

MAYO ROSCOMMON CARE AND CREATIVITY IN CONTEXT

PROJECT EVALUATION

Prepared by



4 The Mall, Sligo, Ireland. ☎: + 353 71 9149500 | ✉: info@meehantully.com | 🌐: www.meehantully.com

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Project Partners

Irish Hospice Foundation

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Clár Lúcháil
Creative Ireland
Programme



Creative
Health & Wellbeing



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



Irish
Hospice
Foundation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation examines the implementation and outcomes of the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project, a two-year long initiative delivered jointly by Roscommon County Council and Mayo County Council under the Creative Health & Wellbeing Pillar of the Creative Ireland Programme, and with the support and assistance of the Irish Hospice Foundation and Healthy Ireland.

Supported by a total award of €140,000, the initiative set out to expand access to arts and creative opportunities across a wide range of healthcare and community contexts—from private homes and hospitals to nursing homes and hospices. Recognising that the sustainability of arts and creative engagement depends on artists being equipped for sensitive environments and healthcare settings having the capacity to collaborate effectively, the project explored what supports are required on both sides to make this work successful.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project provided 15 professional artists from across Counties Mayo and Roscommon with bespoke end-of-life care and bereavement training. Through their involvement, artists gained the skills, confidence, and experience required to support older people living in acute care settings, from private homes to hospices, nursing homes, and hospitals.

Across a two-year period, and in response to needs identified during both the development and delivery phases, the project provided end-of-life and bereavement training, capacity building around understanding dementia, and peer-mentoring supports for artists. It also facilitated the development of relationships across a variety of healthcare contexts and service providers, ensuring that artists could navigate sensitive themes such as grief and dementia while working within the safeguarding and disease-management protocols required in healthcare settings.

The delivery of practical-aspects of the project required the development of new and existing relationships between the project team, artists, and care institutions especially, as well as with older people participating in creative workshop sessions. Establishing good working relationships between all involved was important in creating awareness of the project and the levels of trust required for it to be successful.

KEY FINDINGS

The project was successful in delivering significant benefits for artists, partnering organisations, care institutions, and creative workshop participants. Key findings arising from the project are summarised below.

- Formed a regional panel of trained professional artists reporting increased knowledge, experience, and confidence in their ability to work in different health care settings.
- Relationships between artists, project promoters, and partnering institutions and agencies established and strengthened, with all expressing a desire to collaborate on future projects.
- Participants demonstrated interest in engaging in creative activities, benefitting mental and emotional health and overall wellbeing (652 total creative sessions delivered).
- Artists, families, visitors, and care staff benefitted from high quality creative initiatives, as well as participants (more than 2352 total participant engagements across all care settings).
- Artist feedback highlighted the value of upskilling and professional development, practical application of learnings, and opportunities to collaborate and explore new practices.
- The importance of building trust, being flexible and adapting to the needs of participants as well as care institutions that often have their own, sometimes unique, policies and protocols.
- The two-year initiative was successful in delivering upon all its aims and objectives within the €140,000 budget established for the project.

- The project identified several cross-cutting needs across healthcare contexts, including access to suitable creative spaces or context-specific equipment.
- Artists required support to safely navigate HSE safeguarding and disease-management protocols while delivering creative sessions.
- Additional emotional and professional support was essential for artists working with complex themes such as dementia and grief.

Despite encountering minor challenges, to include a delayed start, identifying potential participants in some areas, and delivering sessions in acute settings initially, the project exceeded many of its early targets. Artists consistently praised the practical tools and knowledge gained, underscoring the Programme's relevance and impact.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The project successfully addressed key Healthy Ireland and respective partnering Local Authority Culture and Creativity Strategy objectives:

- *Build Capacity to Improve Health and Wellbeing*: Training and upskilling provided to artists, and relationships established, increased capacity and structures across the region and in various settings, to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.
- *Work with Partners to develop health and wellbeing programmes*: Relationships established between project partners and stakeholders strengthened the potential for developing settings-based approaches to health and wellbeing.
- *Support Creative People*: Professional development opportunities provided to artists resulted in increased skills, peer networks, financial compensation, and potential for future income.
- *Creative Aging*: Delivered creative sessions contributing to a more meaningful life for older people.
- *Enabling Creativity in Every Community*: Delivered creative sessions benefitting older people in various care settings throughout the two counties.
- *Value and support artists, crafters and other creatives*: Recognised the need to support the professional development of creatives through upskilling to more effectively support creativity, especially within older communities, and to provide more employment opportunities for those creatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggest significant value in developing a county-wide or regional panel of artists—potentially aligned with the HSE West region—who are trained to work across multiple healthcare environments. A shared regional panel would reduce long-term administrative and capacity-building costs, expand employment opportunities for artists, and provide the flexibility required to deliver responsive, high-quality creative engagement for patients, residents, and older people participating in HSE and public-health programmes.

The project has successfully created a panel of trained and experienced professional artists capable of supporting creativity in various acute care settings. In doing so, the project has strengthened existing and formed new relationships, establishing trust between project partners and stakeholders. Lessons learned through practical application of training, and relationship building, enhanced the delivery of creative sessions benefitting the quality of life and wellbeing of older people living in care settings throughout the two counties.

To build upon these achievements and ensure their continuing and long lasting positive impact, creative initiatives targeting older people need to be imbedded in formal health care planning. Furthermore, as the Government of Ireland has committed to ensuring the mental and physical health and wellbeing of citizens, sustainable funding must be provided for the ongoing delivery of creative initiatives in acute care settings, together with the required artist training.

INTRODUCTION

Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project

BACKGROUND

In early 2024, Creative Ireland announced a call for proposals for projects supporting health and wellbeing to be led by at least two Local Authorities working in partnership. Projects were to be developed and delivered by the partnering Local Authorities' Creative Ireland and Healthy Ireland teams working in collaboration with the relevant HSE Health & Wellbeing Officers and other relevant healthcare officers, teams or networks.

In total, 15 projects, including four Shared Island projects, were successful in securing funding. One of these, the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project, was a joint proposal developed by Mayo and Roscommon County Councils (the project promoters), working in partnership with the Irish Hospice Foundation's Arts and Cultural Engagement Team.

Supported by a total award of €140,000 under the Creative Health and Wellbeing strand of the Creative Ireland Programme, this two-year collaborative initiative sought to enhance the skills and experience of artists and creative facilitators (henceforth referred collectively in this document as 'artists') throughout the Mayo Roscommon area. The purpose of the training was to enable the integration of creative activities into healthcare settings - from private homes and hospitals to nursing homes and hospices.

Recognising that the long-term sustainability of creative engagement in healthcare settings depends on artists being equipped to work in sensitive environments, the project explored what supports and resources were required to achieve its objective. To this end, the project delivered end-of-life care and bereavement training, capacity building, and peer mentoring supports designed to help artists working in acute and end-of-life care settings, and to ensure the expansion of access to arts and creative opportunities.

Practical application of skills learned entailed the delivery of creative residencies (hereafter referred to as 'sessions') by trained artists in nursing homes, hospices, hospitals, and private homes throughout the project area. In fostering a supportive environment for artists, the promoters also sought to promote positive ageing, health and wellbeing, and the quality of life of older residents in the region participating in creative sessions.

The promoters envisaged that the skills, experience, and connections made by those involved in the project would have a lasting impact upon how similar creative initiatives are delivered in future in the Mayo Roscommon region.

The project was informed by and expands upon earlier Creative Ireland supported projects such as *Conversations in Portrait*, a Creativity in Older Age Virtual Portrait project led by artist Andy Parsons, the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) pilot programme *Artist in Residence in Service to People at the end of life*, the HSE *Artist in Residence in Nursing Homes*, part of Roscommon County Council's *Creative Ageing in Roscommon* (CARE) programme, and the Creative Ireland-funded Mayo *Hearth* project.

