelty. Everyone thought that the artists created a comfortable atmosphere: one woman liked the fact that she could make mistakes without this really mattering. One interviewee said she had been a bit intimidated in the beginning, saying that, by being in prison, you forget to think for yourself. However she added that, by the end of the course, she had really grown in confidence about her capabilities and in her ability to work alone. Interestingly, the artist's observations on this one participant show this same pattern, and the artist's encouragement seems to have had the desired effect. In short, the artists appeared able to set the appropriate pace and to match competence levels to suitable activities.

### ***Suggestions for changes***

2.27 All of the women said that one thing they would change is that more Artlink Central courses should be available as they liked everything about it.

2.28 Four women said they would have liked their family and friends to come to the prison to see them perform or to show them what they had made:

*Getting the certificate was ace. I can show it to my mum and that and they will feel proud of me. It would have been great if they had been able to come up and see us do the show. (Participant 5)*

Based on the attendance and feedback of prisoners and families at art courses in Pentonville prison in England, Lyon (2008) reflects that having families view the work helps to reinforce the positive experience. HMP Shotts in Scotland also holds art exhibits open to family. With these things in mind, the attendance of families to view final work could beneficially be arranged where possible.

### **Further involvement**

2.29 As a result of the Artlink Central projects, one woman had taken up guitar lessons following the Skerryvore Music Project. Unfortunately she gave this up after a few months because she could not practice outside of class, which she found frustrating. She felt that being a part of the project inspired her to get involved in music in some way.

2.30 Only one woman said that she would not continue to do a similar course if one were available outside, explaining that this was not really of interest to her. However, the other twelve women said that they would like to continue engaging in the arts. Six women said they would like to know what is available in their local area; however one woman said that if you wanted to do this type of thing, you could easily find out for yourself. Three women, who were serving longer sentences, did not want to know what was going on in the community as they said they would find this upsetting. However, they did feel that they would like to know what was available in the prison and if it were possible for them to take part in it.

### **Summary of feedback forms**

2.31 Over a 110 people took part in eleven projects in Cornton Vale between April 2008 and April 2009. 51 of whom (47%) attended the full course. Table 3 below breaks down the specific attendance levels for each of the eleven projects:

**Table 3: Attendance of Artlink Central courses**

Project	Number Signed up	Number full attendance	Reasons for lack of attendance
April – Music	7	5	2 dropped out
May – Ceramics	10	7	3 missed one class each
June – Drama	3	3	no absences
September – Skerryvore Music	18	9	[number?] Heard about course after first session
October – Ceramics	13	3	3 dropped out in the beginning, 7 missed classes
November – Makeup	7	2	3 missed one class, 1 dropped out, 1 had to go back to work
December – Crafts	8	3	4 missed only one class
January – Printmaking	8	7	1 missed only one class
February - Samba Music	10	3	6 heard about it after the first session, 1 dropped out
March - Radio Play	11	2	3 heard about it after first session, 6 missed classes
March - Craft Jewellery	15	7	3 dropped out, 1 released from prison, 2 heard about it after first session, 2 had to attend other activities

In 24 cases (22%), participants only missed one class, usually because they had to go to court or attend an appointment. In 21 cases (19%), participants only heard about the course after a session had taken place, and 3 participants (3%) had to go back to work within the prison. In short, only 11 participants (9%) chose to drop out of the courses completely.

2.32 Better planning may help attendance so that women are more aware of the courses in advance. If possible, those taking part should be released from work. Overall, attendance was excellent: including those who only missed one class, attendance was 69%.

2.33 In total, Artlink Central delivered 1,391 development hours through its courses in Cornton Vale from April 2008 to April 2009 in total. This means that, on average, each of the 110 clients carried out 12.65 hours of ‘purposeful activity’ (for the purpose of the prison’s Key Performance Indicators) through each Artlink Central course.

