



West Midlands Early Years Arts Activity Mapping project (April 2016)

Completed by:

The Centre Research in Early Childhood (CREC)

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On behalf of:

**Arts Connect
(Arts Council bridge organisation for the West Midlands)**



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Context

Arts Council England's strategic framework 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone' (2013) has as one of its five goals the aspiration that 'Every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts, museums and libraries'. With regards to how this squares with the reality of early years, two reports (published by Arts Council England (Jobson, A., 2015) and Arts Connect (Crump, E., 2011) have identified the general range of arts and cultural provision that occurs in the sector; this includes 'creativity' within the EYFS curriculum and through the work of different arts and cultural organisations.

In the West Midlands there is an historical background of strategic programmes led by local authority early years sections which have focussed on both Reggio practice and around creativity. However, due to changes in priorities and funding limitations, most of these local authority leads are no longer in post and the early years sector has altered, leading to increasing fragmentation of the strategic landscape within which arts and cultural activity operates. Centres of good practice often exist in isolation, though the new Teaching School Alliances, both early years and primary led, may begin to offer a more joined up approach to leadership, CPD, intervention, research and development.

Across the West Midlands there are several arts, cultural and heritage organisations, as well as individuals, who have developed expertise in arts and cultural programmes within early years, including with families. There is a range of expertise within these organisations and individuals, which has largely not been shared and there is potential to look at opportunities to build on good practice and also identify art forms that may not be so well.

In addition, there is a history in the West Midlands of strong educational networks focussing on creativity and the arts, with many key leaders in early years educational settings. Programmes such as "How To Catch a Moonbeam and Pin it Down" (Pascal et al 2005) and CPD around Reggio were well embedded and outstanding in both delivery and impact and recognised regionally and nationally as exemplary. "How To Catch a Moonbeam and Pin it Down" (Pascal et al 2005) provided evidence of 'innovation in action' within Birmingham early years settings that were both multi-ethnic and sector-diverse. It was, as a project, an innovation that operated through a collaboration of local authority officers, early years practitioners, professional artists and academic researchers working within the City. It was hoped that the Project experience would make a valuable contribution to furthering understanding of both the potentials and challenges of supporting creativity in young children through the use of 'artists in residence' in a range of early years settings.

Although many of these early years networks no longer exist, or no longer focus on creativity/arts, there are still many key leaders locally with knowledge and expertise in the region. There is an opportunity to revive networks and link up the expertise to inform the developments to build on previous good practice.

Given this context, Arts Connect (the bridge organisation for the Arts Council in the West Midlands) commissioned CREC to undertake a mapping/data gathering exercise on the key people, settings and examples of good practice which are currently active in the West Midlands and identifying the key potential and actual networks (with a focus on CEP priority areas).

Project Brief:

The Mapping project aimed to:

1. Identify and map the current range of organisations and individuals involved in offering early years (birth to five years) arts and cultural opportunities to parents, children and practitioners across the West Midlands. This included:
 - Local authority early years teams
 - Children's Centres
 - Primary and nursery schools
 - Teaching Schools
 - Forest schools
 - Playgroups and preschools, nurseries (maintained and PVI)
 - Childminders
 - Independent schools
 - Libraries
 - Museums
 - Galleries
 - Theatres and theatre groups
 - Individual artists
 - Arts and cultural organisations, networks and projects
 - Virtual schools (children in care)

2. Map the range of arts and cultural opportunities provided by these organisations and individuals and the target groups. This included:
 - Combined arts
 - Dance
 - Film
 - Libraries
 - Literature
 - Museums and heritage
 - Music
 - Theatre
 - The visual arts
 - Digital technologies
 - Not specific

The project has considered the whole of the West Midlands (14 local authorities) but with particular focus on: the Cultural Educational Partnership (CEP) priority areas (Birmingham; Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton); Coventry; Cannock; Tamworth; Telford; Stoke)

Data Collection

Data for this mapping exercise was collected via an online questionnaire (appendix 1) which was made available during March – April 2016. The questionnaire was designed to capture a range of factual data rather than opinion. Completion of the questionnaire was entirely voluntary but potential respondents were encouraged to participate in order to support the development of the sector. An additional benefit of completion was the option of having their details made available via the Arts Connect website in the form of a directory of early years arts activity providers. The questionnaire required respondents to opt-in to the directory; therefore anyone who did not wish to have their details shared publicly in this way would remain completely anonymous.

This project and the data collection questionnaire was circulated in the following ways:

- CREC direct marketing via newsletter to early years providers and practitioners (national recipients: 3300) a significant number of whom work in the West Midlands region;
- CREC social media channels (twitter, facebook, website);
- Arts Connect direct marketing (email) to arts contacts;
- Arts Connect social media channels (twitter and website);
- Targeted approaches via region and by arts type;

Following the initial launch of the questionnaire via the methods listed above, the responses were then reviewed every week and considered in terms of their geographic range and their coverage of arts activities. Where a data gap was identified CREC staff undertook online research of potential practitioners/providers in that area or domain and targeted directly via email and or telephone. The data was also shared with Arts Connect during the data collection process to allow identification of any data gaps as well as known practitioners/providers who would have been expected to have responded. Through this systematic and cyclical process, data gaps could be identified, targeted and reassessed to ascertain if the reflected a lack of response or an actual lack of provision.

Data presentation:

Using the data collected through this research project the following information will be presented:

1. Early Years arts activities offered
2. Type of organisations offering arts activities
3. Geographical coverage of arts activities across the West Midlands region
4. Types of arts activities offered where in the region
5. Type of organisations that typically offer which type of activity
6. The specific types of activity offered
7. Who the arts activities are aimed at
8. The age group of young children worked with where activities are child-focussed
9. The wider arts networks that organisations are linked in to
10. The way in which arts activities are funded

