



Tackling health inequalities using creative health

This case study gives an insight into how the NHS North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB) has started to use creative health and creative health approaches to support the health and wellbeing of local people and tackle health inequalities.

Health improvement and inclusion in North East London

The Health Improvement and Inclusion team within the NEL ICB oversees a ring-fenced fund which is largely devolved to place-based partnerships that have a borough footprint and work closely with their local communities and system partners to address health inequalities.

At a central North East London level its work has included establishing the North East London Health Equity Academy to build capacity and confidence in people working in health and care to improve health equity.

It has published a homeless health strategy and is about to start a health inclusion needs assessment for groups including refugee asylum seekers, sex workers, people recently released from prison and the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

To support personalisation of care, it is working to make sure services meet the needs of the local population using strategies such as personal health budgets and social prescribing.

The role of creative health in the team's work

The team was always keen to use creative health and creative health approaches in its work. It received strong support from the ICB for its use too.

There is clear recognition that:

- creative health has an important role in facilitating the shift from treatment to prevention
- the North East London area has a very strong creative sector already doing creative health work
- partnering with the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to deliver creative health work helps support the partnership remit of the ICS.



Evidencing the value of creative health

The team recognised the value of creative health, but to validate its use, they drew on the creative health evidence base. They also considered how other bodies were already using creative health. This included looking at the Greater Manchester Creative Health Strategy¹ and the work done by the Greater London Authority on creative health and wellbeing².

Engaging with the creative health sector

To start to facilitate the use of creative health in its work, the first step for the team was a mapping exercise. This work aimed to start to build partnerships with the local creative sector and understand where creative health was already being used and where the opportunities lay.

The work involved reaching out to organisations and venues in the local VCSE sector. The team drew on its existing knowledge to start this work, as well as the knowledge of local authority colleagues.

After this initial mapping process, the team organised an event with representatives from all the organisations to continue to build connections and consider opportunities for working together.

The event was also valuable in helping to build a common language between the public sector and the VCSE sector that will be essential to ensure an effective working relationship that drives change.

Using creative health and creative health approaches

Creative health and creative health approaches have given the team different tools to use to engage with individuals and understand their wider wellbeing needs. For example, theatre company Cardboard Citizens facilitated a strategy development workshop involving theatre and creative writing that brought together people with lived experience of homelessness and those working in service commissioning to co-design parts of the homeless health strategy. Members of Cardboard Citizens also performed at a Homeless Health summit attended by 100 homeless health professionals, bringing the voice of lived experience into the event.

¹ <https://qmintegratedcare.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/qm-creative-health-strategy-low-res.pdf>

² <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/creative-health-and-wellbeing>



Next steps

The way creative health and creative health approaches are already being used is just the start for the team.

It has identified funding to work with London Arts and Health to formalise its mapping exercise and strengthen the strategic partnerships that are already forming. The work will also convene the ICB, the local authority and the local VCSE sector around creative health. The intention is to foster cross-fertilisation and build a shared culture that champions creative health as a valuable tool in promoting health inclusion and tackling health inequalities.

Where next?

The NCCH has worked in partnership with NHS England to develop a [Creative Health Toolkit >>](#)

NCCH supports health and care sector professionals in organisations and systems to achieve the benefits of creative health approaches for patients and service users.

We publish a monthly newsletter especially created for professionals working across health and care. Please do [subscribe here](#) and/or share with colleagues working across Primary Care, Provider Trusts, ICBs, Public Health, Social Care and across the NHS, so they can access the latest news for creative health!

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