PROJECT ACTIONS AND TIMEFRAME

The following key actions, as identified in the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project funding application, were to be delivered over the two-year period 2024-2025:

- *Capacity building and training for Mayo and Roscommon artists, facilitators and project leads in end of life and bereavement - delivered by Irish Hospice Foundation. Q2 2024 - Q4 2025*
- *Artist Residencies at Mayo Roscommon Hospice Units & Palliative Care. Q4 2024 - Q3 2025*

- *Artist Residencies with older people in their homes and in nursing homes – incorporating knowledge exchange programme with artists in Mayo Hearth Programme and Roscommon HSE Nursing Home Artist in Residence Programme. Q4 2024 - Q3 2025*

Target groups initially identified for the project included artists in Counties Mayo and Roscommon, Creative Communities and Arts Office personnel in both counties, care professionals to include hospice and nursing home staff, Public Health Nurses and Palliative Care teams, as well as participants themselves, specifically older residents of the region living at home or in care settings.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

In their original funding application the promoters identified the following ‘criteria’ for the project:

- *help to support positive mental health*
- *help to promote positive ageing*
- *support people to manage their health and wellbeing while living with a chronic disease*
- *assist in acute and end-of-life care*

In achieving these, the promoters identified the following as expected project outcomes:

- *Artists and creatives have the knowledge and confidence to emphatically respond or direct people to grief supports whilst undergoing projects engaging with the general public.*
- *Panel of artist & creative facilitators across both counties who have training and experience in creative practice at various settings which engage with themes of grief and end-of-life.*
- *Wider access to creative arts practice for participants who cannot attend events or workshops outside their homes or care places.*
- *Hospice as a new context with special focus in both areas. Together with Mayo Roscommon Hospice and Irish Hospice Foundation, explore how creative practitioners can support those impacted in these services - individuals at end-of-life, their families and care staff.*

These outcomes to be achieved through training, peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, and the delivery of creative sessions in residential care settings.

PROJECT EVALUATION

In the funding application, the promoters outlined a project reporting programme consisting of the following elements:

- *Wrap-Up Sessions for each Training, Knowledge Exchange and Creative Residencies;*
- *For the HSE Artist Residency in Nursing homes, the Arts Office collected feedback from all artists and nursing homes to review for the following year. The information was collected into one report and shared with the HSE, the artists and the Nursing Homes. This provided an insight into what changes were needed to improve and learnings to develop the programme. This project will follow a similar format.*
- *Reflection, evaluation and learnings with IHF Arts and Cultural Engagement Team.*
- *Artist Reflective Diaries*
- *Creative Health and Wellbeing Quarterly newsletter*
- *Reflective external evaluation of the project in the form of creative documentation such as an Animation Documentary, Video, or Book.*

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project delivery and the achievement of identified outcomes and outputs was managed by the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project team which was composed of Culture and Creativity and Arts Office representatives of the partnering County Councils. The team met regularly during the duration of the funded project to decide the programme of work, review delivery, and discuss new initiatives. It was comprised of the following individuals, as identified below.

| Name | Title | Organisation |
|---------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Rhona McGrath | Arts Officer & Creative Ireland Coordinator | Roscommon County Council |
| Áine Butler | Creative Communities Engagement Officer | Roscommon County Council |
| Mary Smyth | Public Art & Engagement Coordinator | Roscommon County Council |
| Ann Marie McGing | Arts Officer | Mayo County Council |
| Anna Livia Cullinan | Creative Communities Engagement Officer | Mayo County Council |
| Austin Vaughan | Creative Ireland Coordinator | Mayo County Council |

Roscommon County Council acted as lead project partner with the County's Creative Communities Engagement Officer responsible for reporting and financial management of training activities, the Project Coordinator, and participating Roscommon artists. Mayo County Council's Creative Communities Engagement Officer assumed responsibility for managing the activities of and financing for participating artists in County Mayo.

SUPPORTS TO ARTISTS

To prepare artists, as well as project team members, to deliver the project, targeted capacity building and training was provided throughout the duration of the project. As described in the funding application, this entailed *“broad awareness and grief support training with tools to enhance end-of-life care knowledge for artists & creative facilitators, and for project leads across Mayo and Roscommon, supporting reach amongst the wider community in these areas.”*

“This will develop into more focused, in-depth tailored training / mentoring with Irish Hospice Foundation Arts & Culture Engagement [to] inform and engage artists who are interested in working in grief and end of life settings. This includes peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange opportunities between experienced artists in both counties. Such as those who have undergone residencies in similar settings – IHF Hospice Residencies, Hearth project in Mayo and HSE Artist in Residence in Nursing Home Programme in Roscommon.”

The training was to be delivered in four stages, both in-person and online, throughout the duration of the project. In addition to being paid €150 for each creative session delivered to participants, artists were also compensated for training at the rate of €50 per session attended.

PROJECT PARTNERS – IRISH HOSPICE FOUNDATION

The IHF, the national charity for dying, death, and bereavement in Ireland, was a key partner in ensuring the effective design and delivery of training aspects of the project. The IHF's mission is to ensure everyone receives the necessary information, care, and support during end-of-life and bereavement. Since 2021, the IHF has been developing a *“Compassionate Culture Network”* across Ireland where locally-based artist, facilitators and support workers work within communities in exploring how creativity helps establish places where people can talk openly about loss and grief.

TRAINING PROPOSAL

Given its work in this area, and specifically with the Caru learning initiative (www.caru.ie), the project team approached the IHF to enquire if the organisation could design and delivery of a bespoke training programme to upskill experienced but untrained artists to enable them to work in acute care and end-of-life settings. The IHF responded with a four-part training proposal for upskilling artists, as well as project team members, over 12 days throughout the course of the project.

The IHF proposal addressed the impact on people working in palliative and end-of-life care settings, how to cope with grief and loss, practicing self-care techniques, and building resilience. The proposal reflected not just the delivery of formal training, but also the support and guidance provided to artists by IHF staff, the compiling and sharing of information, participation in the evaluation process, etc.

PROJECT BUDGET

The total approved budget for the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project was €140,000, €70,000 awarded for 2024 and €70,000 for 2025.

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

The total two year budget for each category of spend, as presented in the funding application and detailed above, is provided in summary below.

| Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context 2024-2025 | |
|--|-----------------|
| Training Programme – IHF fees/ artist honorarium | €20,000 |
| Creative Sessions - artist fees | €90,000 |
| Project Management – coordinator fee | €10,000 |
| Training expenses – room hire / refreshments | €5,000 |
| Hearth / HSE Nursing Home Artist CPD | €5,000 |
| Reflective external evaluation | €10,000 |
| Total | €140,000 |

Following receipt of funding approval, and the refining of training needs, etc., a more detailed revised budget was established for the project (presented in later section).

POLICY CONTEXT

The Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity Project responded appropriately to key national and regional strategies and policies, as outlined in the following section.

PROJECT IRELAND 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the Government of Ireland’s “overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development” of the nation. A key objective of Project Ireland, National Policy Objective 26, states that the Government will:

Support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.

HEALTHY IRELAND

Healthy Ireland is the government-led “national Framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Ireland.” It seeks to “create an Irish society where everyone can enjoy good physical and mental health, and where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society.” Healthy Ireland aims to create an Ireland where health and wellbeing are on everyone’s agenda in a meaningful way. The Framework, “a roadmap for building a healthier Ireland”, has four key goals:

- *to increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life*
- *to reduce health inequalities*
- *to protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing*
- *to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland*

In providing access to art and creative activities within care and private home settings, the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity Project adopted the settings-based approach to health promotion prioritised as “*Healthy Places: Healthy Homes and Healthy Communities*” in the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021–2025.

The project also addresses the Strategic Action Plan’s Partnerships and Cross-Sectoral Work Strategic Action 2.4: “*Build capacity and structures at all levels across national and local government and various settings to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.*” Specifically, the project responds to Action 2.4.4 to “*Work with relevant partners to continue development of existing settings-based health and wellbeing programmes and progress new settings-based approaches.*”

LOCAL ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY PLANS

At local level, the project responds to Mayo and Roscommon Local Economic and Community Plans as follows:

ROSCOMMON COUNTY LOCAL ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY PLAN (LECP) 2023-2029

The LECP establishes as a High Level Goal for the period of the plan: “*A county where people’s health and wellbeing are supported*”, with the specific objective to “*Support a positive approach to health and wellbeing for everyone living, working and visiting County Roscommon*”. Actions under this objective include the implementation of the ‘Healthy Roscommon’ plan (5.1.3) and to “*Increase public access to health and wellbeing infrastructure, supports and programmes in line with ‘Healthy Roscommon’* (5.1.5). In delivering sessions to those in acute and end-of-life care settings, the project sought to support the health and wellbeing of participants, in line with LECP objectives.

