CO-PRODUCED ARTS AND HOMELESSNESS PRACTICE GUIDE

Arts & Homelessness International

Arts & Homelessness International, the international arts and homelessness movement (AHI) is a British charity working to strengthen projects, influence policy and to help people thrive not just survive. Founded by Streetwise Opera in 2016, AHI is helping organisations and individuals to learn from each other through exchanges, events and arts projects. It commissions and disseminates research, designs and delivers training for arts and/or homelessness organisations and advocates for a place for the arts in homelessness support.

Co-Produced Arts and Homelessness Practice Guide

What is it?   A co-produced guide which offers suggestions, good practice and values when working in participatory arts and creative projects with people who are or have been homeless.

Who is it for?   This Guide is created by Arts & Homelessness International [AHI] to assist anyone (be they independent artist/producer, arts or culture organisation staff, or homelessness support service worker) to work in the most inclusive and ethical manner possible. It aims to ensure that co-production and legacy are at the heart of the work from the start, so that the most meaningful outcome can be reached by everyone taking part.

Why we have produced it?   There are some excellent resources in the sector including **Homeless Link and Streetwise Opera's Get Creative: Arts for All**, **Homeless Link's Co-Production Toolkit**, **Dallas Street Choir's Setting up your Own Choir** and **Royal Exchange Theatre Manchester and Booth Centre's Backstage Me?** The reason for a new a resource is because of additional learning that has taken place in the sector, particularly in co-production.

We don't claim to have all the answers – where we feel that other resources and templates already exist without the need for updating, we will provide links. We believe in a 'show don't tell' approach and instead of a systematic list of 'how tos', we have opted to give suggestions and considerations based on international practice.

Who has produced it?   AHI is the international arts and homelessness movement – we are co-produced charity where 50% of board and staff are people who are or have been homeless. The authors are: Matt Peacock MBE, Arts & Homelessness International Director; Lora Krasteva, Arts & Homelessness International Executive Producer; David Tovey, Arts & Homelessness International Creative Producer; Fee Plumley, Arts & Homelessness International Freelance Researcher; Beth Knowles, Chair of Arts & Homelessness International. Additional thanks to Manchester Homelessness Partnership [MHP], and MHP's Arts Heritage Action Network [AHAN] for their contributions.

Further training   We can provide further 1-2-1 training in any of the areas of the Practice Guide. Please get in touch through the links below if you are interested in finding out more.