1. Early Years arts activities offered

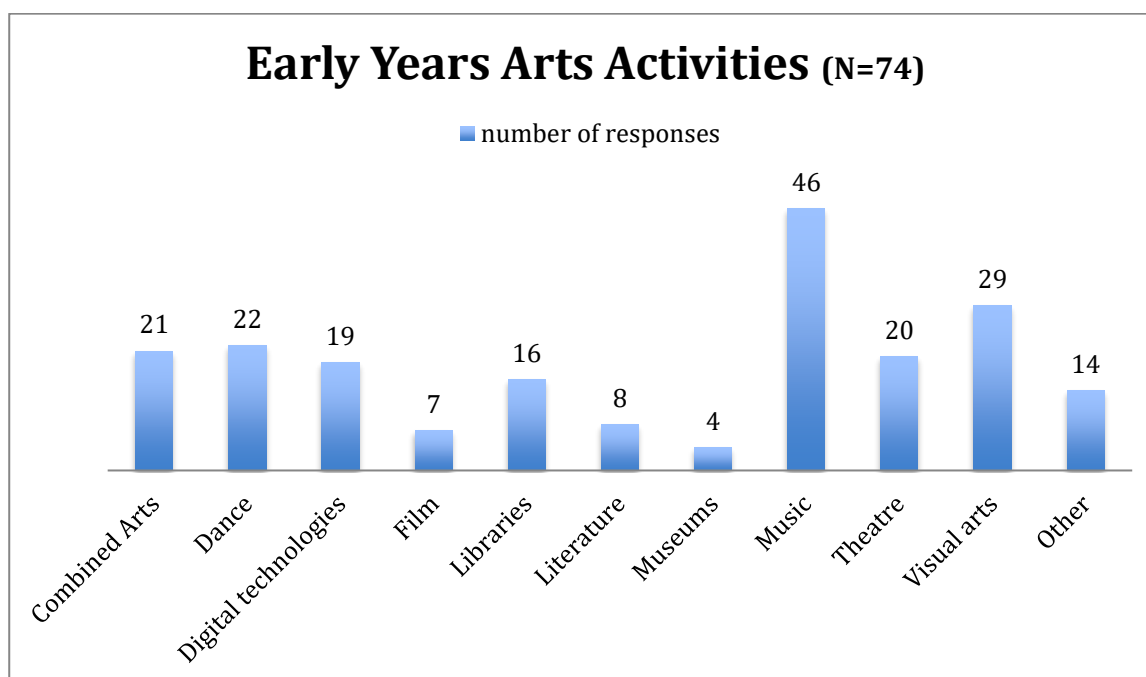


Fig 1: Coverage of Early Years Arts activities offered across the West Midlands

This data reveals that the most frequently offered early years arts activity is Music (46 responses) with the Visual Arts, Dance, Theatre and Combined Arts all clustered together with responses ranging from 20 – 29. Digital technologies also feature quite strongly (19) with Libraries (16). Literature, Film and Museums having the least number of responses. Amongst the areas identified under ‘other’ were storytelling, craft, clay workshops, yoga and comedy.

Several things could be interpreted from these results:

- They may represent an accurate picture of the early years arts sector in the West Midlands;
- Or it could be that the networks utilised for communicating about participation in the project are more established in some art forms than others explaining the lower results for some activities;
- And/or, it could be that respondents selected particular options based on their understanding of the terms and their professional identities as artists. e.g. What might be considered by some as ‘literature’ others may perceive as ‘theatre’ as this term might better fit their identity (for example, as an actor).

Although the mapping exercise cannot feasibly have captured all potential respondents the targeted approach to addressing data gaps through the data collection process did unearth quite a number of respondents and networks through which the project was further disseminated. Given the success of this approach in closing data gaps we would be confident to say that the results represent a reasonably accurate picture of the early years sector in the West Midlands. That is not however to say that some arts activities are better served by established networks; it is not a surprise to the authors that music, for example, is the most common activity offered. The impact of the Moonbeams projects and other Youth Music funded initiatives for music in early years may have maintained the availability of musical activities in the region. Musical activities have been found to be universally accessible and inclusive for all ages in early childhood. Some arts activities require

development of motor skills and understanding of language to enable full engagement and involvement. Music has been found to be a useful and engaging activity to offer families with young children from birth onwards (Pitt and Hargreaves, 2016).