MAYO COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY PLAN (LECP 2023-29) SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATEMENT: DRAFT VISION AND HIGH-LEVEL GOALS

The Socio-Economic Statement identifies as a proposed High Level Goal that “*Communities in Mayo are empowered, healthy, welcoming whilst working collaboratively to promote resilience.*” Proposed objectives include “*Promote healthy and active communities in Mayo.*” The project responds to this by delivering sessions supporting the health and wellbeing of residents, specifically those in acute and end-of-life care settings.

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY STRATEGIES

The project responds to Mayo and Roscommon Local Authority Culture and Creativity strategies, as follows:

ROSCOMMON CULTURE AND CREATIVITY STRATEGY 2023–2027

The Roscommon Strategy prioritises the following strategic themes “*People, Place, Practice and Partnership*”. The Mayo Roscommon project, in supporting the upskilling of artists and delivering of creative sessions, directly addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Priority 1: “*Creative People - Support, develop and deliver projects that support the ambitions of creative people, that develop creative skills, and build valuable relationships and networks, prioritising the following:*
 - *CARE Creative Ageing in Roscommon: Projects which contribute to a meaningful life for older people.*
- Priority 3: *Creative Practice Support, develop, and deliver projects that practice creativity, that centre on community-engaged arts practice, that support professional development, and that lead to sustainable careers, prioritising the following:*
 - *Supports to indigenous creatives and creative businesses to sustain, develop and grow their practice and business through commissioning, mentoring, skills development, training, design, branding and marketing, and to explore how local creatives can add value to ‘non-creative’ businesses.*
- Priority 4: *Creative Partnership Support, develop, and deliver projects that foster unique, unexpected and creative partnerships between agencies, individuals and communities to drive scale, impact and ambition, prioritising the following:*
 - *Partnerships which build on the agility and integrated approach of the Culture and Creativity Team to sustain further delivery of targeted collaborative programmes*

MAYO CULTURE AND CREATIVITY STRATEGY 2023–2027

The Strategy envisages “*everyone living in Mayo will have the opportunity to express themselves according to their needs and abilities.*” The project’s provision of target training and upskilling, and the delivery of creative sessions, directly responds to the following Strategic Priorities:

- Priority 1: *Enabling Creativity in Every Community* - empower and build capacity and support participation in creative initiatives.
- Priority 4: *Promote democratisation of culture through heritage, arts and cultural organisations working with communities:*
 - *Continue to ensure that key target groups are provided for within Mayo, including older people, people with disabilities, intercultural groups, the Gaeltacht community and marginalized groups.*
- Priority 5: *Value and support artists, crafters and other creatives*
 - *Through existing and new infrastructure provide opportunities for creatives to meet, network and skill-share.*
 - *Communicate the value of our artists and creatives by connecting them to communities and by offering them opportunities for work through the Creative Ireland Programme.*
 - *Provide capacity building opportunities for creative practitioners, with a focus on interdisciplinary and collaborative project development*

REVIEW OF PROJECT DELIVERY

INITIAL STAGES

The promoters were officially notified of funding having been approved for the project on the 31 May 2024. Accordingly, a call out was issued in June 2024 for artists to submit an Expression of Interest, including a short proposal as to how they might participate in the project, a CV, and examples of relevant work.

Following a review and assessment by the promoters of submitted proposals, 15 artists were selected to attend an introductory training session with the Irish Hospice Foundation held in the Mayo Education Centre in Castlebar on 17 July 2024 (artists were paid an ‘honorarium’ of €50 for attending). Several of the artists had previous experience of delivering art workshops as part of the Hearth initiative (Mayo) and CARE programme (Roscommon).

Following the introductory session, those artists who attended were asked to respond to an online questionnaire regarding their desired residency setting, i.e. private home or care setting, and region, i.e. Mayo or Roscommon or both, etc. Artists were also asked to briefly outline their residency proposal and how this would be suitable for their desired setting.

All 15 selected artists submitted responses, which were assessed to determine how many and which artists were to proceed to the bespoke training and support stages to be facilitated by the IHF’s Arts and Cultural Engagement Team.



PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

Of the 15 artists initially selected to participate in the project, eight were from County Mayo and seven from County Roscommon. They represented a range of creative disciplines from the visual arts to music and creative movement.

| Mayo Artists | Discipline | Roscommon Artists | Discipline |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pamela Gray | Visual arts | Catherine Donnelly | Creative movement & dance |
| Bernie Garvey O'Mara | Visual arts | Flin Keane | Multidisciplinary art |
| Norah Brennan | Visual arts | Sarah Ellen Lundy | Visual arts |
| Mags Duffy | Visual arts | Patricia Blighe | Creative therapy and wellbeing |
| Tom Meskill | Participatory arts | Emma Brennan | Multidisciplinary visual art |
| Maggie Morrisson | Visual arts | Bianca Fachel | Music |
| Catherine Gannon | Multidisciplinary art and design | Paula Naughton | Creative Therapy & Wellbeing |
| Breda Mayock | Visual artist & Project Coordinator | | |

While all 15 were selected, one withdrew from participating following the initial training session due to other commitments and a second, who attended the first three training sessions, also later withdrew. Neither delivered any creative sessions.

As artist Breda Mayock was appointed to be the project coordinator, only 12 of the initial 15 artists were ultimately engaged in delivering creative sessions.

PROJECT COORDINATOR

A Project Coordinator was employed by the project promoters to ensure the effective delivery of the project. The part-time, fixed term contract for services was for the period August 2024 to October 2025. The role of the Coordinator was to:

- Work with Local Authorities and the Irish Hospice Foundation Arts & Cultural Engagement Team in coordinating the Capacity Building and Training Programme for artists and healthcare workers, including scheduling, booking venues, and liaising with participants.
- Work with Roscommon County Council and Mayo County Council Arts Offices, Mayo Roscommon Hospice, Nursing Homes, and Artists in coordinating the Artist in Residence Programmes.
- Work with Roscommon County Council and Mayo County Council Creative Communities & Engagement Officers to manage project budgets and payments.
- Prepare, collect, and collate evaluations for each initiative, contributing to the overall end-of-project reflection, learnings and evaluation by the Local Authorities, Irish Hospice Foundation and Creative Ireland.

In line with procurement policies, Roscommon County Council issued a Request for Quotations from individuals interested in applying for the post of Coordinator. This competitive process required applicants to provide an outline budget based on the total budget available for the role.

Breda Mayock, artist and musician, and the originator/ coordinator (2009-2024) of Mayo's *Hearth - Art for Older People at Home* initiative successfully applied and was appointed to the position in August 2024.

TRAINING

TRAINING INTRODUCTION

The long-term sustainability of arts and creative engagement in healthcare and public health initiatives is dependent upon having access to artists who are equipped to work in these sensitive environments. For this reason, the primary objective of the promoters in undertaking this project was the creation of a panel of professional artists trained to work effectively in acute care settings, in collaboration with care providers.

To this end, the project team engaged with the IHF's Arts and Cultural Engagement Team, led by Dominic Campbell, to design and deliver a bespoke training programme catering to the needs of participating artists as well as project team members. The programme regularly reviewed and incorporated new training subjects in response to needs identified during the course of the project, for example in relation to dementia care.

EVENTS

This training, which sought to prepare artists for working in acute and end-of-life residential settings, commenced with an initial session to introduce the IHF and its work and approach to creative engagement, which has been informed by years of experience in developing and delivering programmes.

In the first session, the IHF presenter shared the experiences and lessons learned by the IHF in delivering similar initiatives, responded to queries, and concerns, and guided discussion amongst attendees especially those artists who had no previous experience of working in acute and end-of-line settings. In addition to supporting artists in developing their practice and skills, the IHF facilitated peer learning between participating artists and addressed issues arising from engagement with the project, e.g. setting and maintaining work practice boundaries, selfcare, etc. This included both online and in-person support to artists.



Responding to the emerging needs of the artists, the project promoters, and target participant audiences, the training programme was appropriately revised from that originally submitted by the IHF. This was partly in response to a realisation on the part of the promoters that the time commitment of artists was more demanding than originally envisaged. As a result, it was determined that training could be more effectively delivered in seven training sessions, including in person and virtual.

Training delivered include, for example, an October 2024 IHF course “Conversations in Nursing Homes - What happens when we stop?” which addressed the following topics:

- *Active Compassionate Listening*
- *Grief and Loss - Know your limits – compassionate response*
- *How to support someone who is grieving*
- *Self-care in the context of grief*



This training was designed to inform participants about how to deal with grief and loss and build confidence in discussing difficult topics.

