



# Evaluating arts projects with people who have experienced homelessness: Streetwise Opera's approach

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# Contents

Arts and homelessness .....	3
About Streetwise Opera .....	4
Streetwise Opera’s approach to monitoring and evaluation .....	4
Overview of this guide .....	5
Step 1: Deciding on our approach .....	6
Step 2: Planning our monitoring and evaluation .....	8
Step 3: Developing our model.....	11
Step 4: Implementing our model .....	16
Step 5: Reporting, sharing and reflecting.....	22
Final thoughts.....	25
Tips .....	25
And if your resources are really limited.....	27
Useful links.....	27
References.....	27

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## **Arts and homelessness**

Taking part in creative activities can be tremendously beneficial for people who are experiencing or who at risk of homelessness and who often suffer from a range of complex issues that extend beyond their housing situation. Research has shown that taking part in arts projects can provide a bridge back into society, with participants becoming more able to take up employment, education and/or leisure activities.<sup>1</sup> Arts projects also enable people affected by homelessness to become visible and have a voice, enhancing their self-confidence and boosting self-esteem. At the same time, they help to challenge and overcome the negative assumptions and stereotypes around homelessness.

Research has shown that arts projects can play a crucial role in supporting and changing the lives of those affected by homelessness. However, it is only through monitoring and evaluating our projects on an on-going basis that we know whether this is happening as a result of the work we do. Having this information is vital as it helps to attract funding and secure support for our work – but it also helps us make sure that we are making the difference that we aim to make in the lives of the people we work with.

This guide, therefore, describes the approach that our organisation, Streetwise Opera, has taken to evaluating our work in the hope that this will be useful to others. We have tried to present an honest picture of the work we have done to develop our monitoring and evaluation system. At the same time, we recognise that we have been immensely fortunate to have had considerable support from our funders Big Lottery Fund, Arts Council England, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The MariaMarina Foundation and our principle corporate supporter Macquarie Group Foundation who have enabled us to invest resources in this work. We have also been in existence for over fifteen years and have grown in size over the years so that we are now working in homelessness centres across the UK and have a core team in London who support our work. This includes having someone in charge of our monitoring and evaluation system as we have found that keeping this working well requires on-going time and effort. However, we know that many projects, particularly who are first starting out, will be a long way from this and for those organisations, we have

included a section at the end of this guide (see the ‘*And if your resources are really limited*’ section on p.27) to give some ideas for people in this kind of situation.

## About Streetwise Opera

Streetwise Opera aims to enable people who have experienced homelessness to make positive change in their lives through making music. We do this by running weekly music programmes in homeless centres and community venues across England and by staging opera productions starring our homeless performers alongside professionals. We believe that taking part in our programmes and productions improves our performers’ wellbeing and increases their social inclusion.



## Streetwise Opera’s approach to monitoring and evaluation

Streetwise Opera is committed to monitoring and evaluating its work. This means that:

- we monitor our work by collecting information on a regular, systematic basis
- we evaluate our work by analysing the information we collect and using this to evidence and share our progress.

This is important as it enables us to understand how our work makes a difference to the people we work with. It also helps us to identify how to improve what we do, as well as to report to our funders and other stakeholders and apply for new funding.

In developing our monitoring and evaluation system, we found that there was no simple, ready-made approach to evaluating our work. This reflects what others have also found – there is no “one size fits all” approach to evaluation and organisations working in this field need to develop systems that meet their own needs and fit the context in which they are working. However, we have also learnt a lot from the process of developing our monitoring and evaluation systems and hope that, by sharing this, we can help others to do this.

## Overview of this guide

This guide describes the way in which Streetwise Opera has developed its monitoring and evaluation system:

### Step 1: Deciding on our approach

- choosing a model
- taking into account our resources

### Step 2: Planning our monitoring and evaluation

- using what was already known
- involving performers
- taking account of funders' expectations
- anticipating challenges

### Step 3: Developing our model

- defining our aims
- developing our Theory of Change
- creating our evaluation framework
- taking account of ethical issues

### Step 4: Implementing our model

- designing monitoring forms and activities
- managing, collating and analysing our data

### Step 5: Reporting, sharing and reflecting

At the end of the guide, you will find some final thoughts and tips that may help you reflect on your own monitoring and evaluation.

## Step 1: Deciding on our approach

### Evaluation model

Streetwise Opera has always recognised that the work we do takes people on a journey towards making positive changes in their lives. We do not claim that our work enables people to stop being homeless, find work or take up education. We do, however, believe that by offering people positive, creative and supportive opportunities to make music with others, this helps them to feel better about themselves and to start to have more social contact. As our performers engage with our activities over a longer period time, we have seen how this helps them to become more confident, motivated and feel a greater sense of belonging to a community. Eventually, these changes support them to make and sustain changes in other areas of their lives, such as in terms of their engagement with other services, their mental and physical health and their involvement in other community activities. As such, we felt that the **Theory of Change** model of evaluation was a good fit with our work because it enabled us to take account of the way in which change occurs at different times and in different ways for people.