2. Type of organisations offering arts activities

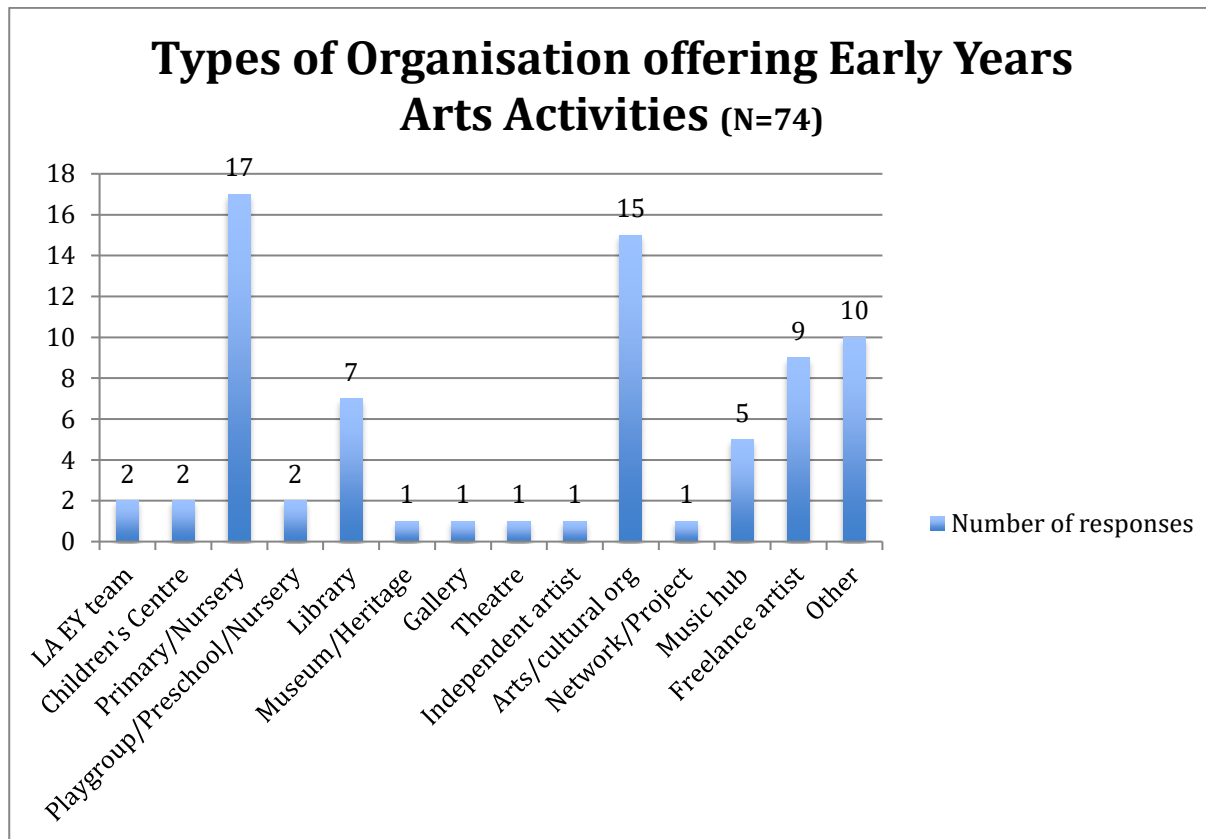


Figure 2: Types of organisation offering early years arts activities

The information collected suggests that the type of organisations who deliver the largest number of early arts activities, by a considerable margin, are: primary and nursery schools; arts and cultural organisations; and freelance artists. Music hubs and libraries also had multiple representation whilst the remainder had only a minimal representation (either 1 or 2).

There was a response from only one gallery, one theatre and one museum or heritage site. The breakdown of the 'other' category (Fig 3) exemplifies the wide variety of provider types operating in this sector:

Other category - number of responses:	
Charity	2
Dance School	1
Higher education	1
Independent instructor	1
Self-employed music teacher	1
Regional development agency	1
Music leader/sole trader	1
Pre-school class activity	1

None specified	1
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Figure 3: Breakdown of ‘other’ provider types

It is notable that only two settings that called themselves ‘children’s centres’ responded to the survey, given that they have historically been very involved with early years arts activities. The low response may well be as a result of cuts to budgets which have significantly impacted on children’s centre services nationally. It may also be that some children’s centres are parts of primary and nursery schools and therefore identified as schools.

When these results are considered alongside the arts activities offered (Figure 1) it can be seen that there is a significant variance between the number of arts activities (of a particular type) offered and the number of providers it might perhaps be assumed would be best placed to offer that activity. For example, some activities (eg museum (n=4), visual arts (n=24) and theatre activities (n=20)) are well represented despite the fact that the number of museums, galleries and theatres which responded was very low (only one of each). The data in Figure 6 suggests that these activities are instead being delivered by a range of other providers but predominantly schools. There is clearly therefore an appetite from schools to engage in these activities and so exploring ways in which organisations such as museums, galleries, theatres and film organisations could enhance their own early years offers could be beneficial, particularly for those children outside of school provision.

3. Geographical coverage of arts activities across the West Midlands region

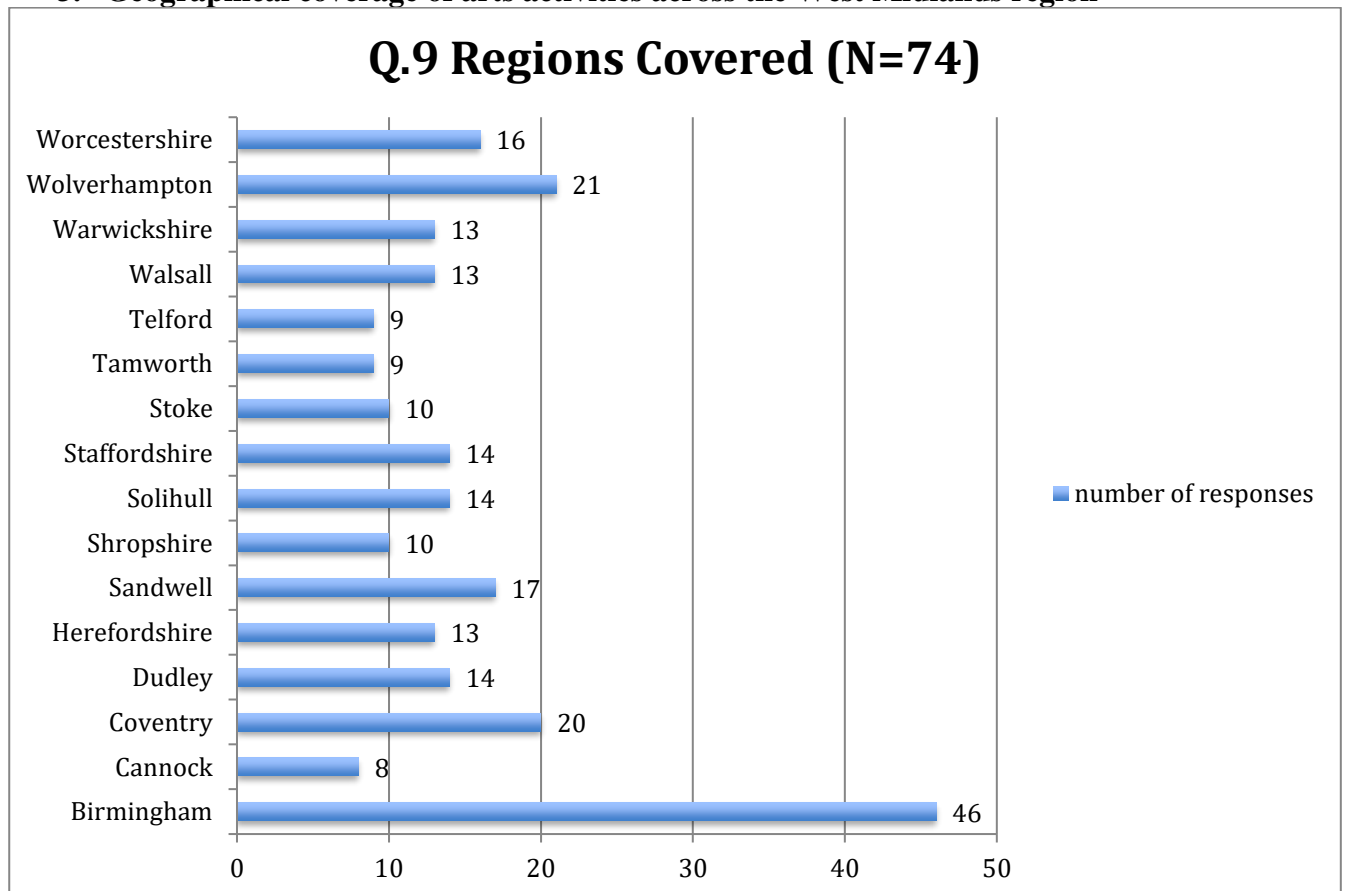


Figure 4: Geographical coverage of arts activities across the West Midlands region

As might be expected given that it is the largest local authority and as the capital of the West Midlands has the highest concentration of arts and cultural organisations, Birmingham (46) had the highest number of respondents: more than double the number of responses as compared to the next highest represented region (Wolverhampton, 21). Cannock had the lowest number of respondents (8) but all regions were represented and there was no discernible difference between response rates of predominantly rural or urban local authorities.