The following table provides an overview of all the training events delivered over the course of the project.

| Date | Title | Venue | Attendees |
|------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 17/07/2024 | Initial training day | Mayo Education Centre | 14 |
| 01/10/2024 | IHF Peer-to-Peer session | Online | 16 |
| 08/10/2024 | Awareness raising & general info (conversations) | Online | 14 |
| 26/11/2024 | Story so Far (led by Dominic) | Roscommon Áras an Chontae | 14 |
| 27/03/2025 | Dementia focused training | Castlebar Regional Training Centre | 15 |
| 22/09/2025 | Experiences to date | Online | 12 |
| 9/1/2026 | Reflective meeting | Roscommon Áras an Chontae | 15 |

In addition to the scheduled training programme, two were required to attend mandatory site specific online training (via www.hseland.ie) to allow them deliver sessions within Roscommon Hospice and Hospital. As with other training, the artists received honorariums for completing this training.

LEARNINGS

In response to a need identified by the interim evaluation of the project, a Dementia Care training was held on 27 March 2025 in Castlebar. This was led by Roscommon County Council project team members who arranged for guest speakers and peer networking activities. Speakers included Veronica O’Connor, an AZURE programme trained artist, and Paula Noone, Assistant Director of Nursing for Dementia Quality Improvement, HSE West and North West. The IHF representative attended and



contributed to the training. Project team members and project stakeholders were also invited to attend the training sessions.

PEER TRAINING

A key aspect of the training was the facilitating of ‘peer-to-peer’ learning and opportunities for knowledge exchange between participants. This was especially important in that it allowed, for example, participants who had previous experience of working in care settings to share their experiences and lessons learned. Peer-to-peer exchanges were encouraged throughout the duration of the project, both in formal training sessions and between artists themselves.

To further support those with little previous experience of working in care settings, the project budgeted for assigning more experienced artists as mentors during year one of the project. This ‘*peer shadowing*’ aspect of the project entailed a less experienced artist accompanying a more experienced peer as they delivered creative sessions. In total, 6 mentoring sessions were delivered in year one with two artists benefitting from mentoring support (three sessions per artist).

CREATIVE SESSIONS

As described, a key element of the project was the provision of opportunities for the practical application by artists of learned skills and knowledge. These were separated into ‘one-to-one’ visits where artists worked with individuals living in their own homes and group sessions delivered in institutional care settings, e.g. nursing homes, hospices, etc. (hereafter referred to as ‘care settings’).

In their initial applications, the artists expressed their preferences as to the setting they wished to work in, either home visits or care settings, or both. The project teams, with the Coordinator, reviewed these applications and allocated sessions to artists based upon their preference, capacity, and amount available for sessions. Additional funding arising from an underspend on project costs allowed for the allocating of additional sessions to artists.

The targets initially established for the project were 142 group sessions (70 Roscommon/ 72 Mayo) and 470 individual or home visits (230 Roscommon/ 240 Mayo), a total of 612 sessions to be delivered over the course of the project.

Following completion of initial training, the artists commenced delivering creative sessions towards the end of 2024. Due to a delay in confirmation of funding, the project did not start until June and, as a result, it was not possible to achieve the originally proposed delivery target of 310 total sessions in 2024. Those living in private homes were to have received 160 sessions and those in care settings, e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, and hospices, 150 in year one of the project. Ultimately, 246 sessions were delivered by December 2024 with the remainder carried over for delivery in early 2025 (though counted as 2024 sessions), in addition to planned 2025 sessions. Shortfalls arising from an underspend in training and travel expenditure allowed for the reallocating of funding to allow each artist to deliver an additional creative session.

In total, 652 sessions were delivered to homes and care settings over the two-year course of the project, as shown in the table below. This total includes six mentoring and ten evaluation sessions delivered. The evaluation sessions entailed a participating artist working alongside other artists delivering creative sessions and providing feedback to the project team in relation to the impact of sessions on participants.

HOME VISITS

Home visits entailed one-to-one sessions delivered by artists to residents in their own home. In the respective areas, potential participants were identified by the project team and Coordinator in partnership with locally based agencies working with older people.

Artists were assigned to delivering home visits based upon their expressed preferences and abilities and taking into account their location and ability to travel to private homes. Artists visited participants in their own home once a week for hour-long, one-to-one creative sessions tailored to the needs and abilities of the participant.

As the Hearth initiative had been operating in County Mayo for many years, and had established relationships with care agencies, Family Support Centres (FRCs), and others, the roll-out of home visits occurred more promptly in the County. In total, 160 sessions were delivered into private homes in Mayo over the course of the project, with twenty older residents visited weekly for eight weeks by a trained artist.

In Roscommon, however, challenges in identifying potential participants arose from the lack of existing relationships with agencies, resulting in a slower start to the delivery of home visits. Contact with FRCs was not initially pursued as their clients tended to be isolated/ socially excluded persons, as opposed to those in acute and, or end of life situations. Instead, liaison was established with Alone, the *'national organisation that enables older people to age at home'*, to identify potential participants. Eventually, older, socially excluded participants were identified for creative sessions in the home and, in total, 160 sessions were delivered throughout County Roscommon.

CARE SETTINGS

The project facilitated the delivery of group sessions in care settings in both counties. The venues for these were identified through the project engaging with managers of the respective care settings to determine interest in hosting sessions. Those venues thus selected were as follows:

- Roscommon Hospice, Roscommon
- Roscommon University Hospital, Roscommon
- Sacred Heart Hospital & Care Home, Roscommon
- Áras Mhathair Phoil Nursing Home, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon
- Plunkett Community Nursing Unit, Boyle, Co. Roscommon
- Mayo Hospice, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
- Sacred Heart Hospital, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
- McBride Community Unit, Westport, Co. Mayo
- D'Alton Nursing Home, Claremorris, Co. Mayo

The experience of artists delivering sessions within these care settings varied between venue. This was primarily due to the receptiveness of participating care settings to the project, their ability to accommodate and facilitate creative sessions, and the relationships existing between the project promoters and management.

In some settings, staff were welcoming and responsive especially where there were existing relationships with artists, for example Sacred Heart Hospital & Care Home, Roscommon. Some provided dedicated physical spaces for activities, whereas other venues were unable to offer the same due to lack of resources. In each case, artists had to maintain a flexible approach in design and adapting sessions to meet participant as well as care setting needs. In the case of Roscommon University Hospital physical space challenges



were resolved by artists creating a 'mobile exhibition & workshop' trolley ("*Moving Art Cart*") that enabled art to be delivered directly to participants' bedsides.

Participation levels for group sessions varied by week and between care settings with, according to the project promoters, 4-12 participants attending per session on average. In the case of Sacred Heart Hospital in Castlebar where 24 sessions were delivered, the average was considerably greater with a minimum of 14 participants per session experienced (high of 22).

In Mayo Hospice, the first 12-week programme of creative sessions had approximately 65 participants and the second 12-week programme had 35 approximately. In this care setting, the artists engaged with residents, staff, family members and visitors in delivering sessions.

Familiarity and experience with the delivery of creative sessions, and the existence of relationships with artists, improved the delivery of sessions. For example, while 96 sessions were delivered in Mayo Hospice in Ballina over the course of the project, only 6 were delivered in Roscommon Hospice despite initial planning for 40 sessions. The artists found it not possible to deliver sessions due to spatial restrictions and a challenging acute care setting. However, the artists initially assigned to the hospice were able to utilise staff feedback and lessons learned from the three sessions (co-delivered, six sessions in total) they did deliver when their remaining sessions were reallocated to Roscommon University Hospital.

In total, over the course of the project, 332 sessions were delivered to participants in care settings. Of this total, 102 were delivered to hospices, 74 to hospitals, and 144 to nursing homes (plus 12 mentoring session). In addition, three 'end of residency' coffee mornings were hosted in nursing homes to which families were invited to join participants, staff, and artists and to view creative outputs.