A theory of change is a “description of a social change initiative that shows how early changes relate to more intermediate changes and then to longer-term change.”<sup>ii</sup>

Using a Theory of Change model provided us with a way of developing:

- a clear and testable theory about how change occurs
- a visual representation of the change we wanted to see and how we expected it to come about
- a plan for evaluating our work with measurable indicators of success
- a powerful communication tool that reflects the complexity of our work.

For more information on using a Theory of Change approach, see:

[Making connections - using a theory of change to develop planning and evaluation](#)

### Our resources

Finally, we wanted to develop a robust system which was **realistic** given the kind of work we do and our resources. As others have found, the need to seek funding can make organisations anxious to prove outcomes far beyond their reach. However, we listened to advice from others in the sector:

*“Be realistic about what can be achieved with the resources available.”<sup>iii</sup>*

We therefore sought to ensure that our monitoring and evaluation system would:

- be based on outcomes that were meaningful and relevant to our performers
- be sensitive to the needs and experiences of our performers
- not be too onerous for performers, or for our staff and volunteers to implement.

Nonetheless, we were aware that we were fortunate in having:

- paid staff who could help collect monitoring information as part of their work
- easy access to computers, emails, photocopiers and other resources that make it easier for us to support the process of monitoring our work
- an online database in which the monitoring information collected could be entered
- funding which enabled us to engage specialist staff who could help us to develop our monitoring and evaluation systems and who now help us to analyse and report on the information collected
- a commitment and an understanding across the organisation of the importance of monitoring and evaluation.

## Step 2: Planning our monitoring and evaluation

In developing our evaluation system, we drew from a number of sources, including research and reports produced by others in the field and focus groups with our performers. We also reflected on the challenges that were likely to arise for us in carrying out monitoring and evaluation activities.

### Research evidence

There is a growing evidence-base of the positive impact of participatory performing arts in terms of improving well-being, reducing marginalisation and increasing social inclusion. This includes:

- A report on homelessness in the UK which discusses issues and provision and includes information that helps show the value of arts projects. <sup>iv</sup>
- NPC's report on music for social change which explores how music can transform the lives of those in need, as well as examining the impact music can have on education, health and the well-being of communities. <sup>v</sup>
- A report produced by Kings College London which provides evidence of the need for ways of increasing morale and reducing isolation when homeless people are resettled. <sup>vi</sup>
- A literature review carried out in 2005 which found clear evidence of benefits that are of particular relevance to people who were homeless, namely reduced isolation, stronger social networks, improved self-esteem and communication skills. <sup>vii</sup>
- A study in Australia which found that group music therapy among people with chronic mental illness resulted in significant improvements, including increased quality of life, health, and perceived support from friends. <sup>viii</sup>
- A further study looking at the use of music therapy for people who were homeless and mentally ill which highlighted the value of singing in a group as a social activity which brings a sense of achievement resulting in improved self-esteem, physical benefits and provides "a unique experience of doing something creative, meaningful and productive with others" which takes people beyond socialisation into healing and allows change to occur. <sup>ix</sup>
- A study carried out with a choir of people with chronic mental health problems, physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities which found that choir singing presented an opportunity for meaningful activity and social connectedness and identified key themes around personal impact (e.g. positive emotions, finding a voice), social impact (e.g. connectedness within the choir and with the audience) and functional outcomes (health benefits, employment capacity, and routine). It also found that when groups provide stability, meaning and purpose, they can have a positive impact on a person's mental health. <sup>x</sup>
- Another study involving members of a choir for homeless men which found that active participation in music could alleviate depression, improve social interaction skills and promote ordered thinking. <sup>xi</sup>

- A report produced by Homeless Link which identified key outcome areas around increasing social inclusion, improving mental health and wellbeing, developing skills for work and challenging prejudice.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Focus groups with performers**

We also carried out focus groups with some of our performers in order to understand how coming to Streetwise Opera makes a difference to them. We found that performers emphasised the way in which coming to Streetwise Opera helped them to:

- develop their self-confidence and sense of self-worth
- improve their communication skills, make new friends, and get support from each other
- improve their creative skills as well as improving other skills such as patience, punctuality and concentration
- express themselves through singing and acting
- improve their physical health e.g. through increased stamina and fitness, helping them to lose weight or cope with respiration problems
- cope with difficulties and help them through difficult times
- make plans for the future and feel more positive about the future, giving them new experiences and opening new doors for them.

What they told us reflected much of what we had learnt through reviewing other research but it also helped us to fine-tune our thinking so that the outcomes we developed strongly reflected feedback from performers.

### **Taking account of funders' expectations**

It was also important that we took account of our funders' expectations, particularly where we were in receipt of grants with fixed targets or milestones. We therefore reviewed our grant proposals and agreements to make sure we were aware of our funders' reporting requirements.

### **Challenges**

We recognised and tried to take account of a number of challenges in developing our monitoring and evaluation system. In particular, we were aware of challenges around:

- collecting baseline data
- getting a balance of qualitative (descriptive) and quantitative (numerical) data
- the need to demonstrate ongoing progress when, for many people, maintaining progress is important
- being open to the potential bias of self-evaluation.