Contact and Feedback   We'd like this to be an organic document which can change and grow with new ideas and perspectives from the sector. If you have any questions or feedback about this document, or any of the issues raised here, please contact AHI's Director, Matt Peacock: matt@artshomelessint.com. Visit our website www.artshomelessint.com
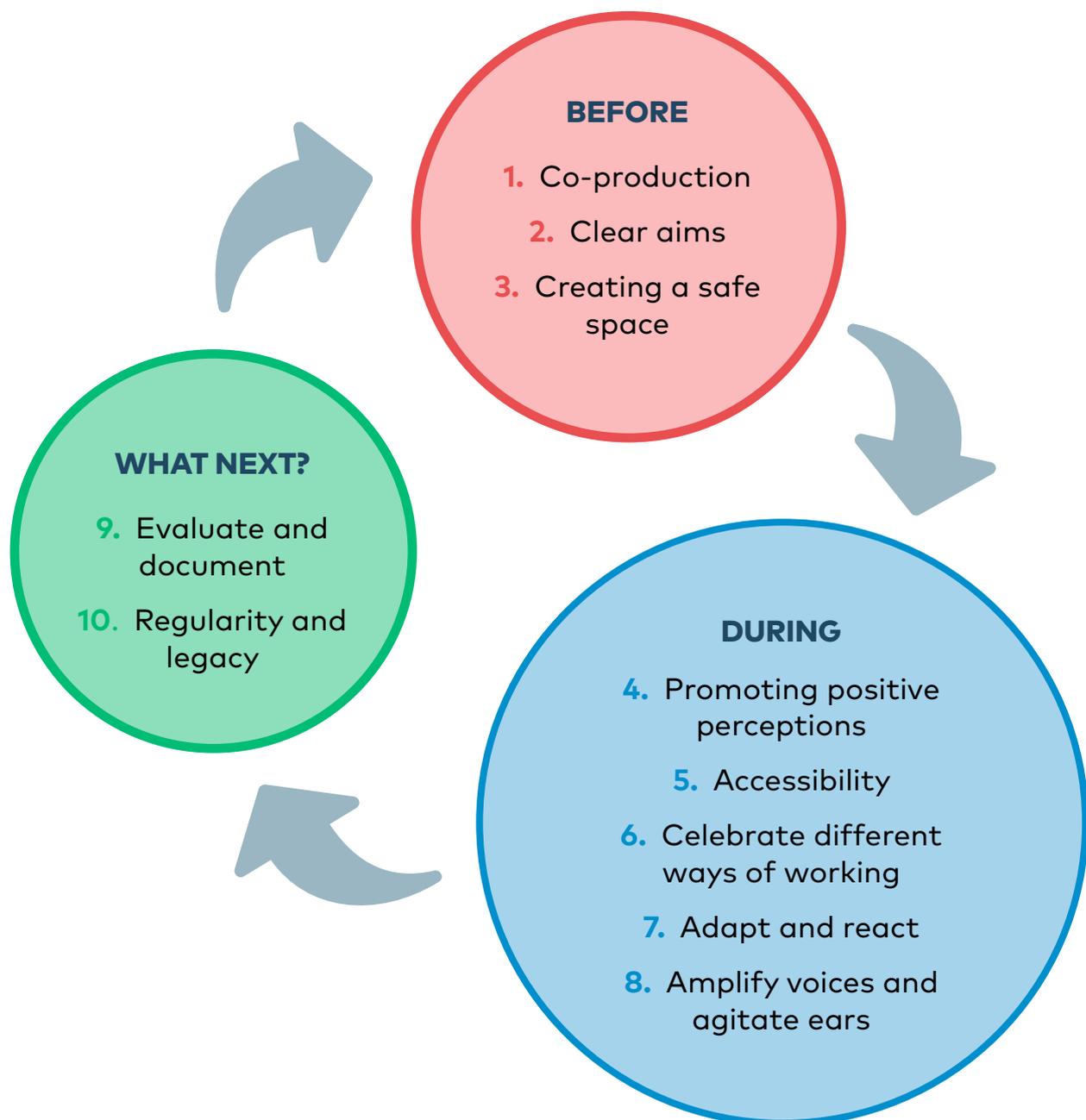
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PRACTICE GUIDE FRAMEWORK

The Practice Guide Framework is an interlinking plan of considerations when designing and delivering an arts or creative project with people who are or have been homeless. Under each of these 10 steps is a 1-page toolkit.

The Framework is in a cycle since we believe it is important (where resources allow) for projects to continue and for learning from previous projects to feed into future projects.

BEFORE

1. Co-production
2. Clear aims
3. Creating a safe space

DURING

4. Promoting positive perceptions
5. Accessibility
6. Celebrate different ways of working
7. Adapt and react
8. Amplify voices and agitate ears

WHAT NEXT?

9. Evaluate and document
10. Regularity and legacy

1. CO-PRODUCING

Values

<u>With</u> people not for them; nothing about us without us; walk with, don't speak for.

What it is

To ensure equity and inclusion, all projects with people who are or have been homeless should be co-produced from design to delivery and beyond i.e. created with the people it is designed for. Co-producing is a about ownership, equality of power, enabling people to shine and to be them-selves without fear of failure.

Considerations and ideas

1.   Culture and Practicalities – co-production involves a cultural shift (change in one person having power to shared power; normalising everyone being 'at the table' where decisions are made) and practical shifts (taking more time for discussions, preparation for meetings, equity of pay – see further reading)

2.   Co-production pathways – there are different recommended pathways depending on whether you are an independent artist, organisation or homelessness service provider. See further reading.

3.   Partnerships – partnerships are essential. Most successful projects in the field have a combina-tion of artists or arts orgs, homeless orgs and people who are homeless. Take care not to replicate something that is already happening in your area. See further reading

4.   5 key principles in co-production – AHI adopts five principles: Learn from each other, 'just do it', communicate, be flexible and create a support structure. See further reading.

5.   The evolution of community arts – this sector has been on a journey from access to participa-tion to involvement to equity. Projects should ask themselves where they are on this journey and challenge themselves to strive for equity.

What to avoid

1.   'Helicopter projects' where there is no partnership – an artist/org comes to a community with a fully-formed idea; bringing all the tools and resources required to realise it; leading the creative process; controlling the work, and then leaving after the project (usually taking their tools and resources with them).