4. Which types of arts activities are offered where in the region

The following table demonstrates how the arts activities are offered in each region.

Arts Category by Regions Covered; (n=74)										
	Combined Arts	Dance	Digital Technologies	Film	Libraries	Literature	Museums and Heritage	Music	Theatre	Visual Arts
Birmingham	11	11	10	5	5	3	1	24	12	18
Cannock	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	6	2	4
Coventry	8	7	7	1	3	3	2	12	6	11
Dudley	5	4	3	1	3	2	1	8	4	8
Herefordshire	4	4	2	1	5	3	1	7	4	5
Sandwell	5	5	4	2	4	2	1	9	4	6
Shropshire	5	4	3	1	2	2	1	7	2	6
Solihull	4	3	2	1	2	2	1	9	3	5
Staffordshire	4	5	3	1	5	2	1	9	3	5
Stoke	3	3	2	1	3	2	1	8	2	4
Tamworth	3	3	2	1	3	2	1	7	2	4
Telford	6	5	8	1	6	5	1	14	7	8
Walsall	4	5	2	1	5	2	1	7	4	4
Warwickshire	4	3	3	1	4	2	2	8	3	5
Wolverhampton	6	6	6	1	3	2	1	11	5	8
Worcestershire	7	7	5	4	4	4	2	9	7	10

Figure 5: The range of activities offered within each region

Music activities are represented strongly in every region, noticeably so in Coventry, Telford and Wolverhampton when the numbers are considered alongside the other arts activity in those regions. Birmingham also appears to have around double the amount of music activities as compared to the other main arts activities (Theatre, Visual Art, Dance, Digital technologies and Combined arts).

Although Cannock received only 8 responses it appears that these responding participants are providing a range and frequency of arts activities in the region such that Cannock does not seem to be especially deprived of arts activity in this matrix.

From this matrix of results it would seem that Museums & Heritage, and Film, are the two least well-represented arts activities across all regions.

In most regions the most commonly offered early years arts activities are: Music; and Visual Arts. The popularity of music activities is not surprising and correlates with research (Pitt, 2016) that has found that early years settings such as children's centres use music with all children irrespective of age group because it is accessible from birth (and even before birth) and requires no communication nor developed motor skills to participate. Musical activities have also been found to be beneficial as a tool in bringing families into settings to then engage with other services. These aspects might help explain the high number of musical activities in early years across the age range. It should also be noted that many of these activities are funded (or have been funded in the past) through Youth Music.

Libraries are identified as offering arts activities for young children in every region; Telford (with 6 instances) presents most strongly with higher numbers than even Birmingham (5). Walsall, Staffordshire and Herefordshire also had 5 instances of library based arts activities identified. This region wide strong showing for library activities would suggest an established and embedded system that is engaging with the early years. This may also be due to the "Early Hurly Burly" Music Hubs and Libraries programme which was supported and chaired by Arts Connect (part funded from Grants for The Arts).

It would appear from the responses received that Telford is very well represented across all art forms, in relation to its size, in comparison with its regional neighbours. Further exploration of why this might be could provide useful learning points for other local authorities and the region as a whole. One contributory factor might be the legacy from an early years arts project in the past; exploration of the funding streams (Appendix A, Q.15) revealed that there had been a significant (two-years) Youth Music funded project in Telford that had continued beyond the lifetime of the funding, and that project, now entitled 'Shake, Rattle and Roll', reaches 1,400 children. It would appear therefore that it might be worth investigating this case further to better understand the current picture in case there is a valuable model to be shared more widely. The authors have been made aware post-survey that some significant personnel and funding changes have taken place in the last 12 months so although there appears to be a positive legacy, the continuation of this legacy cannot be taken for granted.

This Youth Music project alone would not explain the strength of responses across all arts activities which suggests that there might be (or might have been) a strong local arts network and/or perhaps a particularly strong partnership working model in early childhood in that region.

'Early Hurly Burly' also features in several responses as providers of arts activity and as an arts activity and therefore may also provide a useful case study of how partnership working and networks can be developed and supported.

5. Which type of organisations typically offer which type of activity

		Combined arts	Dance	Digital Technologies	Film	Libraries	Literature	Museums & Heritage	Music	Theatre	Visual Arts	Other
Organisation type	Local authority	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
	Children's Centre		2						1	1	1	
	Pre-School/Primary/Nursery	9	7	9	1	3	2		1 2	9	12	2
	Regional development agency	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	Library			1		7	3		2	2		
	Museum	1	1	1				1	1		1	
	Gallery							1			1	
	Theatre									1		
	Independent artist		1						1 1		1	
	Arts/cultural org	5	6	4	4	2	1		1 1	3	4	2
	Network/project	1	1						1		1	
	Music Service					1			4	1		1
	Freelance Artist	1	1	2		1			4		5	1
	Other		1						2		1	

Figure 6: The distribution of Arts Category by Organisational Type

As can be seen in Figure 6, the local authorities and regional development agency cover every arts category. The Arts and Cultural organisations do not seem to be working with Museums and Heritage, which is perhaps unexpected, and something that could be developed in the future. It would appear that the work with theatre, literature and libraries could also be increased.

Interestingly, schools, nurseries and pre-school settings have a good representation of arts categories across the board with the exception of Museums and Heritage. This should certainly be an area for further investigation as it would appear from the responses that museums only offer activities with young children at their own locations. Partnership working and outreach visits might be areas for consideration as a way of museum staff working with schools and other early years providers. Such an approach might also provide a bridge for children and families into museum settings.

A note of caution should be sounded about these responses however because schools will, of course make visits to museums but they may not have included this in their understanding of what they are offering children through their setting. Furthermore they may also not consider visits to Museums & Heritage sites as 'arts activity'; it might be viewed as history (KS1) or Understanding the World (EYFS).