### **Collecting baseline data**

Baseline data is crucial in enabling organisations to assess the progress that performers make during their involvement with Streetwise Opera. Nonetheless, Jermyn (2001) describes the difficulties in collecting baseline information from which to measure progress in respect to arts workshops with socially excluded groups. Similarly, Bines (1994) identifies difficulties in measuring change which are specific to homelessness. This is further complicated by difficulties in measuring 'soft' outcomes such as self-confidence which is highly subjective and difficult to quantify. Validated measures are often felt to be overly rigid and too formal for use in the homelessness field. Equally, finding the right moment to collect baseline data can be difficult, particularly when the focus is on getting performers to engage at all.

### **Getting a balance of qualitative and quantitative data**

Getting the right balance of quantitative and qualitative data (i.e. using a 'mixed methods' approach) was also crucial in ensuring we could collect robust evidence of the value of our work. In many ways, qualitative data is easier for us to gather as our performers have always been very willing to take part in focus groups and share their experiences and views with us. This is extremely valuable in helping us to understand how we help performers and to illustrate the outcomes we achieve (e.g. providing quotes and case studies). However, it is difficult to make a strong case for our work based solely on this kind of data. We therefore sought to develop a system which would also enable us to collect quantitative evidence so that we could report on the extent of the impact of our work. Our CD tool (see Appendix 1) enables us to quantify the progress that performers make towards our outcomes.

### **The need to demonstrate ongoing progress and maintenance**

Demonstrating progress is a challenge particularly when some performers attend irregularly or only for a short period of time. On the other hand, some of our performers have been with us for many years and it is also important that we find ways to demonstrate the value of our role in helping them to maintain the positive changes they have already made.

### **Self-evaluation**

Finally, relying on self-evaluation can be problematic in that it requires ongoing resources and commitment, and may also be perceived by some to be less credible than external evaluation. Nonetheless, at Streetwise Opera we believe in the value of self-evaluation which provides ongoing opportunities for our performers and other stakeholders to give us feedback which we value and use.

## **Step 3: Developing our model**

### **Defining our aims**

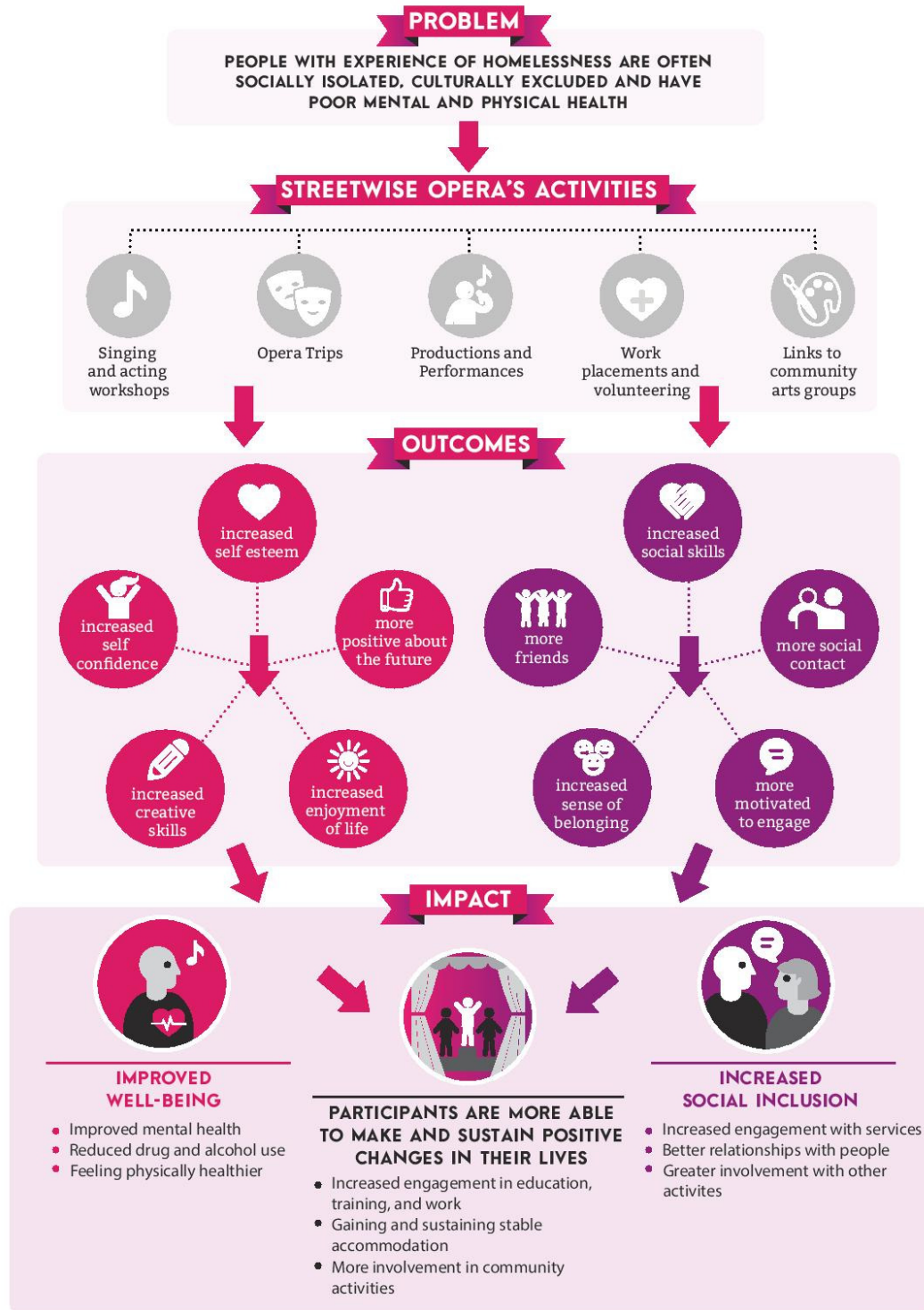
The first step in developing our evaluation model was to clarify our key aims. As an organisation, we were already clear that our work focuses on two key aspects of performers' lives:

- improving their wellbeing
- increasing their social inclusion

### **Our theory of change**

Drawing from other research evidence and focus groups that we carried out with performers, we were then able to develop a theory of change which expressed the journey that performers make as they engage and participate in our programmes.

# STREETWISE OPERA'S THEORY OF CHANGE



At the same time, we developed a detailed Monitoring and Evaluation Framework which supports this visual representation of our outcomes and a Monitoring Plan which details how this information is collected and recorded.

## Our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework

Our M&E Framework sets out each of our outcomes and specifies the indicators that we use to assess progress towards each of these outcomes.

Aims	Immediate outcomes	Medium-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes
To increase performers' well-being	Performers increase their creative skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who increase their creative skills</i></li> <li>• <i>No. of performers who demonstrate increased creative skills and ways they have done this</i></li> </ul>	Performers become more self-confident <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who increase their self-confidence</i></li> <li>• <i>Ways in which SWO has helped increased their self-confidence</i></li> <li>• <i>No. of performers who demonstrate increased self-confidence and how they have done this</i></li> </ul>	Performers have improved well-being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who feel healthier</i></li> <li>• <i>No. of performers who feel their mental and physical health has improved</i></li> <li>• <i>No. of performers who demonstrate improved mental and physical health</i></li> </ul>
		Performers have better self-esteem <i>Indicators:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who increase their self-esteem</i></li> <li>• <i>Ways in which performers feel Streetwise Opera has helped increase their self-esteem</i></li> </ul>	
	Performers enjoy life more <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who increase their enjoyment of life</i></li> <li>• <i>No. of performers who enjoy Streetwise Opera</i></li> <li>• <i>Ways in which performers feel SWO has increased their enjoyment of life</i></li> </ul>	Performers feel more positive about the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No. of performers who feel more positive about the future</i></li> <li>• <i>Ways in which performers feel more positive about the future</i></li> </ul>	

<b>Aims</b>	<b>Immediate outcomes</b>	<b>Medium-term outcomes</b>	<b>Long-term outcomes</b>
To increase social inclusion	Performers increase their social skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who increase their social skills</i></li> <li><i>Ways in which performers feel Streetwise Opera has helped them to increase their social skills</i></li> </ul>	Performers have an increased sense of belonging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who feel they belong somewhere</i></li> <li><i>Ways in which performers feel Streetwise Opera has helped them feel they belong somewhere</i></li> </ul>	Performers are more socially included <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who take up new activities outside Streetwise Opera</i></li> <li><i>No. of performers who increase the amount of positive activities they are involved with</i></li> <li><i>No. of performers who feel they have better relationships with other people</i></li> <li><i>No. of performers who seem more able to build/sustain relationships</i></li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who demonstrate increased social skills and ways they have done this</i></li> <li><i>No. of performers demonstrate increased social skills outside of Streetwise Opera</i></li> </ul>	Performers have more social contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who increase the amount of contact they have with other people</i></li> </ul>	
	Performers make new friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who have made new friends through Streetwise Opera</i></li> </ul>	Performers are more motivated to try new things <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>No. of performers who are more motivated to engage with people and activities</i></li> <li><i>No. of performers who progress to different stages of Streetwise Opera</i></li> </ul>	

## **Ethical issues**

We were also aware that we work with people who may be vulnerable in terms of their mental or physical health or due to other issues they are facing in their lives. This meant that we needed to think through carefully the impact of our monitoring activities on them and make sure we took account of:

- The need to ensure confidentiality of all data and anonymity in reporting our data.
- Data Protection issues in terms of how we collect and manage the information we collected.
- Accessibility issues, particularly for individuals who have lower levels of literacy or who speak English as a second language.
- The importance of obtaining informed consent, so that people know why we are collecting information, what we will do with it, and their rights to opt out of the process.

- Safeguarding issues, so we are clear with performers from the outset that confidentiality may have to be breached if there is a disclosure relating to serious harm, abuse and/or other safeguarding concerns.

## Step 4: Implementing our model

Having developed our Theory of Change and evaluation framework, we were then able to design a set of monitoring tools which would enable us to collect the information we needed to assess our progress towards our outcomes.