After reviewing all participants’ feedback, the following common themes were evident:

- Artlink Central helped participants see that they have talent.
- The women felt proud that they had persevered and completed the courses.
- Women felt more confident by the end of taking part in the courses.
- Participants viewed the courses as both a great opportunity and great fun.
- Participants enjoyed being able to make things for their children and for themselves to decorate their rooms.
- The activities helped them ‘de-stress’ and were therapeutic.

- Participants enjoyed having the prison officer take part.
- Women worked through tea breaks in some instances to get work complete.
- Participants wanted families to be invited in to see the work or performance.

2.34 The following quotes from the evaluation forms illustrate these points:

*I got a natural high and I can say I haven't had many of them but I will strive now to make them a more regular occurrence.* (Participant from the Skerryvore Project)

*The lads treated us like normal and not like criminals; it brought me back down to earth.* (Participant from the Skerryvore Project)

*At first I found it frustrating but after practice and group effort, our performance was amazing and I didn't want it to end* (Participant from the Samba Project)

*I think that the prison should keep doing something along they lines and hopefully start tae even let the families to come up and see them do it* (Participant from the Samba Project)

*I enjoyed the class. I done things in Artlink that I didn't get to do at school. I now know how to sew and be a lot more creative. The staff are really helpful and patient* (Participant from Christmas Crafts)

*Thank you for all of your time and generosity. Spending this small time with us made me feel I was still worth something* (Participant from the Radio Play)

### **Summary of participants' views**

2.35 Participants really enjoyed taking part in the courses and felt that they helped them to grow in confidence and self-esteem. Many expressed that the courses were invaluable and allowed them an opportunity they had never had before, with some women saying it was one the highlights of their lives. Participants spoke about being able to build life skills such as team building and listening, and many mentioned that it helped them to take their mind off things and was therapeutic. For those who took part in the performing arts, having the opportunity to perform was an exciting experience. For those who made crafts, the chance to make something for themselves or for their children was very much appreciated.

2.36 Having enthusiastic prison staff who got involved in the projects not only helped the women to take part but also allowed the prisoners to see a different side to the staff, which some felt helped them to respect staff more. All the women felt that the courses were very professional and that the artists' encouragement helped them to relax and excel in a skill. They particularly enjoyed getting a certificate at the end of it and overall felt that projects like this should continue and be supported. Participants gave no negative feedback about mixing remand and convicted prisoners and felt that mixing older and younger prisoners helped the dynamic of the group. Some women felt that the advertising of the projects could be better but offered no other real criticism.

### **3. Research findings: feedback from staff**

3.1 Eight prison staff and ten artists were interviewed for this research. All eighteen views will be presented together unless obvious differences arose between the groups.

#### ***Expectations of the project***

3.2 The then Director of Artlink Central, Sarah Chester, and the then Governor of Cornton Vale, Ian Gunn (now the Governor at HMP Shotts), introduced Artlink Central into Cornton Vale in the belief that it would help the women to build self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Sarah approached all the artists to conduct the courses except for one, who approached Sarah to do a joint project within the prison. Prison staff came to the project for different reasons. Generally they had either been given the role of facilitator within the prison due to a reshuffle of staff, or they had been approached to do it. However, all were generally keen to be a part of the courses.

3.3 Fourteen people interviewed felt nothing but excitement about the idea of doing arts with the women in the prison, and many commented on the benefits it could have. Three artists were excited about doing the project but also a little nervous as they had never been in prison before. However, they also said they felt well-supported, saying that having preparatory meetings before the project started and someone with them on the day who had already been in the prison really helped.

3.4 One prison officer felt that the artists should sit through the induction for Cornton Vale before working within the prison so they would be more aware of the issues they would face. One artist interviewed, for example, pointed out that they were not aware of the level of self-harm among the women in the prison but that they should have been made more aware due to the materials they had originally planned to bring into the prison. Such prior knowledge should therefore not be taken for granted, with possible induction training considered. Equally, one prison officer had been given the role of facilitation at a very late stage and felt that he had not been told enough about it. However this seemed to be an anomaly, as communication between Artlink Central and Prison Staff was generally excellent, with prison staff well-informed in advance about each project.