2.   Lack of clarity around boundaries - Homelessness services in the past have often been hierar-chical with a culture of 'us and them'. While this is problematic, so is the opposite situation or having no structure or rules. People throughout a project need to feel safe, able to define what they want from personal space etc (see section 3)

3.   Tokenism - co-production is not the same as consultation.

2. SETTING CLEAR AIMS

Values

Learning - from what has gone well and what we can all do differently

What it is

Aims are what you hope to achieve in your project or work. They can vary from 'enjoyment', or 'increasing well-being' to more public-facing aims e.g. 'promoting positive attitudes'. Aims are important because: a) if you don't know what you want to achieve, you will not know if you've achieved it and b) to help demonstrate if and how your work is being effective.

There is a lot of terminology and jargon - don't be put off by this! These are generally the terms most used:

– **Mission** (sometimes called 'specific aim') – this is the overall purpose of why you exist e.g. 'To increase creative opportunities for people who are homeless'

– **Aims** (sometimes called 'outcomes') – the specific change you want to see e.g. 'To increase mental well-being'

– **Outputs** (sometimes called 'objectives') – what, practically you are going to do to meet your aims e.g. organise 10 music workshops or a performance

Considerations & Ideas

1.   Think about starting with an **Aims Triangle**. This will allow you to collect your thoughts and map out your aims and how they relate to your work. See further reading.

2.   We also recommend having a **Theory of Change** – this will help you to define your goals and how to get there. See further reading.

3.   In order to find out whether you have met your aims, you will need to **monitor** (collect data e.g. who has attended) and **evaluate** (what has happened). See section 9

4.   You can **start small** with what you have – don't over complicate

5.   **Ask for help** – there is lots of it around. See further reading and/or contact AHI.

6.   Make your aims are **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound)

7.   Make aims are **co-produced** with people who are or have been homeless

What to avoid

1.   **Don't rush** – giving an evaluation form to someone on day 1 will put them off.

3. CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Values

Being yourself; inclusion; freedom within a framework; praxis (learning by doing); welcoming

What it is

Creating a safe space is important for any community engagement. People can be scared of being in groups or joining something new. Art can be uplifting but it can also unlock memories or past trauma. It is essential that people are in a safe place when exploring this.

The term 'safe space' can be used to mean two core elements:

1. **A safe culture** – a way of thinking and working which is safe and welcoming to everyone, and where it's OK to experiment and make mistakes

2. **A safe physical space** which has been designed, or set aside, for specific individual needs

3. These ideas come together in a **Safeguarding Policy** which is a requirement when working with young people and recommended practice when working with vulnerable adults (see below)

Considerations & Ideas

1. Co-creating a **'how we want to work together' agreement** where everyone agrees how they would like to be treated - e.g. with respect; no bullying; no racism, homophobia; no alcohol (if it can trigger others). This agreement should be written up, shared, updated

2. The presence of a **trusted companion** e.g. a friend who is also able to attend

3. **Support pathways** – e.g. a Support Worker who is on-hand to provide comfort if needed or signposting to support if and when people need it

4. **Arrive as you are** – some people like to join in; others want to sit by an exit so they can leave quickly; others want to suss out what's happening over weeks/months. Thank people for coming; gently include people who are reluctant by asking for their comments as 'directors' or 'audience members'

5. A **familiar place** – often it is better to run creative projects in a place people know

6. Access to a **quiet room** for anyone to use who needs to take a break

7. **A safe structure** – a warm welcome, regular tea breaks, a good pace

8. **Creating a safe place on-line** - this Guide was co-created before C-19 and we are in the process of drawing up more sharable information about running projects on-line. See further reading.

4. PROMOTING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS

Values

Positivity, acceptance, encouragement

What it is

Too often, homelessness is about deficit – what is wrong with people not strong. The arts show people, very quickly, that they have skills and talents. This often results in giving people the courage to try new things and go on to make other positive changes in their lives. Many people feel negative about themselves. By being positive about people and encouraging them, they can begin to think positively about themselves.

Considerations & Ideas

1. Acknowledged everyone for attending (sometimes turning up is a huge achievement)

2. Remind everyone that **you can't get creativity wrong**. Encourage people to give it a go and give them time and space. Be ambitious and encourage people to improve – if a performance, say, needs to improve you can say, 'That was good; we can make it great'.

