

Josie Aston: Clore project information (March 2009)

The questions

- What makes a good arts co-ordinator?
- What's distinctive about the job?
- Is arts and health a speciality within arts practice, health practice, or something new sitting on a continuum between the two?
- What does the above imply for effective recruitment and professional development?

Rationale: why these questions and why now?

There are (probably) at least a hundred people working as arts co-ordinators or curators in UK hospitals but there is no recognised career path. The jobs attract little training or support and the skills required to do the job well are very specific.

Most writing about arts and health in the UK to date has looked at evidence (health outcomes, benefit to patients, benefit to staff) and public policy (how it's organised, who pays, where it sits in the cultural and health agendas) rather than at the individuals making the introductions and relationships that are essential for arts and health projects to succeed. What does it mean to 'lead' in an environment where you have no significant authority? What does success look like? What about failure? Should the lack of a code of practice be a concern, in an area that overlaps with therapy?

Scope

The project will focus on NHS hospitals in England and will also include material collected at the Society for the Arts in Healthcare conference in Buffalo in April 2009. As well as making an interesting comparison, the American interviewees may help to identify skills that are common to all arts and health programmes and to distinguish them from those that are particular to success in the NHS context.

Definitions

This project will focus on hospital environments specifically rather than the broader healthcare sector and by 'arts' is taken to include arts commissions for the hospital environment, collections of artwork and participatory activities for patients and service users based around the arts (e.g. music, art and craft, drama, film and photography, dance, reminiscence) that are voluntary in nature and intended for enjoyment rather than as part of a specific therapeutic regime.

Methodology

The project will include interviews with arts co-ordinators in the UK by phone, email and in person, interviews with arts in healthcare workers in the US and case studies of up to six contrasting individuals.

Timetable

February – September 2009 .

Output

A report of 5,000-10,000 words for publication on the Clore website and Josie's personal website www.josieaston.co.uk. There is also a possibility of publication alongside research ixia, the public art think tank has commissioned into good practice in arts and health commissioning. The project has been offered as a paper to the Inspiring Transformations arts and health conference in Nottingham in September 2009. It is hoped the work will be of value to current arts co-ordinators, people thinking of entering this line of work and organisations considering creating a post or recruiting for such a post.

Confidentiality and supervision

The interviews will be entirely confidential. The report will not attribute comments to individuals, referring only to people by their roles (e.g. 'arts co-ordinator'). There will be a list of interviewees and the organisations they work for (as appropriate) but interviewees can choose not to be included. Only Josie Aston and Giskin Day (see below) will know the names of interviewees who request full anonymity.

Josie will keep securely all interview notes and audio recordings (where used), together with any relevant documents that interviewees might wish to share. Data provided will not be shared with other researchers or used for other purposes than those described here.

The research project is being supervised by:

Ms Giskin Day

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About Josie

Josie is the Wellcome Trust Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme 2008-9, www.cloreleadership.org and is currently seconded to the Science Museum in London, where she is working on their Lates events for adults.

The Clore Leadership Programme is an initiative of the Clore Duffield Foundation which aims to strengthen leadership across a wide range of cultural activities. Fellows undertake an individually tailored programme of activities and experience –

lasting for a year or longer – designed specifically to meet their own needs and circumstances.

Josie is a specialist in arts and health and has managed and consulted on a number of arts and health programmes in NHS hospitals and mental health trusts. She is the author of briefing guides for hospital arts on media relations and artwork maintenance, both of which are available as free downloads from her website www.josieaston.co.uk along with many other links and resources for arts and health projects.

Aside from her focus on arts and health, Josie has worked for a number of performing arts organisations including Opera North, Southbank and the Orchestra of the Age of Environment, specialising in marketing, fundraising and education.

Contact details

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact:

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