#### ***Recruitment of participants***

3.5 Artlink Central has been opened up more recently to women serving a range of sentences and from all different age groups. One prison officer felt strongly that having it originally for young offenders only was not fair to the other prisoners and that having a mixture of age groups really helped the group dynamic. This view coincides with the feedback from the women themselves and from other prison officers.

3.6 None of the artists knew how prisoners were recruited onto the project, as this had been left to the prison staff to organise. However, two artists, based on their experience and what they gathered, felt this could be managed better. They said that things seemed to be organised more on the day than what was desired and that some women came who clearly did not want to be there, which affected the group. In all such cases, artists said that the person did not want to be there did not return to the group after the first day.

3.7 One artist suggested that a presentation beforehand to prisoners might be worthwhile so that they are more aware of what to expect and therefore would sign up

on this basis. One prison officer felt that some women did not attend for the right reasons and that participants should be admitted on a more selective basis. The officer explained that when they organised one of the projects, they asked women whom they felt would not only benefit but who had shown interest in the event beforehand. Based on the drop-out level of women who have attended the project, not that many attend only the once and leave. However, a lot of women only start attending after the first session. The current recruitment process would therefore benefit from review. As discussed earlier, this could also mean a review of how work party commitments are upheld in the prison.

3.8 Two prison staff felt that the lack of support from other prison officers impacted negatively on the project. In one instance, for example, women were not allowed to attend because prison staff working within a particular housing block felt that it was understaffed at the time, despite the facilitators' opinion that this was not the case:

*There are some prison officers who do not want to be around prisoners, that is the truth. I took this job because I want to help prisoners and contact with them is what I am paid to do. Not everyone thinks like that though, and that is hard to manage. (Prison Officer)*

3.9 Cornton Vale is overcrowded, and as a result officers are being over-stretched. One prison officer said that even getting the basics done can sometimes be difficult. Prison overcrowding is likely to impact upon this project, as overcrowding exacerbates difficulties in staffing.

3.10 Four prison officers said they 'have tried everything' to get the women to sign up for Artlink Central, from putting up posters to going directly to their rooms and asking. One prison officer felt that Cornton Vale Television could be used to advertise the projects, and Artlink Central has already developed resources that could be used for this purpose. Two prison officers felt that the testimonies of previous prisoners who took part would encourage others, which could be a way forward.

3.11 Respondents pointed out that young offenders are generally a difficult group to engage with: a number of different officers explained that they sign up to projects but then fail to turn up on the day. However, another prison officer who had worked on the Young Offenders' housing block had run a project there with full attendance. This officer argued that this is the reason why the prison officers need to be more organised in whom they approach to take part in these projects. The officer also added that she really encouraged the women to attend every day but was not sure if prison officers currently organising attendance made the same effort. One prison officer felt that using participation in these projects as an incentive for good behaviour could elicit a different response. Most prison officers appeared to believe that the current advertising and recruitment strategy is not as good as it could be.

#### ***Perceived benefits of the courses***

3.12 All eighteen staff, in line with the original objectives of the project, felt that the women grew in self-confidence and self-esteem and improved their mental health and well-being as a result of taking part in Artlink Central. Many commented that this was probably one of the only opportunities the women have had to take part in any type of arts, and a number of different artists and prison officers felt that completing a piece of work made the women feel good. Everyone commented on the sense of self-

achievement that could come from the work, particularly when the women were presented with their certificates. Three prison officers felt that having these projects helped the women to feel 'normal', and all of the officers said it helped the women to meet others and to interact in a positive way. Eight interviewees felt that the women were able to build life skills such as team building and effective communication. They also believed that Artlink Central gave participants a chance to learn and to improve their concentration. One prison officer said that the courses might make the women aware of better things in life of which they could be a part.