Museum & Heritage organisations in the West Midlands told us that they offered activities in combined arts, dance, digital technologies, music and visual arts and it might well be that there is

disconnection between perceptions of what the early years sector (schools, childcare providers, childminders etc) believe they can access through Museums & Heritage organisations and what those same organisations actually offer for early years. It would therefore seem beneficial to raise the profile of Museums & Heritage organisations and the diversity of the early arts activities that they offer through other established networks.

Similarly, the responses from libraries indicate that they are sites of multi-arts activity including music, theatre, literature and digital technologies; information that might not be apparent to other organisations.

It would appear that the majority of freelance artists who responded are working in the fields of music (15), and visual arts (6); this correlates with the predominant early arts activities offered by schools.

With there being no formal qualification route, nor a recognised professional status, in early years arts it is not surprising that many practitioners are working in a freelance capacity. For some music practitioners and perhaps visual artists, their work with early years might be part of a wider working picture, which includes a variety of contexts. It should be noted that Music Hubs are not compelled to offer early years music teaching, as early years music is not part of the National Plan for Music Education. Music Hubs can therefore choose to offer early years music if they have the budget or interest or other motivation but where this does not take place there is a clear space in which other organisations, particularly freelance musicians, can operate.

Respondents were also asked to identify where their arts activities took place and the most common response was schools with nurseries, preschools and community centres also featuring strongly. There is only one mention of a professional performance space being offered for young children to experience arts activity and only three responses that indicate the outdoor environment is being used for arts activity specifically (although schools and other settings may well offer outdoor spaces).

For our youngest children to have experiences of the arts in the same way that most adults do would seem to be sensible and advisable. Bringing arts into school settings may be a different learning experience for children than visiting artists in their natural environment wherever that may be. Community centres are accessible and local and this might mean that families with young children can readily attend arts activities there, however there may be issues of unfamiliarity with performance spaces amongst parents of young children that could be overcome by inviting them to participate with their children in professional venues.

6. The specific types of activity offered

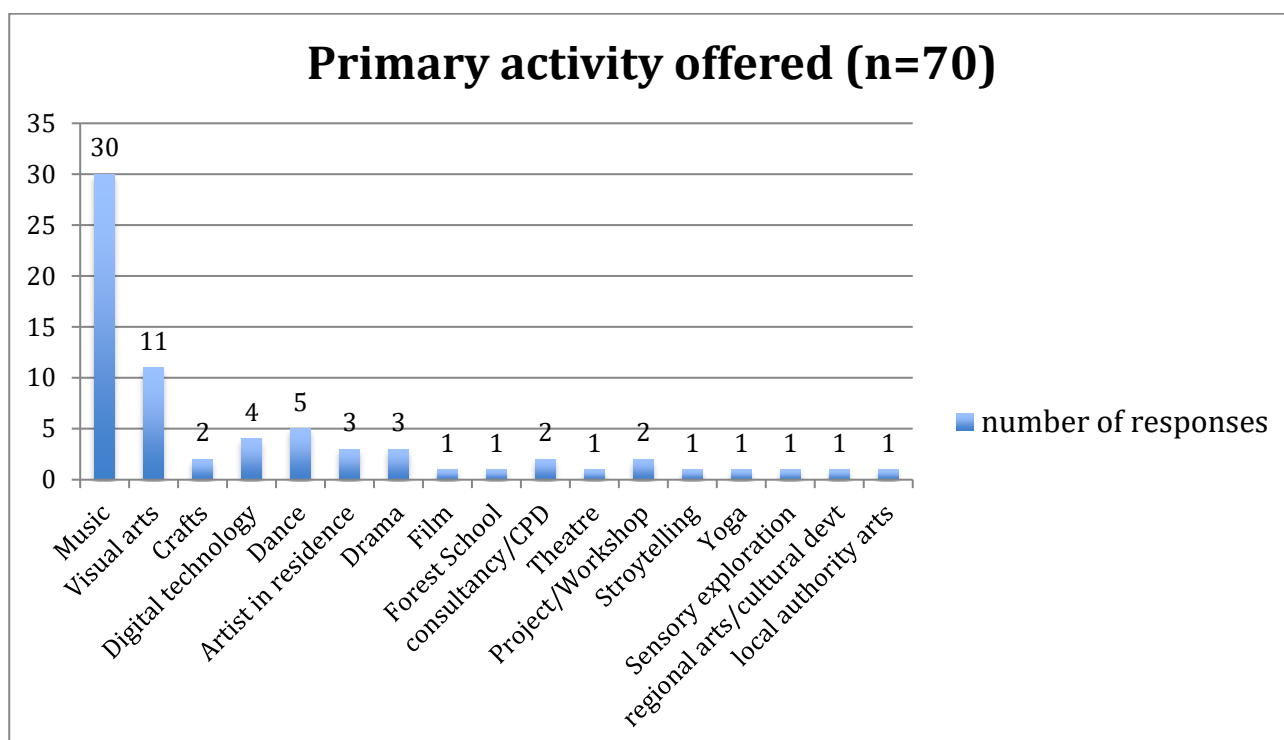


Figure 7: The primary early arts activities offered by respondents

Figure 7 shows clearly that music is the most common early years activity from this sample of respondents. This might be because music is the most commonly occurring arts activity in early years or there may be particularly strong networks, or access points for the survey participation. It might also be the case that Youth Music funding encourages music specific programmes to be delivered by arts organisations.

The Visual Arts category is also well represented and includes at least 3 responses about clay which suggests that the dividing line between Visual Art and Craft categories is unclear and perhaps need to be considered together. It was also unclear from responses which art form the 'artists in residence' specialised in.

Although libraries are well represented among the respondents as sites of arts activity it is interesting that only one response relates to storytelling in this question; this may however link to an earlier point that libraries are offering multi-arts activities.

It could be suggested from the information in the graph that there may be a need for more specialists offering continuing professional development or training in early years arts with only two respondents specialising in this activity in the West Midlands area.

Additional Arts Activities offered

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide information about any other arts activities that they offered. The number of responses dropped to n=33 for this question indicating that around 40 participants (i.e. over half) only focus on one arts activity in early years. Some perhaps unexpected findings are that in four cases the primary activity was visual art (clay modelling, ceramics) and the

second activity was Music suggesting that several arts participants seem to be flexible and multi-faceted in the skills, abilities and facilities they have available. Similarly one primary activity of Digital Media offers Music as a secondary activity, and one respondent reported that their first activity was dance-based whilst their second activity was accessible film screenings for children and families with pushchairs and wheelchairs.