SESSION TOTALS

The tables below provide an overview of the number and type of sessions delivered by year and by county, and in total.

| Mayo | Private | Hospice | Hospital | Nursing home | Mentoring | Total sessions |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| 2024 | 80 | 48 | 0 | 36 | 6 | 170 |
| 2025 | 80 | 48 | | 36 | 0 | 164 |
| Mayo Total | 160 | 96 | 0 | 72 | 6 | 334 |
| Roscommon | | | | | | |
| 2024 | 90 | 6 | 34 | 36 | 6 | 172 |
| 2025 | 70 | 0 | 40 | 36 | 0 | 146 |
| Roscommon Total | 160 | 6 | 74 | 72 | 6 | 318 |
| Combined Totals | | | | | | |
| 2024 | 170 | 54 | 34 | 72 | 12 | 342 |
| 2025 | 150 | 48 | 40 | 72 | 0 | 310 |
| Project Total | 320 | 102 | 74 | 144 | 12 | 652 |

PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

From the outset, the promoters promoted the project widely using established relationships with artists, stakeholders, local agencies and care settings. Key to the success of the project was the use of existing relationships to recruit artists, many of whom had previous experience with the HSE *Artist in Residence in Nursing Homes* and the *Hearth* project. Some were contacted directly about the project or heard about it by

word of mouth from others who had previously been involved with similar projects. Press releases and advertisements were also utilised to recruit interested artists, as well as to raise local awareness of the project itself. Similarly, previous experience working with nursing homes and other care settings facilitated the organising of meetings and direct contact with care managers to ascertain levels of interest in hosting creative sessions.

In the original application the promoters identified that the collaboration of the two local authority teams would *'support awareness of the project among a broad audience'*. To this end, it was initially proposed that the project team would produce a *'joint Creative Health and Wellbeing Quarterly newsletter'* to share the achievements of the initiative with wider audiences. It was also proposed that 'a series of mini-pods' would be broadcast on local radio. These initiatives were not ultimately achieved due to the limitations of project funding and the demand for training related activities.



Within care settings, there were on occasion opportunities to showcase participant artwork to other residents, staff, families and the wider public, for example, the 'end of residency' coffee mornings hosted in nursing homes, etc.

Relevant links to platforms:

- Age Friendly Ireland blog: <https://agefriendlyireland.ie/news/sharing-creative-health-and-wellbeing-in-the-community-blogs-from-creative-ireland-2>

BUDGET AND SPEND

The total budget allocated to the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project was €140,000, €70,000 awarded in 2024 and €70,000 in 2025. In accordance with the funders' requirements, the full amount was drawn down, half in 2024 and the remainder in 2025. To date, the full amount of funding has been expensed or allocated to be paid.

REVISED PROJECT BUDGET

As previously noted, the draft budget included in the original application was updated and revised by the promoters to better reflect the planned delivery during the remaining months of the project's first year, 2024, and throughout 2025.

ACTUAL EXPENDITURE

The table below represents the actual project spend of 100% of funding received.

| | Actual | |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 2024 | 2025 |
| Artist fees | 52,200 | 44,700 |
| Mentoring | 900 | - |
| Training honorarium | 1,250 | 1,650 |
| Training expenses | 1,150 | 870 |
| IHF training | 6,000 | 3,680 |
| Coordinator fee | 5,500 | 6,200 |
| Materials | 3,000 | 3,000 |
| Evaluation | - | 9,900 |
| | 70,000 | 70,000 |

Notes on Actual spend:

- Artist fees - relate to payment for creative sessions delivered
- Mentoring - payments to artists providing mentor support for creative sessions
- Training honorarium – payments to artists for attending training
- IHF training – payment for training and support provided by IHF
- Coordinator fees – payment to the Project Coordinator
- Materials – cost of arts materials provided for sessions
- Underspend in budget areas allowed for reallocating to the delivery of additional sessions

PAYMENTS

All payees submitted invoices to the respective County Creative Communities Engagement Officer for approval and processing for payment by the relevant local authority, i.e. Mayo or Roscommon.

OBSERVATIONS ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The budget was monitored and managed effectively by the project team throughout the project duration and the funders informed via end of year reporting. Changes to the budget, for example reallocating underspent funding to areas of need, etc., were discussed and agreed by the project team, with input from the Project Coordinator. Direct approval from the funders was not required for minor changes to budget allocations.

Management of the project took place in formal meetings – in person and online, as well as regular telephone communications. The adopting of a flexible approach to managing project delivery, particularly in relation to the delivery of training and practical application of learnings, enabled the promoters to more effectively respond to emerging challenges and opportunities while adhering to overall funding levels.

INTERIM EVALUATION

Evaluation was a key aspect of the project and included sharing of feedback from artists and their keeping of 'Reflective Diaries' recording their personal experiences, thoughts, emotions, lessons learned, etc. The purpose of doing so was to encourage reflective practice on the part of the artists. To facilitate knowledge sharing discussion, artists reviewed their diaries to refresh their memories before attending training events to include 'wrap-up' sessions conducted at the conclusion of training and creative sessions.

In addition, artists completed individual reports upon completion of their delivery of creative session. These served as a summary of artist learning experiences, personal observations, response of participants, and number of attendees.

INTERNAL REVIEW

As part of an Interim Review process, a participating artist was appointed to carry out an internal overview/evaluation of the project in late 2024, the purpose of which was to gain an understanding of the experience of artists and to identify any gaps in training needing to be addressed. The artist tasked with undertaking this accompanied other artists while they delivered creative sessions in care settings and private homes to evaluate the practical application of training.



Key findings of the Interim Review/Evaluation identified included the following:

- *artists took the time to engage with participants...tailoring visits to best meet their needs.*
- *sessions had a beneficial impact on the mental and emotional well-being of participants.*
- *artists' talents were diverse, ranging from music and dance to visual arts and storytelling.*
- *[care home staff involvement in session delivery] ...created a sense of teamwork and collaboration, and ensured...[integration] into existing care programmes.*
- *Positive outcomes:*
 - *Improved mood - had a noticeable impact on the mood and atmosphere of care settings.*
 - *Social interaction - encouraged social interaction...helping to break down barriers.*
 - *Sense of community - created a sense of community and belonging.*
- *Recommendations for future funding:*
 - *Increased frequency...to ensure that residents and patients can benefit from regular creative engagement.*
 - *Expanded reach...to reach more care homes and hospitals, bringing joy...to an even wider audience.*
 - *Collaboration...encourage collaboration between artists and healthcare professionals to develop tailored programmes that meet [identified] needs.*
- *Conclusion...the programme deserves continued support and funding to expand its reach and make an even more significant difference in the lives of individuals in private homes, care homes, hospitals and beyond.*

As part of the interim review process, the IHF facilitated a 'check in' with artists to allow for group reflection on the project to-date.

INTERIM SURVEY

An interim survey of artists was also carried out. The following provides a broad summary of responses provided by artists to the survey.

CONCERNS

More experienced artists stated they had no concerns prior to project commencement, whereas others expressed concerns ranging from their *“ability to react appropriately”* in end-of-life settings and having *“the right words to deal with different situations”*, to how to adapt sessions to meet participant needs and *“how to get participants interested and willing to engage.”*

TRAINING

Training was widely regarded as key to building confidence and equipping artists to work in care settings, with grief and managing emotional boundaries training described as particularly impactful. Training created opportunities for artists to validate their own experiences, exchange ideas, and learn from colleagues.

Artists regarded the combination of practical guidance, peer learning, and real-world case studies as the most beneficial aspects, directly strengthening their skills, confidence, and sense of connection within the project. One artist described the process as *“transformative”* as it allowed for *“sharing experiences, learning from others, and receiving constructive feedback”*.

The role of facilitators was emphasised, with their guidance and structured discussions providing a forum for artists to *“ask questions, hear other people’s concerns and learn from their experiences.”*

PEER SUPPORT

Peer support was described as important to confidence-building with many emphasising the comfort of knowing that others shared their concerns and challenges: *“hearing similar stories has reassured me that my struggles are not unique.”* Overall, these sessions were seen as *“extremely helpful,”* offering reassurance, fresh perspectives, and a space to learn from one another.

MENTORSHIP

Those mentored stated it had a positive impact, one reporting *“The mentor sessions were excellent... [my mentor] taught me so much and got me involved from the beginning, which really boosted my confidence.”* A mentor stated that their involvement made them *“evaluate and really consider the way I do things in certain situations again,”* showing how teaching others prompted self-reflection. All involved found the process mutually beneficial to enhancing their confidence, approaches, and understanding of working in care settings.