3.13 Prison officers noted that doing the craft workshops meant that the women had something tangible to remind them that they had achieved something. The workshops also gave them a chance to do something they may not otherwise have done. The artists said that, over the week, many of the women surprised themselves and commented that many did not think that they could do it in the beginning. Both prison officers and artists said that sometimes it allowed prisoners to get to know a different side of each other, which opened up the group and helped build respect. Two prison officers felt strongly that the projects should be targeted more towards the most vulnerable in prison, saying that these women generally did not get a lot to do in their halls and that doing these projects had such a positive impact on their self-image and confidence because there were generally so lacking:

*I have worked with vulnerable prisoners most of my life and I can tell you that that wee bit of makeup that they put on in the workshop and that small glimpse of a more confident them does them so much good...I actually can't even tell you how good it makes them feel. (Prison Officer)*

3.14 All of the artists and prison officers felt that the workshops helped to improve behaviour on the halls and helped the women to feel happy, to take their mind of things and, in short, to be a better prisoner:

*On the day of the project all the women had their picture taken with their certificate and I can tell you that in those pictures and on that day you could see just pure happiness in their faces and I think that that is an undervalued but important thing to say (Artist)*

3.15 All of the artists said that they saw an improvement with the women from the beginning to the end of the courses, and indeed the artists' notes reflected this:

*X said that she was not confident with paints and tried to avoid using them in the beginning but by the end of the week she was making complex designs with paints. She has grown in confidence with the work and materials. (Observation notes by one artist about a participant)*

Johnston (2008) from the Under-21 Visiting Committee also observed changes:

*As is the case with any project of this kind the direct benefits are difficult to assess but when students are starting from a very low level of self-esteem and attainment, the fact that they were able to sit close to and co-operate with others throughout the course is an achievement in itself and makes a positive contribution towards the rehabilitation which is so important in trying to prevent reoffending. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is the girl with serious*



*behavioural problems who said to me confidentially: 'I really did enjoy that' – the fact that she had attended and was able to concentrate well enough to achieve the same standard of work as the others speaks volumes for the value of such a project.*

The Under-21 Visiting Committee's Annual Report (Scott et al. 2008) also highlighted the work that Artlink Central has been doing in the prison as an area of best practice.

### ***Long-term impact***

3.16 When artists and prison staff were asked about the potential long-term impact of the courses, the reaction was generally positive, with interviewees saying that they may or would have an impact over time. Ten people believed the courses may have a long-term impact, focusing on the benefits for the participants and the potential to show them that their lives could be different and better. For example, one artist commented that a participant had said that she had had a 'natural high' and that she didn't think that this was even possible. The artist felt that having the women involved in these projects in the community would help them occupy their time, meet new people and ultimately to stay away from crime. Two interviewees said this was a good experience for the women that could never be taken away from them, and in this way it had a long-term impact. Five said the courses would have a long-term impact and could reduce reoffending, as the arts could develop transferable skills to help participants readjust and get on with life after release from prison. Only one person said that he didn't know if the courses would have any long-term impact.

### ***Restriction on the courses***

3.17 One artist did not think any restrictions had been placed on the courses in which they had taken part. In contrast, 14 interviewees felt that space for the courses was an issue. However, this had improved recently, whereby a space had been designated for Artlink Central alone. Fourteen interviewees also said that a lack of support from prison officers could impact adversely. All of the artists felt that having a prison officer involved who wanted to be there made the project better, and each had experienced that feeling that the designated prison officer they had was invaluable both to the success of the project and to getting the women involved. One artist described how one prison officer appeared despondent and had not replied to their requests to have equipment admitted into the prison, with the result that they could not go ahead with the project that had been agreed. Five other artists said that getting things confirmed in general had proved difficult at times.

3.18 Three officers felt that prison staff should encourage the women who had signed up to attend but at present did not think that this was happening. Three prison officers also said that work party commitments sometimes clashed with the courses, but that this could easily be overcome by having reserve lists in place. Thirteen interviewees felt that staffing in the prison always had a potentially negative impact: holiday times and periods where staff were off sick could sometimes mean that a project struggled to go ahead. One artist felt that the participating artists should be made more aware about what the women are allowed to make in the prison. The artist gave an example in which a woman was not allowed to bring her ceramic bowl back to her room after spending all week making it. This example again shows that induction to the prison for artists could be advisable.

