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Legacy in substance use: Using the arts to empower communities to break cycles of silence

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Funding: AHRC Creative Communities Pilot Programme

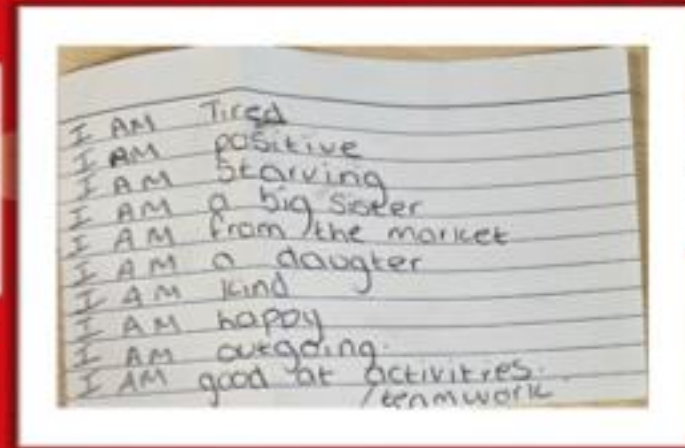
Context



- Market community (Place) – approx. 2500 - MDA
- Deprivation + Intergenerational Trauma ➤ Substance use (SU)
- Silence and Stigma
- Growing up in the Market study and Community Consultation
- Intervention needed
- Arts-based solution – Widen participation and reach

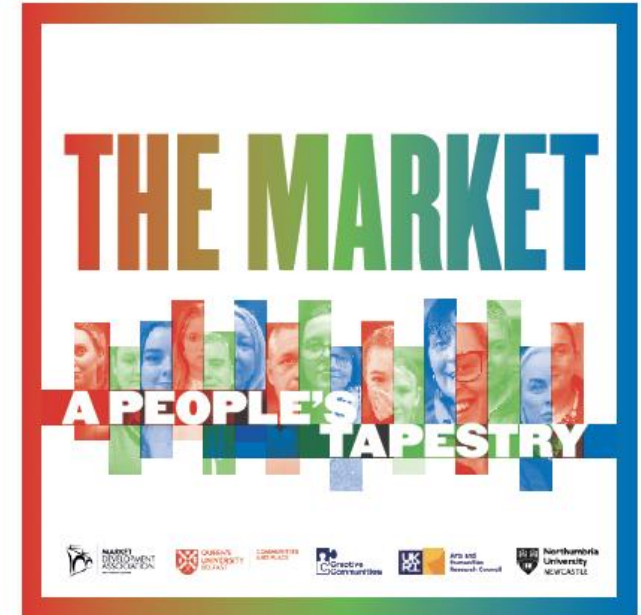
Activities

- Nine workshops
- 17 Participants
- 2 groups – Intergenerational
- Range of Methods





Outputs: Exhibition – 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast



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Data collection

Interviews with participants - photo elicitation

- Choosing 3-4 of their own photographs from the exhibition or workshops to tell a story mapping their lives in the Market
 - Memories of the past
 - Realities of the present
 - Fears and aspirations for the future

Focus Groups (generations)

- Share impact of the study on individual and community:
 - Attitudes and Beliefs
 - Cohesion/Belonging
 - Stigma around these topics



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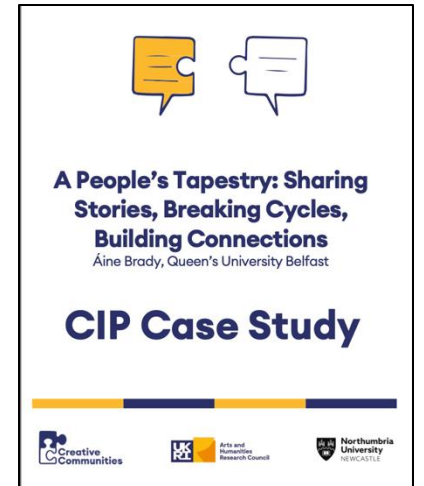
Outcomes

Theme	Category	Subcategory
Community Identity and Cohesion	Historical and Collective Pride	Shared community narratives; Community resilience
	Social Connectedness	Informal social support; Community solidarity
Intergenerational Experiences	Mutual Learning and Understanding	Exchange of perspectives; Generational empathy
	Legacy of Conflict and Trauma	Persistent historical trauma; Intergenerational transmission
Substance Use and Recovery	Community Impact and Individual Struggle	Substance misuse coping mechanisms; Family impacts
	Breaking Stigma and Supporting Recovery	Promoting open dialogue; Community-based support
Arts-Based Empowerment and Recovery	Individual Empowerment	Personal healing and self-reflection; Therapeutic storytelling
	Collective Reflection and Solidarity	Group cohesion and mutual support; Shared experiences

Findings & Outcomes

By having that group experience and chatting together, you realise not only is there sympathy and empathy, but there's a recognition of problems, with no judging

- Co-designed community-based Arts and Culture intervention to empower participants to break cycles of silence around complex and persistent issues of substance use and intergenerational trauma
- Focus Groups highlighted project tackled stigma, empowered participants, strengthened community resilience, fostered empathy, understanding and promoted wellbeing
- 'The Market: A People's Tapestry' Exhibition
- A People's Tapestry: Sharing Stories, Breaking Cycles, Building Connections. CIP Case Study: Creative Communities (AHRC): Newcastle
- Article: Using Photovoice to Explore Community Responses to Substance Use and Intergenerational Trauma. Proposed for BMC Public Health



We did get into deep, personal experiences of things that are going on in the Market with substance abuse, with trauma, generational trauma... how things that have happened to our parents, to our grandparents, that we're still dealing with the fallout today... We've been able to come back out the other side and produce something amazing



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Outputs

- **Policy Paper:** Brady, Á., McGuigan, K. (2024). Northern Ireland Health & Wellbeing: Policy Paper. CIP Creative Communities (AHRC): Newcastle.
- **Podcast:** *Transforming Trauma: Co-creating change through culture.* Creative Communities Podcast.
- **Community Toolkit:** Amplify: Sharing stories, Building connections, Breaking cycles. An arts-based toolkit to help create healthy communities. QCAP: Belfast



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Impact

Reach



Media coverage: BBC Newsline, Radio Ulster Evening Extra, Irish News, Belfast Live

SM coverage: 91,000 views on X alone. **Exhibition:** approx. 7000 visitors in April

Raising awareness: Community challenges, Tackling stigma around SU and trauma

Community Networks

40 additional Market families to join 'The people's tapestry'

Growing interest in new arts initiatives

Increased engagement with partners

Community Research Network – Blueprint and roll out

Leveraged funding

Play, Documentary, Resource, Tapestry on Tour (ESRC/AHRC)

Building and sustaining external partnerships

We have people involved who would have traditionally felt alienated in the community and never really participated in community life. Now, because of participating in the CIP project, they're coming into the community centre more often, they're engaging with our services and volunteering to be community activists



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“We took part in the Tapestry project because we wanted our community to do something about substance use and trauma and we wanted to play our part in this. We can either sleep-walk through these issues and watch as they get worse, or we can come together to confront them and do something about it, and that’s what we did.

We had many laughs along the way, we also had hard moments too, where people in our group opened up and shared some of the most difficult moments of their life. In a way we rediscovered our community and now we see it in ways we hadn’t before. The impact it has had on us and our people has been incredible. Taking part in the group and using the creative methods in the Amplify toolkit helped to make this happen.

We know the power of speaking up and sharing our stories; it helps break generational cycles and it builds human connection. We’ve seen this happen in our group.



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Get in Touch:

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