

Arts for health's sake



As the world thinks about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) post-2015, wellbeing has emerged as an increasingly important concept. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's contribution to the MDG framework recognises that a holistic approach to defining poverty must take quality of life into account, and suggests that happiness be used as a measure of good health. The UN have repeatedly endorsed wellbeing as central in the post-2015 agenda, through creation of resolutions and hosting of a high-level meeting on Happiness and Wellbeing in 2012.

With this backdrop, the publication of an Arts Council England report this month, *Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society*, is a timely evidence-based review. Engagement with arts and culture is associated with an increased level of wellbeing in all societies, and can contribute to an improved quality of life. From a survey of 10 000 people, the report found that those who had participated in a cultural event during the past year were almost 60% more likely to be in good health. The report cites evidence that positive behavioural and social

changes associated with art and cultural participation can improve self-esteem and social interaction, although no long-term studies have shown sustainability of these results. The uses of art as therapy for conditions such as Parkinson's disease and depression are well-established and the report summarises relevant studies.

In conclusion, the Arts Council calls for interdisciplinary collaborations, from both inside and outside the arts sector, and acknowledges a need exists for more robust research to bring credibility to the arts. Sir Peter Bazalgette, Chair of the Arts Council told *The Lancet* "It's common sense, isn't it, that the arts make us feel better. We now have the beginnings of evidence to prove it too. But we need to do more work to persuade health leaders this could be a worthwhile investment. The Arts Council will fund more research and welcomes partnerships in all fields." With new partnerships and rigorous scientific methodology, the benefits of art and culture to health and wellbeing could be documented and measurable for future generations.

■ [The Lancet](#)

For more on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's contribution to the post-2015 agenda see <http://www.oecd.org/dac/POST-2015%20Overview%20Paper.pdf>

For the Arts Council England report see <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/pdf/The-value-of-arts-and-culture-to-people-and-society-An-evidence-review-Mar-2014.pdf>