Several participants who registered music as their primary activity also offer a secondary music-based activity. E.g. music and movement or musical dens, or a SEND musical activity, or a different specific age group: baby music or toddler music.

It should be noted that some 'second activities' are referred to as 'holiday time' programmes which suggests that some providers will work through schools in the term time and focus on family engagement in the school holidays. It would appear that there may be a range of arts activity-types across the year to enable freelance or other arts organisations to be sustainable out of school term-time. This could however mean that for children not yet accessing school provision that the opportunities during term time are limited.

Two respondents offer child-family based activities as their primary focus and professional development activities as their secondary activity. This suggests that those offering CPD to practitioners are active practitioners themselves.

There are no significant differences found between the age group focus, the venue type nor the funding sources as compared to Activity 1.

17 respondents said they offered a third activity. Of these there were 6 mentions of story time or storytelling which suggests that for several participants this is an additional activity that they offer to families. Cooking, dance and music and movement activities also feature.

8 respondents said they offered a fourth activity. These included: Forest school; family fun; summer challenge; musical picnic; music and movement; and story visits. The group targeted in this activity is predominantly 'families' and the venues are community centres, libraries, arts centre and Symphony Hall

4 respondents reported that they offered a fifth activity, identified as: Bookstart; Early Hurlly Burlly; Family Fun festival; and Sensory Tots. All of these respondents were community settings and, with the exception of one, the activities are all grant, government, or charity-funded.

Those arts organisations or individuals who are offering more than one arts activity seem to focus on the family more generally in the extra activities, whilst the primary focus in arts activity was on the young child specifically.

7. Who the arts activities are aimed at

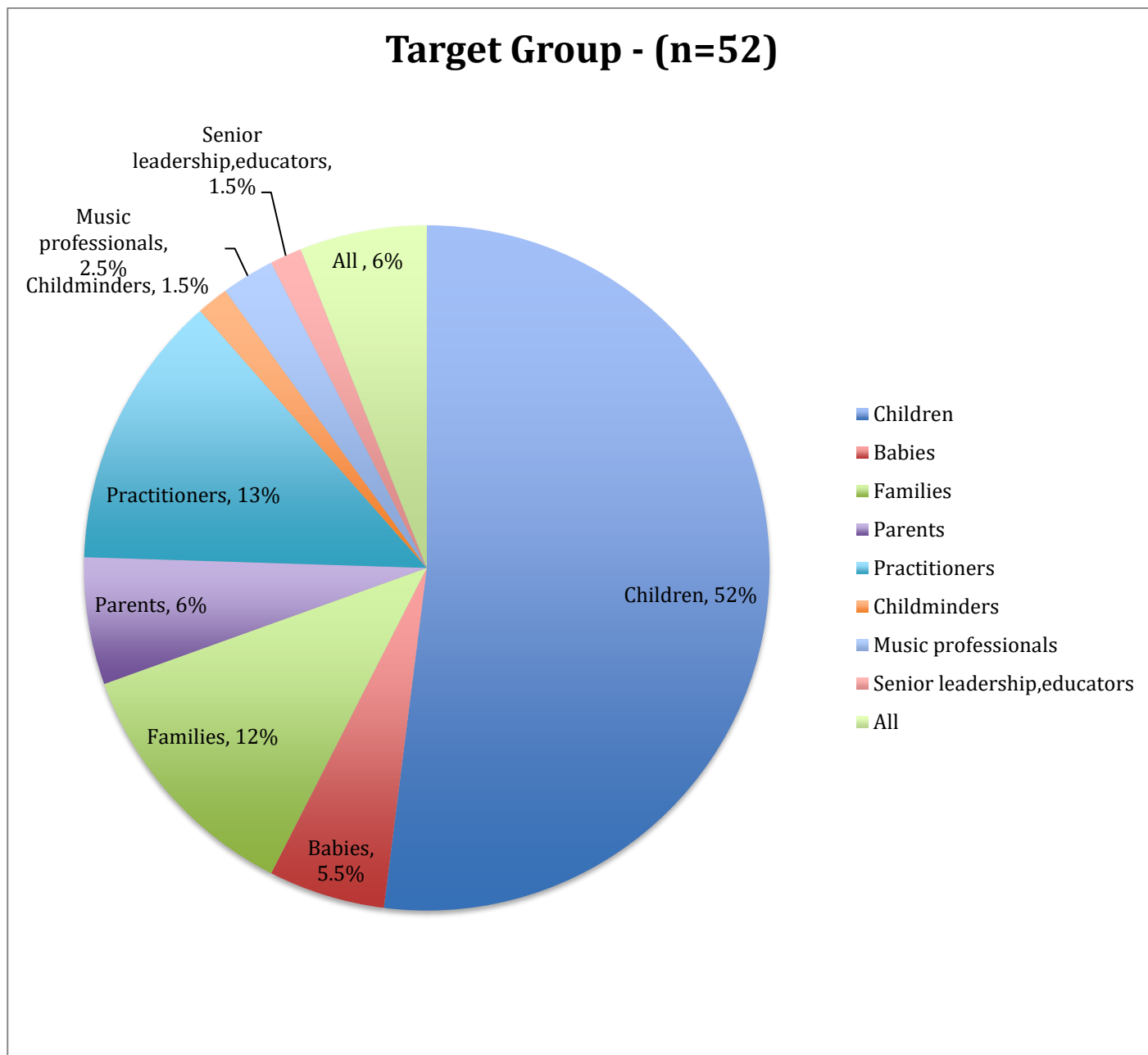


Figure 8: Target groups for early years arts activities

The responses received show that just over half of the work that makes up the respondents' core activity is with children and a further quarter involves babies, families and parents. It can be seen that three quarters (75%) of the main activity of this sample is with children and families. The remaining quarter mostly work with a variety of early years practitioners including leaders. 6% of respondents said that they worked with all categories (ie parents, professionals and children)

It is notable that work with childminders is particularly low at 1.5% (although some respondents may have included them generically in 'practitioners' category) and indeed no childminders participated in the survey which does raise several issues. Firstly, whether childminder provision is adequately considered by early arts organisations as a group to engage with, and secondly, whether there are ways that childminder provision can be included in existing networks to raise their profile but also develop collaboration and engagement.