### Designing our monitoring forms and activities

In order to give us more robust dataset, we designed a range of tools to collect information directly from performers as well as from those who work with us. This helps us to triangulate our findings – so that the evidence we collect from performers of the changes they have made is strengthened by feedback from those who work closely with them such as our workshop leaders and support workers and our partners in the centres in which we deliver our workshops. We also designed tools that were appropriate to the different kinds of activities that we deliver and the people we work with. Performers who engage with us for a short time, through our taster sessions for example, are only asked to fill out a simple feedback form at the end of the workshops. On the other hand, we have developed a more in-depth system for assessing performers' progress in our longer-term programme which involves a visual tool that is easy and attractive for performers to complete. We also provide opportunities for performers to give feedback as a group which enables us to collect more qualitative evidence of the progress they have made and their views on the way we work with them.

Overall, our monitoring system enables us to collect different types of data (i.e. both quantitative and qualitative) from multiple sources:

	Taster sessions	Drop-in workshops in homeless centres	Long-term programme	Work placements
Membership forms		<i>Completed when people first come along</i>	<i>Completed when people first come along</i>	
Getting to know you & the CD tool			<i>Completed when people first come along</i>	
Progress review & the CD tool			<i>Completed by performers annually</i>	
Performer feedback forms	<i>Completed at the end of the session</i>	<i>Completed at the end of the session</i>		<i>Given out at the end of the placement</i>
Focus groups		<i>Carried out annually</i>	<i>Carried out annually</i>	
Workshop leaders / support workers feedback			<i>Completed annually</i>	
Partner centres survey			<i>Completed annually</i>	

Having a range of monitoring tools also means that we are not attempting to collect data from everyone all of the time! Given the challenges of getting data from people whose lives are often challenging and chaotic means that realistically, we can often only collect in-depth feedback from less than a fifth of the total number of people we work with (and around half of those who engage with us regularly).

### Membership forms

- We have two membership forms; one for our drop-in groups and a slightly more detailed one for performers who join our longer-term programmes.
- Both these forms gather profile data (i.e. age, gender, issues faced).
- They are given to new performers by the workshop leaders/support workers after performers have attended for two or three sessions.

### The Getting to Know You (GTKY) form

Our GTKY collects baseline outcomes data and is given to people who join our longer-term programmes at the same time as the membership form. The GTKY form asks performers for some background information:

<b>Had you done any singing before you came to Streetwise Opera?</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> never	<input type="checkbox"/> as a child e.g. at school	<input type="checkbox"/> as a member of an adult singing group	
<b>What do you do when you're not at Streetwise Opera? (tick all that apply to you)</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> meeting friends	<input type="checkbox"/> going to the cinema	<input type="checkbox"/> looking for work	
<input type="checkbox"/> going to the theatre	<input type="checkbox"/> taking part in sport or other activities	<input type="checkbox"/> working part-time	
<input type="checkbox"/> going to museums or galleries	<input type="checkbox"/> volunteering	<input type="checkbox"/> working full-time	
<b>What challenges / difficulties have you ever faced or are you currently facing?</b>			
	<i>currently</i>	<i>in the past</i>	<i>never been an issue</i>
homelessness (incl. hostel, staying with friends)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
drug or alcohol issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
mental health issues e.g. depression	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
disability or physical health issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
learning disability or difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
refugee, asylum seeker or other immigration issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
speaking English as a second language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

It also asks them to rate how they are feeling about different aspects of their lives using our 'CD tool':<sup>1</sup>



### Progress review forms

All performers in our longer-term groups are asked to complete a progress review on an annual basis. This asks them whether coming to Streetwise Opera has helped with issues they previously identified on the GTKY form and asks them to rate how they now feel about the aspects covered on the CD.

<sup>1</sup> The CD tool was adapted from an evaluation tool developed as part of the evaluation of the Vocality Programme (Deane et al, 2013) by Pete Lambert, Third Sector Research Centre.

## Feedback forms

We also have developed feedback forms to use with performers who engage with our short-term activities such as our taster sessions and drop-in groups. These ask some simple outcomes questions, such as:

<b>Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:</b>			
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
I have made new friends at Streetwise Opera	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have had fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to do more of this kind of thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