3. **Point out publicly how much improvement there has been** in individual's work or the group's work

4. Highlight instances when a member **has been kind** or positive to another

5. **Promote positive communication** - treat each other with kindness, respect, and appreciation and congratulate people often and publicly for what they are doing. A round of applause can make someone's day!

6. **Be supportive** – offer to help, notice when someone is having a bad day or not feeling well

7. **Provide a sense of purpose** – everyone wants to know their work is meaningful and valued

8. **Mistakes are good!** and sometimes great works of art are the result of the artist making a mistake

5. ACCESSIBILITY

Values

Openness and welcoming; no barriers either physical or invisible; acceptance and respect

What it is

Accessibility covers a wide range of ideas about making services and projects as easy as possible for people to find, attend, use, appreciate. It includes accessibility across disability, race, sexual orientation, learning speeds and more.

Considerations & Ideas

1. **Be open about access requirements** – give people the opportunity to let you know if they have any access requirements that they would, privately or publicly like to share.

2. **Don't make assumptions** about what access requirements artists have or what their preferred methods of working are

3. Allow people to attend '**as they are**' rather than as you want them to be

4. Ask people how they **prefer to communicate** (by phone, email, post)

5. Ensure the place you're meeting people meets **any access requirements**. Let people know if there is/isn't e.g. a quiet space & gender-neutral toilets

6. **Ask people how they'd like to be presented or written about** – some people don't want to be referred to as 'Homeless', others are passionate about it

7. **'Model' good practice** – this often gives people the courage to be open e.g. if an artist running a workshop introduces themselves and tells the group what their pronouns are

8. Be careful about literacy levels and don't make assumptions. Find ways of **giving people a 'get out' if they need one**. E.g. if you have a word sheet for a song, say you're on hand if anyone "hasn't brought their glasses"

9. Make your **materials accessible**, especially where they're published online – use image descriptors, videos and audio recordings as well as text documents

10. **Accessibility runs through everything you do** from how you run creative sessions to recruiting for jobs – open application processes to include audio, film, Braille, face to face, or a medium best suited for someone to express themselves.

11. **Open Door Policy** – homelessness and rejection sadly often go hand-in-hand. An art or creative process shouldn't be another example of this. Where auditions or selection processes are necessary, care should be taken with unsuccessful applicants. Activities where everyone is welcome regardless of skills/experience is the best method

6. CELEBRATING DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING

Values

Openness and acceptance to different ways and methods of working

What it is

There is a kaleidoscope of different ways of working in arts and homelessness; it is one of the most exciting things about the sector. These include issue-based and non-issue-based work; work that is led by the people within the group or by an external leader.

Considerations & Ideas

1. **Issue-based work** - where the issue or challenge that the group is facing is used within the art or creative endeavour with often solutions being found e.g. Forum Theatre

2. **Non-issue-based work** – where the content of the 'art' is not about people's issues or their histories and they can 'leave their past at the door'

3. **'Self'-led** – artists themselves suggest or dictate what they want to do. This is co-produced and 'owned' by the artists or group

4. **'Leader'-led** – where one or more practitioners lead a project. If these people are unfamiliar with the artists, make sure that trust and partnerships have been built (see sections 1 and 2)

5. **Mixed approaches** – it is possible to have 'self'-led approaches within a 'leader'-led framework ('freedom within a framework') so long as there is clarity around where one starts and the other stops. Ditto, a mix between issue-based and non-issue-based work

6. **No 'one right way'.** All approaches have pros and cons: Self-led work can be the most co-produced but people tend to opt for something familiar and a leader-led approach can stretch people out of their comfort zone. Non-issue-based work allows people to be defined by their creativity not their past whereas issue-based work can unlock new perspectives to familiar issues

7. **Safeguarding** – building a safe place and trust is essential in any approach. Creativity and the subject matter can become emotional triggers, good and bad. It's important that there is someone there to turn to and techniques to support people e.g. encourage an actor to 'step into' the character and then 'step out' if they find the issue upsetting

7. ADAPTING AND REACTING

Values

Flow; fluidity; agile development; lifelong learning; cyclical processes; reflection; change.

What it is

No individual or community is exactly the same – people are unique. When working with people who are or have been homeless, a wide range of scenarios can come into effect which can radically change the state of play. Some members might need to drop out, have to attend meetings at short notice and new members may arrive without notice. Projects should be open and responsive to change while keeping values, aims and 'non-negotiables' intact.

