



Hospitality House, Clarion Alley Project, San Francisco, CA

A Review of Arts and Homelessness in North America

Cllr Beth Knowles, Chair, With One Voice Steering Group,
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Executive Summary

“I’m dared to think my art matters and I matter.” Path With Art Student, Seattle

This Review of the arts and homelessness sector in North America is the first of its kind to be produced in those countries. Before embarking on the review, there was very little accessible and consolidated information about the sector. The review seeks to bring together the results of internet research, word-of-mouth information/recommendations and a study trip over the course of six weeks in late 2016. The result is a snap-shot of the sector, charting the broader homelessness situation in a number of cities and what those who are connected to arts and homelessness feel they need to continue their work. The review also seeks to offer some recommendations as to how these needs may be met by With One Voice as the international arts and homelessness movement.

The With One Voice movement seeks to work globally supporting the arts and homelessness sector – strengthening existing projects, starting new ones, raising awareness of the arts/homelessness sector and its members and helping to influence policy. It is a sector that is often fragmented, under resourced and seen to be peripheral to the main support structures put in place for and with people experiencing homelessness. And yet, as we see in USA and Canada, there are a number of dynamic projects in existence that use arts of all types to give dignity and visibility to homeless people. This is With One Voice’s second such review of arts and homelessness, having previously produced a review of the sector in Rio and Sao Paulo and is currently compiling similar reviews in Scotland and Japan.

North America is seen as an emerging priority for With One Voice, as homelessness has reached record levels in a number of cities including Los Angeles, (estimated 100,000 people) and New York City (62,000 people in shelters alone). Combined with the statistical increase, homelessness is also a highly contentious political issue, emerging from a general public perception of individual blame for the situation people find themselves in, this may not be an aggressive blame, but stems from a disconnect with the issues surrounding homelessness. As homelessness is generally seen as an individual problem rather than a failure of wider systems, the solution is therefore seen as needing to be an individual one rather than city or state led. Where the general mindset leads, policy-makers head, making genuine and sustained policy reform difficult for even the most well intentioned local or national policy-makers. There were several examples of this witnessed, especially due to the impending election cycle when the research trip took place.

The combination of societal and political factors alongside the growing potential to connect existing best practice both on the continent and internationally, led to this study being conducted from October-November 2016. Notably, the political context shifted at the conclusion of the trip as the United States elected a new President, resulting in drastic regime change, this means a great level of uncertainty for non-profits, city councils and government funded institutions at the time of writing. However, this shift was widely regarded as a motivation for With One Voice to be involved on the continent, with the impetus to provide an increasingly necessary international network for support, promotion, shared vision and advocacy.

Key Findings

a) Homelessness and Arts and Homelessness Statistics in North America

In the USA the total number of homeless people is estimated to be around 842,000, however depending on the time of year this number could be more like 3.5 million. In Canada there is currently no country-wide street count, and numbers are estimated at around 300,000.

Arts and Homelessness Projects (we have found so far) number around 50, with the majority being music-based, closely followed by visual arts projects, then theatre and multi-disciplinary programmes offering a range of activities. See Appendix 1 for details.

b) Overview of the Arts and Homelessness Sector in North America

Whilst the arts and homelessness landscape initially looked bare throughout much of North America, after six weeks traversing the continent, the most brilliant projects, organisations and people emerged from every place visited. Examples of international best practice were found within non-profits, arts organisations, individual practitioners, funders, activists and policy-makers, it was not simply the case that work did not exist, it is just **not showcased** and its owners **not connected** as well as practitioners in other countries With One Voice operates in. The most notable quality was **a thirst to drive practice** at a time when it is needed most and to utilise the arts to drive positive change with people experiencing homelessness. Experienced practitioners feel **a strong responsibility to shape both the homelessness and arts sectors** whilst they are in their infancy on a grander scale and the social need is greatest.

Disconnection on a personal and political level to the issues surrounding homelessness has resulted in **non-profits stepping in to the multiple gaps left by the state and private sector**. Whilst they are effective, wide-reaching, brave organisations, due to capacity concerns and strict funding restraints (including politically), they **struggle to move out of their natural silos** to build long-term solutions with partners working in the homelessness field and across inter-connected fields in the arts.