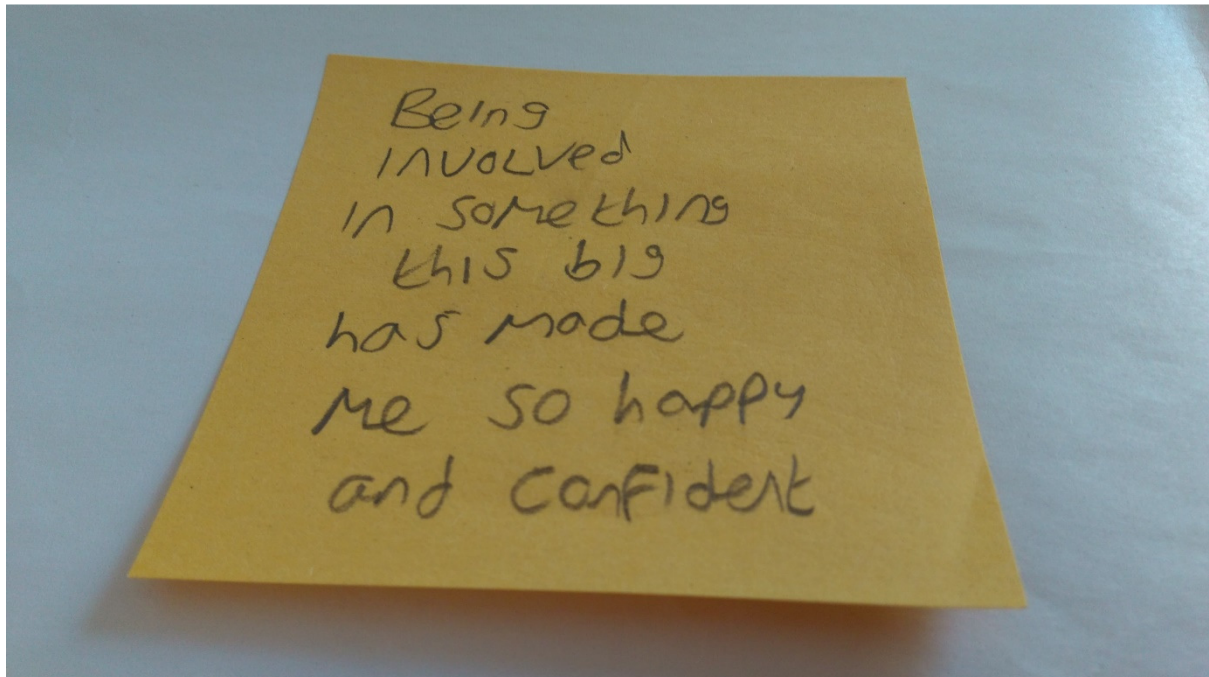
<b>Now please tell us whether you feel it's helped you in any of the following areas:</b>			
	<i>Yes – it's helped</i>	<i>No – it hasn't helped</i>	<i>Not an area I needed help with</i>
creative skills (singing, acting, performing etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
social skills (team-work, communication etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
self-confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
feeling motivated to do things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Focus groups with performers

Each year, we carry out focus groups with our performers in order to provide an opportunity for performers to give us feedback verbally and as a group. We ask them about what they like and don't like and what we could improve as well as how they feel they benefit from taking part in our activities. Questions include:

1. *Do you enjoy coming to Streetwise Opera? What do you enjoy most?*
2. *Is there anything you don't enjoy about coming here?*
3. *Have you been involved in any performances? How has that been?*
4. *Do you feel you have made friends since coming to Streetwise Opera?*
5. *What skills do you feel you have developed since you have been coming to Streetwise Opera?*
6. *How do you feel coming to Streetwise Opera has helped you as an individual? e.g. in terms of how you feel about yourself, or life generally. Impact on physical health?*
7. *Is there anything you think Streetwise Opera could do better or differently in the future?*

Finally, we ask performers to write down [or draw] on a post-it what Streetwise Opera means to them.



### **Feedback from workshop leaders and support workers**

We also ask our workshop leaders and support workers to give us their feedback on the progress they have seen performers making. For example, workshop leaders are asked about changes in:

- the way in which performers participate in workshops (e.g. more willing to participate; to give creative input; to step forward for roles; to improvise)
- performers' skills (e.g. communication skills; team-working skills; creative skills; performance skills).

Support workers are asked whether they have seen changes in:

- performers' confidence and engagement (e.g. self-confidence; motivation to try new things outside Streetwise Opera; engagement in creative activities outside of Streetwise Opera; engagement with other services)
- performers' general well-being (e.g. mental health; physical health; consumption of alcohol/drugs)
- performers' relationships with others (e.g. friendships at Streetwise Opera; relationships with family/friends; relationships with other professionals)
- performers' situations (e.g. accommodation; voluntary work; employment).

### **Feedback from partner centres**

We also send out an online survey to our partners on an annual basis to collect their perspective of the progress performers have made and their feedback on how we have worked with them.

### **Managing, collating and analysing our data**

Most of the information we collect is entered into a database that enables us to hold our data in one secure place. This has also enabled us to set up queries which help us to see what our data is showing. These queries also allow us to check what data we have received and whether there are any particular gaps. On a regular basis, we check what information has come in and contact workshop leaders or support workers when we are missing monitoring data. Meanwhile the data from our focus groups is transcribed on an ongoing basis ready to be analysed.

Despite having a database that enables us to collate and run queries on our data, analysing our monitoring information is still a complex and time-consuming process. As a result, we carry out the main phase of analysis once a year. This also means that we have allowed time for enough information to be collected and for meaningful outcomes to occur.

The process of compiling a report that draws from multiple sources and different types of data is not straight-forward so the actual analysis is carried out by a dedicated member of staff who has been trained in carrying out quantitative and qualitative analysis. Each year, the process gets easier as we are able to use methods that were developed in previous years. However, we still have to allow several weeks for the process of checking the data (e.g. making sure there are no duplicates or incorrectly entered data), running queries and writing up the report, which is then shared in draft form internally before being finalised.

## **Step 5: Reporting, sharing and reflecting**

Our annual evaluation report is therefore the main document that we share with our staff and Trustees. This gives a sense of what the organisation has achieved as well as providing an opportunity to reflect on our work. A shortened version of the report is also made available on our website and the data is used in our Annual Report and for reporting to our funders.

