



05 October 2010

[Manage your e-mail subscription](#)

In this email:

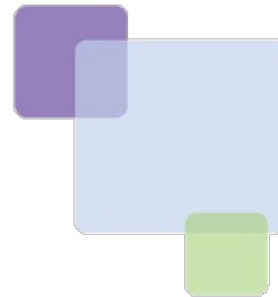
- [Introduction](#)
- [What we think about the arts and mental health](#)
- [SDC wins an arts and health award](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [More about our work in this area](#)
- [Coming soon from SDC](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [About SDC](#)

## Introduction

Over the past two years the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health (SDC) has been building up its portfolio of work linking the arts to mental health and wellbeing. This e-bulletin outlines the work we have developed in this time and the contribution we have made to the evidence base.

We are sending you this e-bulletin as you have previously shown an interest in this work and SDC is excited to share what it has learnt through this work and is committed to knowledge exchange.

This is the first in what we hope to be a series of e-bulletins on arts and mental health. Please feel free to forward this bulletin to any interested parties.



## What we think about the arts and mental health

SDC believes that arts attendance and participation is a means of enhancing quality of life by promoting good mental health and wellbeing and promoting recovery. However, SDC recognises that the experience of having mental health problems can impose multiple barriers to attending and participating in arts and cultural activities. SDC feels strongly that providing evidence and making this evidence available has the potential to create or enhance opportunities for the population to enjoy the wellbeing benefits of arts activities, and to improve the wellbeing of people with lived experience of mental health problems. Therefore, SDC feels that more should be done to make arts activities accessible to people with mental health problems, and that the part that the arts plays in maintaining and improving mental health for all should be further acknowledged and explored.

It was from this premise that SDC decided in 2008 to focus a strand of its work on exploring and evidencing the impact the arts has on mental health and wellbeing.

## SDC wins an arts and health award

We are pleased to announce that SDC has been awarded the 2010 award for outstanding contributions to arts and health research by the Royal Society of Public Health Awards 2010.

The Royal Society for Public Health is an independent, multi-disciplinary organisation, dedicated to the promotion and protection of collective human health and wellbeing. The Royal Society of Public Health recognises that the creative arts play an important role in helping to address health inequalities. The Arts and Health Awards 2010 aim to recognise and celebrate work which contributes to this endeavour either by offering original contributions to arts and health inequalities, research and evaluation or innovative initiatives in the arts and health inequalities practice in healthcare and community settings.

When informing SDC about their success, Professor Richard Parish, Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Public Health, said that "The committee was particularly impressed by the wide range of work undertaken by the Centre (SDC) and its role in promoting the need for high quality evidence to underpin further developments of arts and health practice."

SDC accepted the award in London on 22nd September 2010.



## Publications

### Arts accessibility for people with mental health problems (2010)

SDC received funding from the Big Lottery Fund (Investing in Ideas) and the Steel Charitable Trust to consult with people who have lived experience of mental health problems and work with arts venues with a view to producing a good practice guide for enhancing accessibility and encouraging attendance for people with mental health problems. SDC worked in partnership with The Audience Business, who provided advisory support to enhance this project.

Findings from our qualitative and quantitative research are consistent with previous research, which shows that people who

experience mental health problems are comparatively infrequent attenders of the arts and can face multiple barriers to attendance. For many, the experience of having a mental health problem can be a barrier to participating in society and doing the things they would like to do and this can make attending arts events particularly challenging. Despite this, many people with mental health problems reported the positive wellbeing impacts of arts attendance, including; enjoyment, feelings of creativity, sense of community, and escapism. Escapism was particularly important, as the arts were described as being an activity that made people feel good when otherwise they were having a difficult time and this can be a welcome relief for people who are feeling unwell. People with mental health problems therefore often use the arts to enhance and maintain their recovery, and recognise its role in enhancing the wellbeing of others.

Barriers to the arts are not experienced exclusively by those with mental health problems, and some of the concerns (e.g. around cost, transport, staff and rules) are likely to be shared by other sectors of society. However, our research suggests that the nature of having a mental health problem can pose enhanced and complex barriers to attendance, and negative experiences can have long lasting consequences.