The mainstream arts sector was not found to be taking a lead in a response to homelessness alongside individuals experiencing displacement or attempting to change the perception of homelessness among the general public. There are very few examples of arts organisations or institutions connecting with homeless organisations in the US without partnering through a specialist non-profit; when contacted prior to the study visit, arts institutions almost without exception were the only organisations not interested in participating. There are however, several examples of independent artists recognising emerging issues in their community and responding, most alongside people experiencing homelessness. Many of these practitioners, especially on the West Coast, noted the similarities between artist's communities and their voices being displaced due to gentrification and those of the

local community who become homeless due to the same pressures. There was a strong desire from this community to work with With One Voice to develop **toolkits for socially-engaged practitioners**, catalysing their practice with people experiencing homelessness.

Non-profit partners who are connecting arts and homelessness practice are forging relationships of their own with local cultural institutions, some by developing training packages (Path With Art), theoretical models (Exeko), one-off projects combining multiple practices (Hospitality House) and others to instigate change in operational models (Red Line Services). Working with these partners to **develop an international strategy for Cultural Spaces and Homelessness** and using Manchester, UK as a test bed, the conversation around homelessness could not only be changed through connecting people with lived experience to the arts, but flow through these buildings to a wider general public.

Talking to Path With Art's students in Seattle and actors with Theatre of the Oppressed in New York, they stated the only way for the conversation around homelessness in the United States and Canada to change is for **communities to be brought together with people with lived experience** to have it. This is being done by individual arts and homelessness organisations in separate cities but not as a concerted effort. Many organisations, including the National Endowment for the Arts, understood the power of speaking with one voice to enable this to happen and With One Voice's place setting this in motion. A conversation would naturally start if Exeko's model of Social Transformation were taken on by a partner in Seattle or Portland, Path With Art's tools were taken to organisations who have the capacity to set up similar initiatives in LA or Chicago and organisations in New York were to sit around the table with their participants. Combining this with international best practice and support a movement would ensue. As with connections between Brazil and the UK, **With One Voice's primary purpose should be to find the separate parts and stitch them together.**

Geographical scope of the Report

Cities were chosen in North America for their perceived high rates of homelessness, arts and homelessness projects known to With One Voice already, recommendations by contacts and research in to the existing sector. The list of locations visited during the review is below between the beginning of Oct to mid November 2016.

Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; Portland, OR; Seattle, WA; Chicago, IL; Detroit, MI; Washington DC; Toronto, ON; Montréal, QC; New York, NY

This report answers the same questions previously set in the With One Voice arts/homelessness report of Brazil in 2014 by Paul Heritage (People's Palace Projects) and Matt Peacock (With One Voice). Due to the varying social and political nature between American cities and the two different countries visited during this country review, the questions are answered on a city-by-city basis. As well as answering the questions set in advance, this report will highlight the existing arts and homelessness work taking place and the context of homelessness in each city visited.

Contact was made with organisations and individuals through a variety of sources including; internet-based research by Beth Knowles and Andy Hamflett (an independent researcher working with With One Voice), existing networks, news articles on homelessness, social media and recommendations before and during the trip. A full list of organisations visited and their contact details can be found in the Appendix. As previously stated, this is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of all arts and homelessness organisations in North America – more of a starting point. We would also like it to be a living document that may be built upon as we map the sector and connect the community. If you would like to be involved in the network or know of a project we should be featuring, please get in touch through the website www.with-one-voice.com

Recommendations

With One Voice has the potential to work with key protagonists in a variety of ways, through a series of summits and exchanges this work can be supported to grow initially and develop naturally into a movement in both countries.

With the direction of partners in North America, the key priorities for the movement in the USA and Canada should be:

- Facilitate an exchange in Montréal later in 2017 to bring together the arts/homelessness sector from USA, Canada and a small international delegation.
- Involve the key partners in the Arts/Homelessness Summit in Manchester in 2018.
- Map/connect organisations and recognise potential to cross-pollinate ideas and projects, especially where it is possible to set up arts and homelessness networks in cities.
- Engage cultural institutions in With One Voice's review of Cultural Spaces and Homelessness Strategies and connect these with pilot work in Manchester, UK.
- Share resources to encourage best practice and enable co-production of new models/resources.
- Support through mentoring/networking with other members across the movement.
- Enable conversations and creative problem solving around the issues surrounding homelessness.
- Alongside members, develop links to funding organisations and national/international partners.

When reading this report it is worth noting that for With One Voice as a social movement, opportunities for real change lie where there are challenges, where gaps exist amidst chaos; this is precisely where new solutions need to be formed. As a movement instigating change in the arts and homelessness sector we should only go where there are challenges, not where social change has already happened. At a time when homelessness is increasing to crisis point in almost every major world city, shared practice and positive responses need to follow suit. With One Voice recognises as a movement we are not just about the growth of organisations or projects but a stronger, more resilient response to ending homelessness worldwide.

Thank you

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