We were also keen to develop a visual representation of our impact so engaged the services of a design agency to help us do this. We asked them to produce an infographic that we could then update ourselves in subsequent years. Here is the infographic for 2016-17:

# STREETWISE OPERA'S IMPACT

2016 - 2017

Streetwise Opera is an award-winning charity that uses music to help people make positive changes in their lives and, ultimately, to improve wellbeing and increase social inclusion. Working with people who have experienced homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, we run workshop programmes across England and stage critically-acclaimed operas.

*"It boosts my confidence. I'm doing things that I never thought I'd do before, so it's really good for me. I really enjoy it. I love Streetwise Opera."*

## OUR AIM

Our aim is to improve wellbeing and increase social inclusion by enabling people who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness to make and sustain positive changes in their lives through engaging in high-quality creative activities.

## WHO WE HELPED

667 Performers

60% Male 40% Female



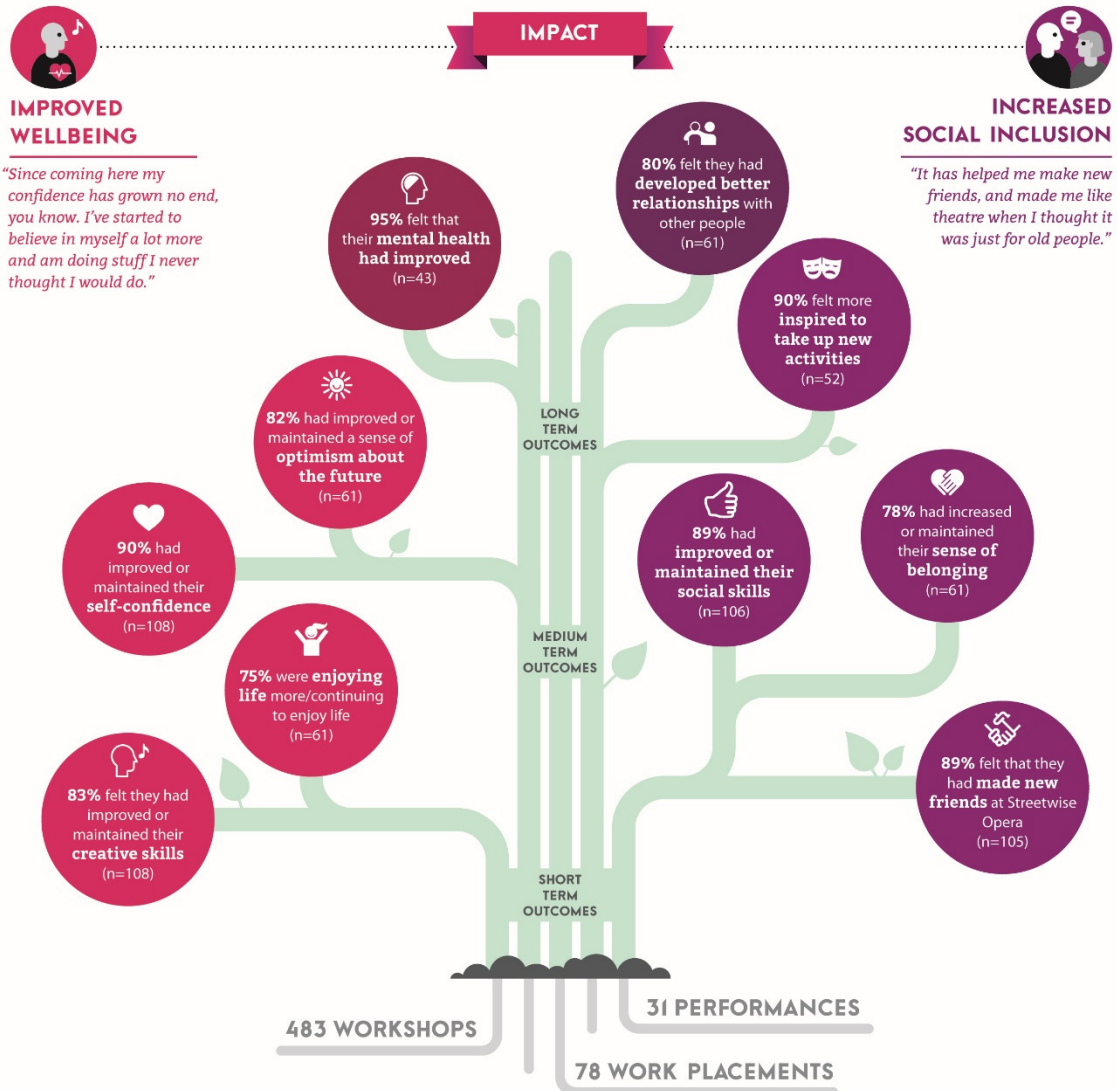
## IMPROVED WELLBEING

*"Since coming here my confidence has grown no end, you know. I've started to believe in myself a lot more and am doing stuff I never thought I would do."*



## INCREASED SOCIAL INCLUSION

*"It has helped me make new friends, and made me like theatre when I thought it was just for old people."*



Data: Apr 2016 - Mar 2017; based on sample performer groups (n= 43-108) | © Streetwise Opera | Design by Data Design Studios

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STREETWISE OPERA  
GIVING HOMELESS PEOPLE A VOICE

This shows that, for example:

- **90%** had improved or maintained their self-confidence (*n=108*)
- **82%** had improved or maintained a sense of optimism about the future (*n=61*)
- **89%** felt that they had made new friends at Streetwise Opera (*n=105*)
- **90%** felt inspired to take up new activities (*n=52*)

Note that we are careful to report the number of people who were asked about these different outcomes (“n =”) so that we are transparent in how we report our data. We also count maintenance as a positive outcome so that our figures include the people who maintain their level of confidence, for example, as well as those who become more confident. This is because we feel our work helps performers who engage with us over a longer period of time to sustain positive outcomes.