3.19 Two prison officers felt that some of the projects were too advanced for many of the more vulnerable prisoners and that a more targeted approach for recruitment of participants and design of courses would work best. One officer commented that the timetabling of the projects could be more grounded and therefore less susceptible to last minute changes. Finally, as part of the makeup project, prisoners were given a small makeup kit to practice with and were allowed to take this back to their housing blocks. One prison officer working on a hall subsequent to this said that it created a lot of problems and rivalry among the women; in future, this should be given careful consideration.

### ***Positive practice***

3.20 The prison staff and artists interviewed agreed unanimously that having consistent and enthusiastic prison officers helped the project. Artists focused on the benefits of the prison officer's participation and felt that, in many cases, the women trusted the officer and looked to them almost as role models. The women's adjustment to and full participation in the course was much faster when the prison officer was also involved. Research about supporting prisoners into education (Braggins and Talbot 2005) also noted the importance of having positive support from prison officers. However, the research also found that officers were given little support in fulfilling these roles, as they were not given enough time or training. The authors argue that no further progress will be possible in officer involvement with prisoner learning until these issues are addressed and asks that a review of the prison officer's role, training and support should take place.

3.21 Twelve interviewees felt that having older participants mixing with the younger ones had a positive impact; the artists who did not comment on this had not worked on projects where this took place. All of the prison staff felt that the artists were very professional, and that it was their delivery that helped participants to engage and excel in the work. Two artists felt that 'going in cold' - not knowing anything about the women's background or ever asking - helped to establish a good working relationship. Johnston (2008) also observed that the women valued having a service provider independent from the Prison Service. Three artists felt that being flexible and allowing the women to decide what they wanted to do work best. According to a report by the National Council for Research on Women:

*When girls' collaboration is solicited through authentic and meaningful ways, through involvement in the design and implementation of programmes, girls can gain leadership skills, develop supportive intergenerational relationships and experience themselves as active participants in social change' (1998: 87 cited in Worrall, 2001).*

3.22 One artist felt that, in the craft classes, the young women in particular had a poor attention span and sometimes needed constant stimulation, emphasizing the advisability of having a 'plan B' for projects. One artist felt that the women responded well when they did not patronise them and allowed them to get to grips with the more difficult aspects of the project. Two artists commented that all participants responded well when the prison officer took pictures of the event and then gave them to the women. Only one artist said they had had trouble with two of the women beginning to argue during the project. However, they used the argument to do a role-play, and as a result the women made up their differences.

### ***Management of the courses within the prison***

3.23 Nine staff interviewed had been involved in the Artlink Central Projects when they were part of the restorative justice practices in Cornton Vale, which received a Butler Trust Award in 2006. Five people felt that this had worked well for the women. However, three artists said they did not really know what the restorative justice work was about, that no one had told them about it, and felt that in reality they had little support to do anything about that. All those involved felt strongly that, since the transition from the umbrella of Restorative Justice to Education, the projects had been much better organised and supported within the prison. The fact that Artlink Central was now managed within Learning and Education was viewed as having a very positive impact on the projects.

### ***Evaluation***

3.24 Since the beginning of the courses in Cornton Vale, Artlink Central has been keen to get participants' feedback, and indeed the women appreciated the opportunity to do this. Three artists said they had not had any feedback about the evaluations. Although the women told them at the end of the week that they had really enjoyed the experience, the artists saw value in being able to see the evaluations where possible. They regarded ongoing evaluation as useful in helping staff to tailor projects and improve on content and structure. One artist said that the suggestions they had received from the women would be taken on board for their next sessions.

### ***Position within the prison***

3.25 One of the objectives of the evaluation was to ascertain how embedded Artlink Central is within the prison. Three interviewees felt that the project was well-embedded, feeling that the shift to both consistent staff and consistent timetabling of courses had made this a reality. However, the other fifteen interviewees thought that the project was 'somewhat' embedded, seeing room for improvement before this was fully the case.