The key to successful engagement with people with mental health problems is ensuring equality of access and providing the opportunity for people with mental health problems to attend the arts on their own terms, as arts attenders rather than as people with mental health problems. Many of the barriers to attendance can be overcome by ensuring that people with mental health problems are empowered to make an informed choice about whether to attend an arts event or not. Providing adequate information about productions, venue facilities and pricing can help to dispel worries that an individual might have in advance of booking or attendance.

A link to the full report along with a short form summary can be found on the [arts & mental health](#) page of our website.

### **Arts and wellbeing (2009 – 2010)**

SDC received funding from the Big Lottery Fund (Awards for all) to conduct a large scale quantitative research project amongst the Scottish population to explore the link between arts attendance and participation, and levels of mental health and wellbeing. We found that attendance of and participation in the arts is an activity that is perceived to have multiple life-enhancing benefits. Despite the fact that arts attendance and participation can be good for your mental health, those with poor mental health were significantly less likely to be arts attenders or participators.

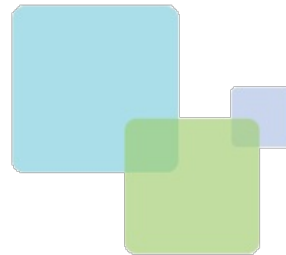
See the [arts & mental health](#) page of our website to download the short form summary of this research.

---

## **More about our work in this area**

In this bulletin we have mentioned just a few of the arts and mental health and wellbeing projects that SDC has been involved in. A full list of all the arts and mental health and wellbeing work SDC has worked on is listed below.

- Arts accessibility for people with mental health problems (2010)
- Artistic Practice on Referral (2009 – 2010)
- Arts and wellbeing (2009 – 2010)
- Healthy Reading Midlothian Evaluation (2010)
- Universal Comedy Evaluation (2010)
- Culture and Sport Glasgow, and Mental Health (2009)
- Survivarts evaluation (2009)



---

## **Coming soon from SDC**

### **Artistic Practice on Referral (2009 – 2010)**

In 2009, SDC was commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council (now Creative Scotland) to carry out a one year programme of reflective research with three organisations who deliver arts for health and wellbeing services in different contexts. The three organisations involved in the project, Art in Hospital, Art Angel and Positive Mental Attitudes (PMA), were chosen because of their record of success in delivering arts on referral to different parts of the medical establishment in institutional and community settings. The purpose of the project was to work with the three organisations as exemplar projects to develop a shared situational analysis of Artistic Practice Referrals from health and institutional care contexts in order to:

- Develop a framework for sustained and effective referral to, and commissioning of, Specialist Artist Practitioner services;
- Increase people's access to Specialist Artist Practitioners and the development of their own Artistic Practice.

The report for this project will be published in Autumn 2010. It will define what Artistic Practice Referral and the role of a Specialist Artist Practitioner is and how this is different from other roles. It will also identify and discuss the impacts of accessing and participating in arts and the development of one's own Artistic Practice as well as the impact on health and wellbeing outcomes for the individuals referred.

---

## **Contact us**

To find out more about our work in this area please visit the [SDC website](#)

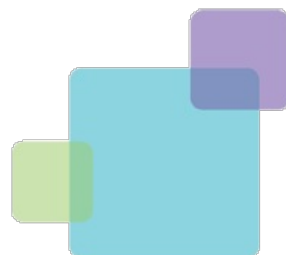
Alternatively, contact the research team involved in the work;

Ruth Stevenson, Head of Research [ruth@sdcmh.org.uk](mailto:ruth@sdcmh.org.uk)

Hannah Biggs, Researcher [hannah@sdcmh.org.uk](mailto:hannah@sdcmh.org.uk)

Tel: 0131 555 5959

We would be delighted to hear from you if you are interested in our work in this area, particularly if you are interested in collaborating on, or commissioning, a project.



---

## About SDC

SDC is an independent not-for-profit organisation which aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of people in Scotland and further afield. Formed in 1997, SDC has an extensive track record of delivering research and development projects, in partnership with others. SDC also brings experience in mental health policy and practice in the UK and beyond. SDC recognises that people's mental wellbeing is influenced by social factors and to improve mental health and wellbeing this complex relationship needs to be understood and explored.

We are grateful to our funders, which for our arts and mental health work include the National Lottery Awards for All and Investing in Ideas, The Steel Charitable Trust, Mickel Fund, and The Scottish Arts Council.