IMPROVING TRAINING AND SUPPORTS

Most artists expressed satisfaction with the training received, some responding that no improvements were needed. Suggestions for how support and training could be strengthened included:

- Developing *“a concise guide... outlining key resources related to the work being done by the artists, recommended books, videos to watch, and an introduction to some of the projects”* which would make navigating the information easier and more practical, especially given the wealth of invaluable resources provided to artists.
- More training in relation to conditions such as dementia and Parkinson’s, to better understand how these impact participants and their level of engagement.
- Providing more structured opportunities to *“express what’s happening and exchange ideas”* in relation to one-to-one work in particular.

There were also reflections on programme design and terminology with one artist stating that use of the term “*project*” implied pressure to produce results within a set timeframe which overshadowed a more process-led approach. The extent and quality of support provided by the project team and the project coordinator was also specifically noted.

SUGGESTIONS

Ideas for future training topics included healthcare knowledge, practical guidance, and peer learning, and specifically:

- Guidance on working with older people suffering from dementia, Parkinson’s, and Alzheimer’s, and practical strategies to support participants experiencing distress or behavioural changes linked to these conditions. For example “*a toolkit of responses when conversations about death arise... and training on how to best manage participants who are suffering distress due to dementia.*”

Ideas as to additional resources and supports that could improve the programme for future artists included:

- Concrete examples and first-hand perspectives to give newcomers clearer insight into what to expect, to include from care staff or activities coordinators who had seen the benefits of the programme first-hand. For example, “*a talk with participants, perhaps through a video featuring artists, staff, and participants sharing their experiences*”.
- More guidance on scheduling, administration, e.g. invoicing, payments, etc.
- Extending mentoring and peer support for new artists, to allow artists to deepen their practice, and to share strategies, ideas, and reflections on what has worked in different settings.
- More structured opportunities—such as presentations where artists share their work and exchange contacts—would strengthen the network.

Artists emphasised the importance of workshops on health conditions such as dementia, as well as exposure to external specialists, for example, a “*death doula*”.

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Artists generally found the reflective journal to be a helpful tool for engaging with the project and tracking their progress, with most responses indicating that the journal supported both involvement and self-assessment. However, while beneficial for most, its value was not experienced equally by all artists.

FEEDBACK ON EVALUATION PROCESS

Artists offered a mix of reflections, practical suggestions, and affirmations about the interim evaluation process. A recurring point was the importance of gathering feedback directly from participants and staff, not only from mentors, to ensure sessions are impactful.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Artists described mentoring, reflective practice, and working in sensitive environments as key influences on their professional development, with some referring to how the project has reshaped their artistic practice. Some artists describe being inspired by their colleagues, as well as by their project experiences, to explore new forms of expression.

The use of practical skills learned, particularly in relation to working with participants, was also emphasised with one artist stating, “*I now use a lot of sensory work with participants, which I will definitely incorporate into the rest of my practice.*”

The project created valuable opportunities to network with other artists and professionals. Networking sparked inspiration and the potential for collaborations, including film and music work. One artist described collaboration with another as *“a fantastic way of sharing skills, ideas, support and developing my own work as an artist”*.

LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT WITH RESIDENTS

Most rated their level of engagement with participants as being high, though a number reported moderate engagement. One artist reported low engagement, however, this most likely reflected the extent of their involvement at the time of the interim evaluation.

Some artists recalled participants consistently asking about return visits, which they interpreted as a clear sign of engagement and value.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Artists identified a variety of effective strategies to engage participants, ensure their comfort, and encourage creativity, with the importance of simplicity and flexibility emphasised. These included, for example:

- Offering only one or two options to make it easier for participants to choose.
- Adjusting sessions depending upon the goal, i.e. to produce art or simply to enjoy the process.
- Building rapport by learning names, talking with participants about their preferences, and showing genuine interest in their lives to break down barriers.
- Being warm and friendly, and removing any sense of mystery from the creative process, is essential.
- Creative use of props to stimulate memory and to spark conversation, e.g. taxidermied birds and animals, images of garden birds, etc.
- Using clay, sponges, and stamps with participants experiencing reduced dexterity.
- Relaxing music, bright colours, and thoughtful adjustments to physical comfort (such as table height) contributed to creating more positive and welcoming environments.

Visibility and integration into the care setting were also noted. In hospices, being *“visible but not intrusive,”* working alongside participants, and keeping staff informed encouraged wider engagement. In nursing homes, liaising regularly with activities coordinators (sometimes via WhatsApp) ensured sessions were responsive to the environment.

FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR WORK AND FUTURE INVOLVEMENT

Many described their experience as deeply rewarding, both personally and professionally, some telling of moments of joy and personal emotions. One stated, *“It has been incredible... this experience allows me to view my art from a new perspective, understanding its role not just as a creative expression but also as a tool for connection and healing.”* Others highlighted the reciprocal benefit, noting that the work had been as valuable to them as artists as it was to the participants.

Enthusiasm for participating in similar projects was widely shared, reflecting a strong appetite to remain involved in future. Artists consistently described the work as beneficial, inspiring, and worth developing further. Only a small caveat was raised, with one respondent noting they would be interested *“if the support was there,”* underscoring the importance of having strong organisational backing.

Some artists suggested a number of improvements that could enhance future projects:

- Provide for structured reflection or downtime to allow for artist wellbeing and self-care: *“a little bit of ‘sacred’ time for the artists themselves to enhance their own self-care”*.

- Regular feedback meetings to “*check in and get some feedback*” to ensure issues are addressed during the project rather than afterwards.
- More practical hands-on creative workshops in care settings to show “*how artists work.*”
- Greater involvement of care staff in the training process to build collaboration from the outset.
- Clarity and preparation in new settings: meet staff beforehand to discuss the project, share expectations, and answer questions. One artist reflected that starting in a new setting “*feels like starting all over again and can be tricky*” without such preparation.
- Provide ongoing peer support opportunities to allow artists to learn from and be supported by more experienced peers, seen as being vital to instilling confidence and continuous growth.

REASONS TO RECOMMEND

Artists were unanimous in their recommending of the project to others, describing it as both professionally enriching and personally fulfilling: “*It offers a unique opportunity to grow both personally and professionally by using art to make a meaningful impact in a sensitive and transformative environment.*”

The impact on participants was also a strong motivator, highlighting the importance of giving people in care settings a creative voice and bringing comfort and connection to individuals in vulnerable situations.

Respondents acknowledged, however, that the work requires empathy and openness to challenge, with one stating, “*I would [recommend it] if they had a genuine interest in engaging with older people as it can be sad and challenging but also so rewarding.*” Another added: “*Not everyone is suited to this type of work.*”

PROMOTING INVOLVEMENT

To attract more artists and increase future involvement, respondents recommended direct outreach and promotion using established networks, newsletters, artist networks, and social and traditional media. Other suggestions included:

- Sharing project achievements and documentation with the wider public to ensure greater visibility.
- Emphasising the value of first-hand artist testimony, the organising of public information sessions where prospective artists could ask questions, for example a “*coffee afternoon... to talk about the project*” or a “*free information day/session online or in person*”.
- Public events to showcase the project and its importance, e.g. exhibitions of works, project findings, etc.
- Contacting nursing home management directly and conducting introductory talks in care settings so that staff, and residents, understand the purpose and potential of a project.
- Expand networks beyond the HSE system to include privately operated nursing homes.

Overall, making the project more visible while also deepening on-the-ground healthcare connections should lead to greater levels of both artist and care setting participation.

The interim evaluation highlighted the successes of the project to date, as well as potential opportunities for improvement in its remaining few months. For example the addressing of identified training gaps by the provision of a dementia focused training day on 27 March 2025.

FINAL EVALUATION

The promoters also appointed an external body, Meehan Tully & Associates Ltd., to conduct a final evaluation examining the extent to which the project met the objectives agreed to by the project partners. This evaluation considered the following key areas:

- The effectiveness of providing access to artists for nursing homes, hospices, and individuals at home.
- Measuring the success of different programme strands, including artist capacity building and residency experiences.
- Understanding the challenges faced by artists working in palliative care for the first time.
- Effectiveness of collaboration between agencies, including Local Authorities, the Irish Hospice Foundation, HSE, and other partners.
- Assessing participant experience in a meaningful and ethical way.
- Identifying best practices for safeguarding artists and participants

METHODOLOGY

This evaluation process commenced in mid-2025 and concluded in January 2026 and incorporated reviewing all project documentation and financial information, attending online and in-person training sessions, one-to-one contact with the project team, the Coordinator, and individual stakeholder representatives, and the conducting of an online survey for artists with a separate survey for participating organisations.