From the responses received there does appear to be a lack of focus on early years arts activity specifically with looked after children and with young children with additional needs (although there were some projects mentioned through the data on work with the latter group). It might be that there is therapeutic arts work taking place through health or social care provision that was not targeted as part of this project but links and work in these areas would be worth developing.

8. The age group of young children worked with where activities are child-focussed

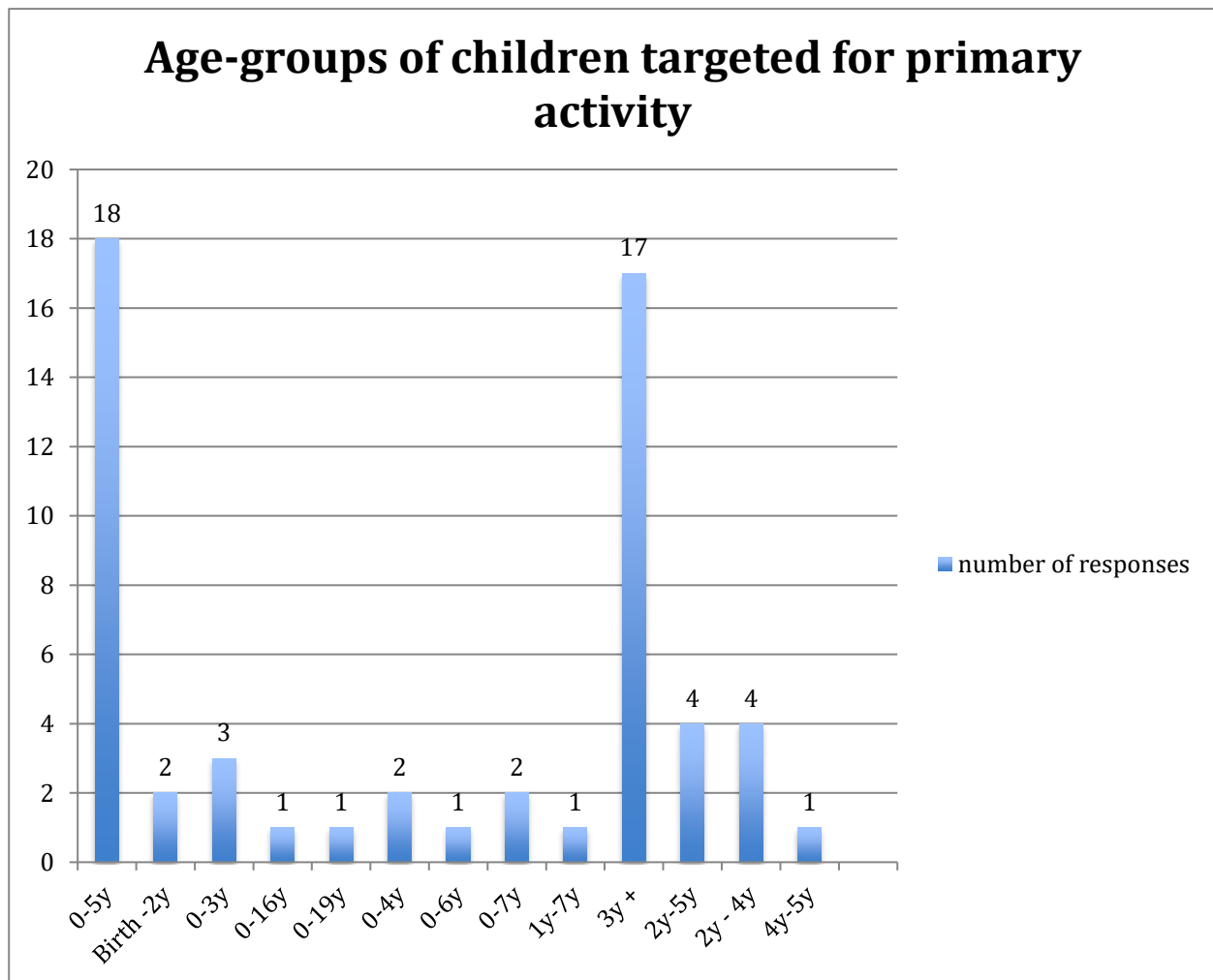


Figure 9: Age-groups of children targeted for primary activity

The vast majority of responses list the broad categories of ‘0-5 years’ or ‘3 years+’ as the age-range with which their primary activity is focussed; only a small number specified a particular age-range within this age band. These broad age bands with which respondents identified may mask some variation and specialisation but it would seem that specific arts activities for the youngest children (0-2 years and 0- 3 years) are underrepresented.

When age groups are considered by each arts activity (Appendix 1: Q.10 and Q.13) it can be seen that no particular arts activities worked with only one particular age group; there was a spread across art forms and ages. Where arts activities were targeted at the youngest children they tended to be music focussed although there were some art and craft activities available for children from 6

months of age and one dance and one yoga activity available from birth. Working with clay was offered from the age of 3 years and digital technology projects began at 2 years.

9. What networks the organisations are linked in to

When asked what networks respondents were involved with, Arts Connect received the largest number of responses (n=7). Other networks identified in the West Midlands to whom respondents were connected were: Early Hurly Burly; Early Arts; Sightlines; Artslink; Music Education Hubs; early childhood setting partnerships and networks (e.g. Preschool Learning Alliance, Birmingham Nursery Schools Trust and Birmingham Nursery Schools Teaching Schools Alliance); The West Midlands Erasmus Network; and Regional Arts Partnership (N.B. The authors assume this to be a reference to the Moonbeams project). It appears that there is no ubiquitous arts network that successfully works across all artforms and regions.

Five respondents said that they were currently not part of a network but their comments (“keen to help the mapping project as unsure at present” and “No arts networks currently, we are hoping to develop this through contact with Arts Connect”) suggest that there is an appetite to access the support and communication links that a network can provide. It should be noted that the Sightlines West Midlands network has now been revived via the Erasmus programme which may help in this regard.