3.26 Eight people suggested that the arts and innovative ways of working with prisoners should be taught in the Prison Service College. Twelve interviewees thought that involving staff who wanted to be involved was the best way forward; they believed this was currently the case but hoped it would continue. One artist felt that the officer 'on the ground' did not have the full support from more senior officers, which the artist felt was necessary for the course. Five people felt that Artlink Central's courses should be a part of the range of core programmes within the prison and form part of the everyday timetabling of courses. One member of prison staff said that, in general, the prison is stretched to get the basics done, particularly in periods of overcrowding, that external service providers are treated as an 'add on'.

3.27 In saying this, the Governor at HMP Shotts (previously at Cornton Vale) said the art projects held by Motherwell College within Shotts are regarded as part of the core programme for prisoners if they want to take part. At present, HMP Shotts has three art teachers based within the prison; art classes are held every day and are always oversubscribed. An art exhibition is held in the prison once a year for a small number of art students.<sup>10</sup> HM Inspectorate of Prisons highlighted this as an example of best practice, with the proviso that more regular events should be held to promote achievement (McLellan 2007). The possibility of inviting families in at the end of each Artlink Central course would therefore seem to comply with the Inspectorate's example

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<sup>10</sup> Thanks to Ryan Dobbin and Linda Young for their information about the art programme at HMP Shotts.

of best practice, namely the acknowledgment and celebration of achievement on a more ongoing basis. McLellan comments, however, that the Prison Service has "... not yet recognised the personal development programmes... as part of orientation and tackling offending behaviour within the broader curriculum of learning" (*ibid.*: 32).

### ***The future of the project***

3.28 Everyone felt strongly that the courses should continue. In their view, Artlink Central had proved itself as a valuable provider and that the benefits of the courses are so immense that it would be wrong to remove them:

*These women improve from being a part of this every day and that should be continued. This is about testing new water, and it's a breakthrough. (Prison Officer)*

Generally respondents felt that, if possible, these projects should be linked to similar work in the community. Some pointed out that much is available in the prison that the women could also be linking up with such as guitar lessons, craft classes, 'fine cell work' projects and other classes through Carnegie College, the education provider within the prison. At present, Artlink Central does not appear to have any real links with any of these providers, nor is participation recorded on PR2 (the prison's computer database, which records all activities and contacts for each prisoner to inform other services and to assist with plans for release). However, this type of link may help the women to continue the work that they were able to start with Artlink Central.

3.29 Two artists commented that making the women aware of available funding for college and raising awareness of opportunities more explicitly could be valuable. Two artists also felt that any inclusion of education providers at some stage should be managed carefully, and only if the women want this to happen, to avoid changing a good experience into a 'target'. One prison officer spoke about potential connections with Youth Enterprise Scotland and making the women more aware of the benefits of this:

*Could link in with modules, need to be careful though as don't want to be seen to be forcing the women into work. Having a link with education may give the project more credibility among officers (Prison Officer).*

### ***Summary of views from staff***

3.30 Prison Officers and Artists believed the courses from Artlink Central improved the women's self-esteem and confidence, mental well-being and life skills. They felt that the project could have a long-term impact on participants in terms of improving their behaviour, helping them to build skills and ultimately to help them turn away from crime.

3.31 Everyone felt that the communication between Artlink Central and the Scottish Prison Service was excellent. However, a small number of artists had had problems receiving confirmation of information from the prison, in particular regarding the equipment that was permitted, and hoped this could improve. Some prison officers and artists felt that the artists could benefit from having a more robust induction before entering into the prison.

3.32 Everyone felt that, over the past year, the courses had been delivered more consistently, with space designated and the same prison officers facilitating.

Respondents felt strongly that this should continue and that positive involvement from prison staff was invaluable in helping the women engage and excel in the work. Recruitment and advertising was regarded as needing review and improvement, with comments that the courses may be better targeted towards certain individuals, and some highlighting the most vulnerable prisoners as a priority group. Respondents suggested ways in which recruitment and advertising could be improved, such as through creating reserve lists for work parties so that those in this position can still sign up and using participants in work parties to advertise the activities. Cornton Vale Television was a further suggestion for advertisement, as were testimonies and feedback from those who have taken part.