Considerations & Ideas

1.   Establish your '**non-negotiables**': What are the parts of your work that your community won't negotiate on? What is open for negotiation? Co-produce a list and refresh often

2.   **High expectations or setting someone up to fail?** If you have created a safe space, having high expectations and pushing people out of their comfort zone can be beneficial. Yet expecting too much can be damaging. Striking the right balance takes care

3.   **Prepare to be challenged and proved wrong** – one of the richest parts of co-production is that decision-making is much richer

4.   In a group setting, **going at the pace of the slowest member** can breed solidarity

5.   **Think laterally.** If a member of an art group joins a week before an exhibition and there is no room for their artwork, perhaps there is another meaningful role for them e.g. taking photos of the exhibition or welcoming people. 'Yes, and...' is better than 'yes, but...' or 'no'

6.   **Respond to different learning needs**. Some people respond to structure, others don't. Try to create a space which caters for both – e.g. material can be developed over time but there is space for freedom, drop-in and improvisation

7.   **Build in time and space** – sometimes, life gets in the way and someone may have to be absent for a while. Activities within this setting should make allowances for that

8.   **'What if x doesn't turn up?**' It is important to create a plan that will accommodate this – say you are working towards a theatre show, can you 'double cast' a role so that two or more people know it? Can the whole group learn the script before allocating solos?

9.   **Communicate** – keep on talking and checking in

8. AMPLIFYING VOICES AND AGITATING EARS

Values

Empowerment, audience, decision-maker, changemaker

What it is

Art is powerful in communicating a different, more positive message about individuals or communities, often turning stigma into celebration. Art is also an excellent way to give people the confidence to re-discover their voice not only within the art practice but also in daily life. So even if your primary role isn't to amplify or agitate, do consider how to harness this about your work for the benefit of everyone. Art can make social and personal change in stealthy, gentle, often unexpected ways.

Considerations & Ideas

1.   A creative project should enable those involved to express their **creative 'voice'** – in putting pen to paper or creating a dance, that person's voice is coming out in a creative way. It is OK if it is a means to itself or communicated more widely

2.   When people feel that they are invisible or not listened to, ignored, they can forget that some people do want to listen. **Creative projects can often remind people that they have something to say.** It is good to acknowledge that you are listening and hearing. This can often mean that they have a stronger voice in other areas of their lives e.g. being more assertive during, say, doctor's appointments

3.   If your work has a **'message',** is everyone clear what that is? **What do you want audiences to 'do' with the message?** Is there a call to action?

4.   **How will your work reach an audience** – either physically to see it or on-line? Do you know what avenues are possible and that many of them are free to use?

5.   **Whose ears do you want to agitate?** Neighbours in the community (see Path With Art's We are All here project in Further Reading), co-workers, arts audiences, members of the public; or perhaps the ears you need are those of policy makers?

6.   Consider **the ethics of amplifying the voice of others** – some people love the exposure of speaking on the radio, for instance; others do not. Some people may be happy to speak about their past and then find they have 'over shared'. Some people find that their image is on a website for a charity long after they left. See Respectful Sharing in Further Reading.

9. EVALUATING AND DOCUMENTING

Values

Learning is always positive; don't be afraid if something isn't working since you can change it for the better; try, fail, fail better; make friends with your failures since they are your greatest teachers.

What it is

Evaluation is the assessment of whether a project has met its intended aims. Evaluation is often split into **Monitoring** (collection of data) and **Evaluation** (analysis of the data). Monitoring is about keeping a log of how many sessions you did, how many people came, if they enjoyed the sessions. Evaluation is about analysing and interpreting this e.g. are more people coming; has the enjoyment of the musicians increased? An **Indicator** – is an example that something is happening. E.g. laughter is an indicator of enjoyment.

Documenting is the process of recording what happened (including how many people came etc), writing notes after sessions, taking film footage or photos (if this is appropriate – see section 3). This can be very valuable to back up the evaluation; be a source of pride for those involved and can show external partners what you all achieved.

Considerations & Ideas

1.   **It's normal to be scared of evaluation** – but it's not as complicated as you think.

2.   **Get into the habit of recording information**, be that lists or photographs or other forms of documentation.