In addition, we are honest in reporting the issues that occur for us in evaluating our work and do not try and hide this in our reporting. We have found this is an important part of our learning for next time and that our funders us being honest.

Finally, we also believe it is important to share our finding with performers so, as well as sending them a summary of our annual evaluation findings, we also send each group a summary of the focus group we have held with them and of the organisation’s response to any issues that have emerged. After all, our performers are at the heart of what we do and we believe it is crucial to keep them central in reflecting on what we do and how we move forwards.

## **Final thoughts**

We are really proud of our monitoring and evaluation system and the way in which it enables us to capture evidence on the difference our work makes and to identify how we can learn and develop as an organisation. Nonetheless, we also recognise that it is not perfect and that we face ongoing challenges in monitoring and evaluating our work. In particular, we struggle with:

- Some funders' expectations, particularly when they want to focus on outcomes or impact that is not reflected in our existing systems, or when their reporting timescales differ from ours.
- The impact on staff on collecting monitoring information and entering the data into our database. We know that this takes time away from what the workshops and we have to do our best to make sure staff see the point of this.
- The impact on performers of having to fill out forms and take part in our evaluation activities which, again, takes time away from the workshops themselves.

## **Tips**

In thinking about your own monitoring and evaluation, you may find it helpful to consider the following questions.

### **Where are you starting from?**

What approach to monitoring and evaluation do you feel fits best with your work?

- It is important to take account of the time-scale of your work to distinguish between service users who are involved over a period of time and those who only attend for a short period of time. A Theory of Change approach fits organisations who have ongoing, regular contact with their service users over a sustained period of time.
- Taking account of your own organisation's values will help you to make sure that your monitoring and evaluation system reflects how you engage with your service users and your relationship with them.
- Thinking about your resources is important in being realistic about how much information you can feasibly collect and the methods you use to do this.

### **What will help you to plan your monitoring and evaluation?**

- What research or other evidence can you use that is relevant to your work and the difference it makes.
- Involving service users is crucial in making sure the outcomes you identify are meaningful to them and reflect their experiences.
- Thinking through the challenges that you are likely to face in evidencing the value of your work will help you to think through what information you need to collect, when and how. Above all, getting a mix of quantitative and qualitative data is important in being able to know how many people are benefiting from your work and to understand how they are benefiting.

### **How do you want to articulate your model?**

- Having a visual representation of your model helps others to understand your approach and is a useful tool to communicate this to funders and other stakeholders.
- An evaluation framework helps to pin down the detail of what needs to be collected and how.
- Thinking through the ethical issues that you will need to take account of is vital in making sure your monitoring and evaluation activities do not cause harm or distress to anyone.

### **What will you use to implement your model?**

- You will need to design monitoring forms or activities to collect data from your service users and other stakeholders. These need to be appropriate and sensitive to people's situations, and realistic for people to complete.
- A database is helpful in managing the data you collect but an Excel spreadsheet can do the job.
- It is a good idea to identify someone who will be responsible for checking that people know what information to collect, when, why and how and that the information is coming in as expected.
- You will also need to think through who will be responsible for analysing and reporting your data – they will need time to do this and may benefit from additional training.

### **How will you report, share and reflect on your findings?**

- After all this work, you want to make the most of evaluation findings by sharing them with others and by using them to reflect and inform the development of your work. It is helpful to think about how you can best communicate your findings to different audiences, so that they are most likely to engage with them. Both service users and staff find it particularly valuable and interesting to see the results of the monitoring activities they have taken part in.

## And if your resources are really limited...

- Keep a record of how many people attend your activities.
- Consider doing some 'snapshot' monitoring activities every few months (or even just once a year) where you ask anyone who is in the room to complete a short feedback form or to respond to a few questions in a group (and someone records / notes down what they say).
- Spend some time drawing your own Theory of Change which will help other people to understand your work and the difference it makes.
- Look for additional help e.g. a university who might be able to provide research students to help carry out some evaluation activities for you.

## Useful links

DFID have produced a guide to producing a [Theory of Change](#):

[NCVO KnowhowNonprofit](#) is a source of free information to help you plan evaluation, develop a theory of change, collect outcomes and impact data, and more.

Resources to help you improve the way you measure impact are also available from [Inspiring Impact](#) – a UK-wide, ten-year collaboration between NCVO Charities Evaluation Services and others, which aims to improve impact measurement in the non-profit sector.

[Evaluation Support Scotland](#) have produced a wide range of helpful resources to support organisations in monitoring and evaluating their work.

## References

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