As part of the evaluation assignment, a 'Telling the Story' creative output in the form of an '*Animation Documentary, Video, or Book*' was to be provided. Artists Mary Branley and Sarah O'Keefe, experienced publication creators, were commissioned by Meehan Tully & Associates Ltd. to carry out this aspect of the evaluation process. To inform their creative piece, they attended in-person training in January 2026 where they met with participating artists.

EVALUATION SURVEYS

SURVEY OF ARTISTS

As part of the Final Evaluation process, a second online survey was carried out in late 2025 to ascertain the experiences and views of participating artists. In total, 12 artists responded to the survey and a summary of responses received is presented below.

REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING

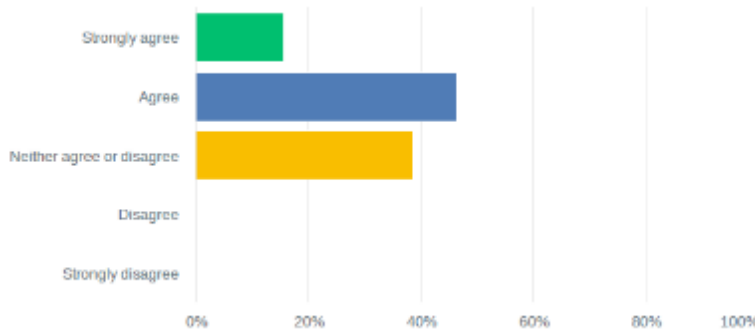
In response to the question what attracted them to taking part in the project as an artist, the following comments were provided.

- *Sharing, encouraging and supporting people to make their own work inspires me.*
- *I'm interested in arts and social engagement and how art can transform one's experience of daily life.*
- *I was attracted to take part...as a means of using my creative skills [for beneficial purposes].*
- *This was a great opportunity to bring my creative facilitation background and volunteering with older aged people in their own homes together.*
- *Learning – how to handle the elephant in the room when working with older people i.e. illness /death /loss /grief. Collaboration – An opportunity to work and collaborate with artists from other art forms. Being part of a large, supported team.*
- *The project offered a unique pathway to realise the therapeutic power of music—the ability of familiar songs to unlock memories, rescue emotional connection, and foster genuine moments of presence and joy.*
- *I did not have any experience working with the elderly...this would be a great way to gain experience and learn new skills within a supportive environment.*
- *I had been working on art projects with older members of the community, so it seemed appropriate to work in care settings.*
- *The opportunity to work in a more extensive way as an artist with older people in different care settings.*
- *I had been an artist with the Hearth project...This project was a perfect fit for me.*
- *The ethos of working with older people and the sick is very appealing to me...they have so much to teach us.*
- *I've always believed art can have a very positive effect in a Health care environment.*

The responses highlight that many artists saw the project as an opportunity to use their existing practice, values, and experience to enhance the quality of life of older people, and to learn new skills to enable them to do so more effectively. Several described long-standing creative engagement with older people and saw the project as a natural continuation of that work. The potential for professional development through supported learning was also a significant draw, particularly for artists with less experience of working directly with older people. Some noted a belief that creativity has a meaningful place within healthcare.

ABILITY TO CONTRIBUTE

When asked if they felt confident about their ability to contribute to the project at the outset, more than 60% of artists replied in the affirmative, as shown below, with the reminder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

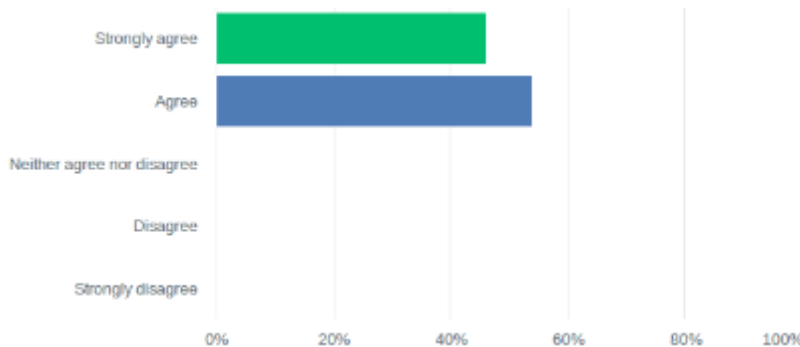


Just over half of respondents indicated that they felt more confident in their ability to contribute, with a combined 61.5% selecting either *agree* or *strongly agree*. At the same time, a substantial proportion of artists (38.5%) selected *neither agree nor disagree*. This neutrality is notable and suggests a degree of uncertainty rather than a lack of confidence. For some, this likely reflected awareness of the specific challenges involved in working in healthcare, and end-of-life or older-person settings, particularly among those with little or no experience of working in unfamiliar environments such as private homes or palliative care settings.

Though slightly different in that some reported more confidence at the beginning of the project in this survey, the overall findings are not dissimilar to the results of the interim survey.

CONFIDENCE IN CONTRIBUTING EFFECTIVELY

All the artists agreed with the statement that they felt more confident in their ability to contribute effectively at the end of the project, as shown below.



Responses show a clear and unambiguous increase in artists’ confidence following their participation in the project. All respondents reported that they now feel more confident in their ability to contribute effectively, with 100% selecting either *agree* or *strongly agree*. Notably, nearly half of respondents (46.2%) selected *strongly agree*, indicating a particularly strong shift in confidence for a significant proportion of artists. The absence of any neutral or negative responses at this stage suggests that the experience of working within the project, alongside its training, mentoring and practical delivery, played a key role in consolidating artists’ skills and sense of capability.

These results reflect an improvement from the interim survey, when two artists provided responses indicating that they did not feel overly confident in their ability to contribute.

QUALITY OF TRAINING

In relation to the quality of training provided and what, if any, improvements they would suggest, the following responses were given:

- *The training was very informative, in particular the dementia training.*
- *I found the training very beneficial and necessary...very helpful to have a peer group and ongoing support...and keep in touch/check-in...the training allowed me to explore “process work” with the participants, which focused on the “doing” rather than the requirement to produce an end result...I found it very helpful in the training to learn about boundaries.*
- *The training was extremely helpful, listening to the experience of the people in the medical and caring professions gave me a lot of knowledge and encouragement.*
- *I found the training helpful and on-point...could attend online evening and weekend sessions.*
- *What I most appreciated about the training was the sense of preparedness it gave me and the sense of being part of a bigger supported project.*
- *The training days were very informative... I learned a lot about boundaries and confidentiality and how to address disclosures from participants.*
- *The most valuable aspect...was gaining practical strategies for communication and adaptation. Learning about grief, the importance of non-verbal cues, [gave me] confidence to handle unpredictable moments...that a moment of withdrawal or agitation was...a sign that the environment or the approach needed adjustment. It made me aware to ensure every session was safe, respectful, and genuinely responsive to the participants’ needs.*
- *Training provided during the project was excellent...feedback was completely taken on board by the organisers...Experienced speakers delivered the training...The network that I have built with the other artists has been amazing...also beneficial that some of these training sessions were delivered online, as it was easier to fit into my work schedule.*
- *IHF training was very informative and helpful...the experience and peer support of the other artists was really important...I felt supported throughout the whole project.*
- *The training was helpful...made me more familiar with what I need to provide in more demanding situations...around illness and end of life of the scenarios.*
- *The training helped to allay any worries I had about going into the Hospice setting.*
- *Very good training, research and theory was excellent. Experimental aspects very worthwhile.*
- *I feel the training was very important in making me aware to aspects and roles within Healthcare I wasn’t aware of and hadn’t considered.*

The training was consistently described as an important and enabling element of the project, repeatedly referred to as being informative, relevant, and valuable. Several highlighted specific components that stood out, including dementia training, grief and end-of-life awareness, and input from medical and caring professionals. A recurring theme was the value of preparedness. Artists spoke about the training helping them feel equipped to work in complex and emotionally demanding settings.

Peer learning and shared reflection emerged as another strong feature as many artists valued the opportunity to hear from others working in different settings and disciplines. The peer group was identified as a source of reassurance, learning and professional connection, reflecting similar findings from the interim survey and the overall value of this aspect of the project.

In terms of improvements, very few were suggested though some artists noted that peer support should be further embedded as a feature of future training.