3.   **Ask for help and advice** – there is a huge amount that has been written about evaluation and sharable resources (see Further Reading)

4.   **Choose a method of evaluation** and one that is defined by time and staff resources. Streetwise Opera has 5 Key Steps of Evaluation (see Further Reading)

5.   **Make it creative** - there are some lovely creative ways of evaluating projects that are effective and fun at the same time (see Further Reading)

6.   **Self-reflection** is a key part of the process and often very positive. Assemble people involved and ask two questions, 'what was good' and 'what could be improved'

7.   **Timing** - it may be a mistake to give an evaluation form to a room full of nervous people on day 1 of a project. This could easily be done a few weeks in.

10. BUILDING REGULARITY AND LEGACY

Values

The most important day of the project is the day after it has ended; a life beyond the project; actions; campaigning; maintaining links with audiences/co-producers; what next, exit planning, managing expectations.

What it is

Arts projects can be incredibly positive, life-affirming, even life-changing for those involved. Considerations and communication around 'what happens next' is vital to maintain positive feelings and prevent people feeling let-down and rejected.

In an ideal world, arts projects in the homeless sector should be regular and continue – consistency is a rarity in the lives where everything else can be unstable. Where continuity is not possible (often because of resources), an exit plan is vital.

Considerations & Ideas

1. **Continuous work** – if a project is continuous, be aware of the different dynamics between people who have been there for a long time and newcomers – talk about it in the 'How we work together' agreement (see section 3). Length of membership – is it open-ended; if there is a time limit, how is that managed?

2. **(Exit) Plan** – if a project needs to come to an end, communicate early (see below); work on signposting people to other groups; if there is a culmination e.g. a performance don't have it right at the end but leave enough time to meet and have reflection and wind-down.

3. **Communicate** – be clear about the project length and chat about this. Talk about the fact that it is natural to feel a sense of sadness at the end of a positive experience, and that no one can ever take their achievements away from them. Enforce the view that experiences build new, stronger, foundations which can be transferred to any context.

4. **Check-in** – if a project does come to an end, check in with everyone a little while afterwards

FURTHER READING

Co-producing

- AHI 5 Key Principles of Co-Production are outlined in this **Battersea Arts Centre Co-creating Change blog**
- **Inspiring Change Manchester's Co-production methods**
- **Homeless Link's Co-Production Toolkit**
- Theatre Témoin's **Engaging with the homelessness sector: a guide for theatre venues**
- **Expert Link's co-production resources**

Setting clear aims

- Aims Triangle – here is a **step-by-step guide** from National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).
- Theory of Change – **here is a great template** on DIY (Development, Impact and You).

Accessibility

- **Shape Arts Accessibility Statement**
- Museum's Association **Access Resource**
- **Access All Areas**
- **The Outside Project**
- Unlimited **'Cards for Inclusion'**

Creating Positive Perceptions

- **Shawn Achor's TED Talk, "The Happy Secret to Better Work"**

Celebrating Different Ways of Working

Examples of issue-based, non-issued based, leader-led, self-led projects include **WAYOut, Sierra Leone**; **Cocoroom, Japan**; **Basket Beats, Spain**; **Shedia street paper upcycling project, Greece**; **Pehchan, India**; **Choir of Hard Knocks, Australia**; **Sokerissa dance company, Japan**; **Dallas Street Choir start your own choir, USA Museum of Homelessness UK**; **Cardboard Citizens UK**; **Theatre of the Oppressed NYC, USA**; **Choir with No Name, UK**; **Sketch, Canada**; **Streetwise Opera, UK**; **Café Art, UK**; **Uma So Voz, Brazil**; **Manchester Street Poem, UK**; **Path With Art, USA Access Art programme.**

FURTHER READING

Amplifying Voices and Agitating Ears

- **Path With Art's We are All Here project**
- Katy Rubin's guide to **Legislative Theatre**
- **Respectful sharing** by Fee Plumley

Adapting and Reacting

- **Active Listening tips**

Evaluating and Documenting

- **Evaluating arts projects with people who have experienced homelessness: Streetwise Opera's approach** (this also contains monitoring templates e.g. attendance sheets)
- **Backstage Me?** Participant-led reflection tips

COVID-19

This guide was co-created before the C-19 pandemic took hold. Since then, a large number of projects have had to move their work on-line or cease operations all together. We at AHI have been supporting the sector to learn from this new way of working, including and will be publishing more learning soon through our ART Lab Enquiries into arts and homelessness and C-19 (keep an eye on our website **www.artshomelessint.com** and social media). In the meantime, please see our resources on **Cultural Spaces Responses to C-19** and **Running a Mobile Library During C-19**.

Acknowledgements