3.33 Respondents regarded Artlink Central as a reliable partner with a professional approach, which all prison staff involved appreciated. Some interviewees felt that better and more explicit links should be put into place with similar work taking place in the prison and in the community. This is something that both Artlink Central and the Prison Service could potentially develop.

#### **4. Key points and discussion**

- The courses from Artlink Central visibly supported participants in developing core life skills, increasing self-esteem, and improving well-being. It gave participants the opportunity to meet new prisoners and to interact in a positive activity such as making things for their room or their children or performing in front of an audience. All of the participants appreciated getting a certificate and were proud that they were able to complete the projects. Some of the women said that it was not only one of the best experiences they had had in prison but also in their lives.
- Participants and prison officers commented that the artists acted in a professional and encouraging way that helped the women to excel in the projects.
- Having positive support from prison officers including participation from officers in the courses was viewed as invaluable.
- Advertising of the project should be reviewed so that women from work parties are able to enroll and so that all those who wish to take part can do so. A more targeted approach to recruitment should be considered.
- Prison staff viewed Artlink Central as a reliable and valuable partner that communicated well and were understanding of prison commitments. Prison personnel believed that the prison could work better to help the timetabling of projects like this.
- Many respondents felt that the courses should become part of the prison's core programmes in order for it to become imbedded in the prison regime.
- Stronger links with existing work in the prison and the community would be of benefit both to the participants and to the work of Artlink central as a whole.

4.1 Based on these findings, Artlink Central appears to be making a number of contributions to the Offender Outcomes identified by the Scottish Prison Service and highlighted in their Delivery Plan as having a positive impact on reducing offending (Scottish Prison Service 2009). Specifically, the work that Artlink Central is doing assists the prison in reaching its target of improved mental well-being (Offender Outcome 1); maintained or improved relationships with families and peers (where prisoners make

items for their children) and interact more positively with a variety of prisoners (Offender Outcome 5); and improved attitudes and behaviour (Offender Outcome 9).

4.2 Where the courses act as a bridge to further participation in the arts and education, Artlink Central also makes steps towards improvements in literacy, employability, and access to community support such as education (Offender Outcomes 3, 4, and 6).

4.3 As highlighted in the Scottish Prison Service's Delivery Plan, "the Scottish Government expects agencies to work together to enhance services for offenders to achieve the (offender) outcomes" (Scottish Prison Service 2009: 13). Artlink has shown that it is a valuable partner in doing this.

4.4 Most of the comments regarding improvement of Artlink Central's work in Cornton Vale related to the ability of prison staff to cater for it in an overcrowded and demanding prison. Needed improvements related to the advertising, recruitment, organisation, and input from prison staff. Other suggested improvements require a joint effort between Artlink Central and the prison, namely better linking with existing services in the prison (e.g. Carnegie College), better preparation of artists about the prison population prior to delivery of courses, and further involvement of families.

## **6. Recommendations**

- Artlink Central's courses should continue, though consideration of a more targeted approach in some cases (e.g. whether certain projects should be set up specifically for more vulnerable offenders) may be helpful.
- Artists should take part in a more robust induction so that they are more aware of the issues female offenders present and which equipment is appropriate to take into the prison.
- Due to the apparently positive effect on group dynamics, mixing of older and younger offenders on the courses should continue unless prison rules and practice prevent this.
- Prison officers who are interested in participating should continue to be allowed to work on these projects.
- The advertisement of courses and recruitment of prisoners onto them needs to be reviewed, with better procedures put in place.
- The arts should become a part of the core programme for the prison, with a view to using this as a bridge into education.
- Opportunities to include families in the courses, such as through inviting families in to see performances or exhibits, should be explored and developed.
- Links with similar projects within the prison should be established so that women who have taken part in Artlink Central courses can build on their skills. Links with the community should also be more explicit so that participants are aware of what is available for them.

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