10. The funding of arts activities

The responses indicated that funding for delivery of early years arts activities overwhelmingly comes from the organisations themselves (30 responses) and in most cases delivery of these activities was considered to part of their core offer. Sometimes these activities were run with full or part funding support from Arts Council or charities such as Youth Music (11 responses). For schools who responded, pupil premium money as a source of funding was cited in a number of cases. There were also a number of county funded projects (+/- 10) and the Arts Council (12) as well as an Erasmus project (6) and Town Hall Symphony Hall (1) funded project. Only a very small number of activities were paid for by parents.

Summary of findings:

This mapping exercise does not claim to have captured all organisations who are currently offering arts activities across the West Midlands region but significant efforts have been made to identify and encourage respondents from across the region and from each of the arts categories. The research methods followed, coupled with the fact that no local authority area or arts category received no responses, provides validity to the accuracy of the mapping project and as such the authors believe that the data presented is close to the true picture. It is also hoped that this mapping exercise can provide an up to date starting point from which the new networks and projects can develop.

The most encouraging finding of this project has been that despite a sustained period of budget cuts within the arenas of education and the arts there still exists representation of all art forms across all areas of the West Midlands. That said, there is variation across the region and certain areas appear heavily reliant on a few organisations offering a wide range of early arts activities which may have implications for quality and sustainability if resources are spread thinly.

Music is unsurprisingly the most commonly offered activity, followed by visual arts. The popularity of music is understandable given its accessibility and transferability with early years, including the youngest children, but it also seems the most developed discipline in terms of its networks.

The predominant providers of early years arts activities are schools and cultural organisations who between them deliver almost half of the activities. These are also the organisations who deliver activities from core funding albeit sometimes supported by project/targeted funding. The responses did seem to suggest that the activities were often delivered in isolation rather than collaboratively and therefore there appear to be missed opportunities that could be explored. Linkages between schools and museums & heritage organisations in particular could be improved.

Where arts activities are not delivered as part of an organisation's core offer, funding tends to be project funding which has limitations in terms of continuity and sustainability. Telford appears to provide an interesting example of how project funding can have a longer lasting impact given the quantity and breadth of responses received in relation to its size - any further investigation should also consider whether funding and personnel changes might negatively impact on this apparent legacy.

Whilst approximately half of respondents focussed only on one arts activity, a significant number of respondents offered multiple activities, often in different disciplines. The primary activity tends to be with children whilst an increasing number of the additional activities include families.

Most (75%) respondents worked with children and families, whilst a fifth of respondents worked with professionals. The majority of respondents worked across the early years age phase but there was less focus on the youngest children. Of those arts activities aimed at under 2's, almost all were music activities.

There was no apparent early arts activity targeted at looked after children and there were only a few activities that made reference to children with additional needs.

There were no responses from childminders and minimal responses from PVI childcare providers (in contrast to a very healthy level of response from maintained settings).

The overwhelming majority of respondents belong to at least one early years or arts network but there is not one that has coverage across all regions and arts activities. There are some larger arts and school based networks but there is a need for some clarity and coherence to draw early years arts organisations together.

Recommendations

1. Grow and strengthen a network for early years arts;

The mapping exercise indicated several networks in operation across the region but none seemed to connect with a significant number of people; Arts Connect was the most frequently mentioned network with 7 respondents identifying it as a network to which they belonged. Growing this network and collaborating and supporting other existing networks would be of great benefit to the sector and would be a logical 'next step' from the mapping exercise. One strategy to do this might include exploring the use of social media and technology to connect disparate entities across the region.

2. Utilise existing working links with Teaching Schools to foster partnerships between early years settings and arts organisations;

The redistribution of increasing levels of education funding away from local authorities and directly to schools has radically changed the way in which services within an authority are delivered and organisations are supported. Teaching Schools are being designated to fill some of the gaps in terms of school to school support and CPD but as with any new process these things take time to embed and distribution is far from uniform at present. Working collaboratively with these Teaching schools on common objectives will allow arts organisations (libraries, galleries, museums etc) access to, and engagement with the wider school sector and, in the case of early years focussed Teaching Schools, local PVI providers too.

3. Explore ways of connecting with, and supporting, PVI settings across the region to access and engage with early arts activities;

Although Teaching schools may provide access to some of the region's 1500+ PVI settings there needs to be an exploration of other possible ways to engage with a disparate collection of settings who offer childcare provision for a large number of children (0-5) across the region. This may require various targeted strategies depending on local context.

4. Develop strong working links with Music Hubs to increase and co-ordinate the focus on early years;

The mapping exercise identified that some of the region's Music Hubs were offering early years focussed activities and work strands. This good work should be built upon and supported and encouraged across all Hubs to create an equality of opportunity for young children to benefit from this resource across the region.

5. Undertake further investigation into early years arts activity in Telford;

The mapping exercise identified a higher than expected response rate from Telford which justifies some more in depth enquiry to ascertain the reasons for this and identify any explanation why this may be the case in order to inform future strategy.

6. Commission in-depth case studies of artists/organisations identified through the mapping exercise

The purpose of this project was to produce an initial mapping of the early years arts sector in the region and, while it provides a snapshot of what is happening across the region, it is unable to provide any further in depth qualitative data to identify such things as levels of quality, reach, satisfaction and inclusion. Case studies would also highlight areas of good practice and barriers to delivery.

7. Investigate opportunities for CPD opportunities and pathways for early years arts artists and educators;

There were only two respondents who said they offered CPD which suggests opportunities are limited. Creating an appropriate and accessible CPD pathway (especially for freelance artists) would raise quality, increase profile and has the potential to create the next generation of early years arts leaders.

8. Explore ways of connecting with, and supporting, childminders across the region to access and engage with early arts activities;

Childminders were not represented in the mapping exercise. By the nature of their profession, childminders will generally work independently and are limited in their ability to attend courses during standard working hours because of the difficulties involved with organising suitable cover arrangements therefore exploring other ways to support and engage this important group of early years providers should be undertaken.

9. Develop strong working links with virtual schools across the region to ensure looked after children have access to early arts activities

Looked after Children (LAC) was a group not identified by any individual or organisation and therefore developing strong working links with virtual schools would provide a useful starting point to engage this group of young children.

10. Undertake further investigation into the barriers to artists and arts organisations working with the youngest children (birth – 2)

The mapping exercise identified a gap in provision for the youngest children. Knowing the reasons behind this will help develop strategy to remedy this gap and increase the early years arts offer for the 'birth – 2' age group.

Reference

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