MENTORING

Artists who received, and delivered, mentoring were asked to provide their thoughts as to how their experiences affected their involvement, as well as any improvements they would make. The following are some of the responses provided:

- *[Mentoring] was a very special experience for both of us and the participants as we could create a wonderful unique experience...brought a great sense of culture to the sessions... [my mentee] let me know how helpful she found it to watch me in the sessions*
- *[Mentoring] felt very gentle and skills and experience sharing in nature, as we are all coming from different backgrounds and it is such a nuanced area of work that it was more peer-to-peer than anything but was so important to have this sharing session as it can otherwise be very isolated work for practitioners.*
- *[Mentoring]...fosters communication about what is evolving and allows discussion on different problems or difficulties that may arise but also fosters sharing of ideas and techniques that work really well.*
- *The support...was invaluable. [The mentor] allowed me to shadow her...showed me how the hospital operates, what is expected from the artist and how best to approach the art residency.*
- *One to one conversations where information can be shared helps everyone. It takes time to build relationships and mentoring provides a very good link in for people to feel free to question, suggest, share and learn.*

While the requirement for providing mentoring was small, it was described as a valuable and supportive element of the project to both those receiving and providing it, particularly given the sensitive and sometimes isolating nature of working in care settings. Artists who received or provided mentoring emphasised its role in building confidence, sharing experience and creating space for reflection, problem-solving, and professional exchange.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Artists were asked if participation in the project had been beneficial to their professional development. The following responses were given:

- *Philosophically and mentally, I have evolved as an artist through this work...With the 1-1 sessions, I introduced creative writing as another stream of creativity to explore.... The work [the participant] produced...was inspirational for me as an artist...inspired me to explore creative writing and painting in combination as another workshop theme.*
- *[Participation was] very beneficial and rewarding personally...allowed me time to step back and reflect on my practice and to develop new ideas.*
- *[Experiences showed how] the project can lead to other employment opportunities which can be so vital in the precarious world of a creative['s] financial existence.*
- *I feel more confident in my abilities to work in Care settings after this project...[and] I wish to extend my knowledge and experience in this field.*
- *I have definitely benefited from the experience...interacting with the other artists and participants ...has made me grow as an artist in experience and knowledge.*
- *It has made me more confident in these particular settings.*
- *More self-assured and more in tune with the world of the elderly, artists and sick.*
- *I have experimented with media I haven't used before and working with people that don't have an art background has given me new insights on approaching works.*

- *[The project] gave me an opportunity to work with a visual artist – something I've wanted to do for a long time – and to further explore and develop an idea I've been working on. Learning how to exhibit work – as a dance artist, this is not something I'm all that familiar with.*
- *The project was really beneficial for me as I work with groups in care settings... I found the mentoring part of the project really beneficial and worthwhile. The topics that were covered and guidelines for best practice were great...it was great to be involved in a discussion... to hear other people's experiences and to contribute too. As for working with the participants I learn a lot too.*
- *My development... extended far beyond anything I had previously imagined. It led to deep reflections about life and the precious time we share with those we care for... will undoubtedly influence my work from now on. This opportunity has changed me profoundly... and I am deeply grateful for it.*
- *[The] elderly was the one group that I wanted to collaborate with. I had never entered this part of the industry simply because I didn't feel fully equipped with the skills and knowledge to give the residents what they needed... this project has given me knowledge, skills and experience, which in turn has given me confidence to work and continue to work in the area.*

Professional development gains cited were both practical and reflective, often extending beyond technical skills to gaining a better understanding of their role as artists. Confidence emerged as a key outcome, particularly in relation to working in care settings. Artists spoke about the benefits of collaborating with practitioners of other art forms and experimenting with unfamiliar media.

In summary, the responses indicate that the project was successful in supporting professional development in building skills and confidence, opening new pathways of practice and employment, and prompting greater reflection on the role of the artist within care environments.

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Artists were asked to describe, from their own experiences, what impact the project had on those participating in creative sessions. The following reflections were given.

- *The participants were initially nervous, unsure...within 2-3 sessions they had relaxed and developed a level of self-confidence, making decisions, mixing colours.*
- *The workshops I delivered focused on autonomy and choice...that they are doing it for themselves...People look happy, content, smiling. They are upbeat and encouraging of each other...Seeing them smile when they completed their painting was very rewarding.*
- *The project provided participants with a new focus, of a social meeting and a creative activity in the week...new connections and getting to know each other, the sharing of stories and life experiences, thoughts and ideas...It provided a time for connecting, conversation, listening and creativity.*
- *I think it mattered a great deal to them...to see their eyes lighting up when I would address them by name...the memories and conversations that ensued was magic. [For those living alone visits] offered important interactions... a light in their week of what I encountered was loneliness.*
- *Brought some lightness and joy...Participants made discoveries about themselves. Some participants explored an artform for the first time. So much light, joy, movement and colour in the artworks...A positive impact on their relationship with staff.*
- *I found they enjoyed the process, it became their own personal time...a private space which they enjoyed and explored...a new kind of independence which for some meant a lot. It opened a window for them to engage and explore, a safe space without expectations.*

- *I needed to...learn observing the patient's body as the primary source of feedback...positive reactions like the softening of a face, a moment of eye contact, or rhythmic tapping...The overall impact of this project to me is so profound and transformative...moments of pure joy.*
- *The biggest [impact] being their self confidence...they were lacking so much confidence in themselves and their abilities to create art...gradually they became less reliant on me and were making decisions for themselves...taking ownership of their work...the social impact of this project...was a huge influence. They would chat, encourage each other and help each other.*
- *[The artists table] allowed for all sorts of creative expressions from talking about the weather, to words and images of love and remembrance...participation was voluntary and for family it often acted as a holding space to process feelings.*
- *Participants have benefited greatly from regular interaction with art and creativity, from the company of artists and the uplifting interaction with artists and sometime other participants.*
- *I have seen excitement and joy and surprise when participants realise what they can do, make and create.*
- *They felt listened to, more valued and involved.*
- *[The] majority of participants experienced an extremely positive impact and enjoyed the interaction immensely.*

Artist responses reflected the view that participants enjoyed and benefited from their involvement, possibly more so than reported at the time of the interim survey. This was based upon visible displays of enjoyment and pride to more subtle shifts in behaviour witnessed by artists. Sessions provided a time and space for shared activity, conversation, encouragement, and mutual support. As identified in the interim survey, adopting a flexible approach and building rapport with participants was key to their engagement with and enjoyment of the creative process.

INTEREST IN FUTURE PARTICIPATION

When asked whether they were interested in participating in similar projects in future, the artists provided the following responses which included changes, improvements, etc., if any, that they would recommend.

- *I'd be delighted to be involved in future projects.*
- *Yes...I'm very happy to visit older people in their homes...it would be nice that people who are interested in home visits have the option of longer residencies or recurring residencies with the artist so they can continue to develop.*
- *Yes, I am very interested in participating in similar projects I am very invested in care and creativity and find it very rewarding. The support and training provided was hugely beneficial and would recommend continued training days.*
- *Yes, I would definitely be interested in participating again, and I don't think there are any changes I would suggest, it was a great significant project, gentle but vital.*
- *Yes.*
- *Yes, I would be interested in similar projects. It would be great to have time for group meetings for Artists to meet up and discuss things, share ideas on what worked for different people and what didn't work and to get some feedback.*
- *Yes! Absolutely, I would like to work again with private homes, doing more sessions again with one patient rather than a few sessions with different patients. I would love to work closely with nursing homes that have activities coordinators and if possible to work in partnership with another colleague.*
- *Yes, I would absolutely be interested in participating in similar projects in the future.*

- *I would be interested in participating in the future. I think working with another artist in the Hospice was really important and helped to process the emotional load of working in that particular environment...working with another artist in a Nursing Home would be very beneficial too.*
- *Yes, I want to continue to participate in similar projects, to build on what I have learned and to build on relationships that have been forged through this project.*
- *I would be very interested in being involved in future projects.*
- *Yes. That more of the senior staff buy into its value.*
- *Yes, as this was our first project within our area we had to be very flexible and adapt to situations as they presented.*

There was unanimous interest among artists in participating in similar projects in the future. Responses ranged from concise affirmations to more detailed reflections, with several artists describing the work as deeply rewarding and expressing a clear desire to continue. Several expressed interest in continuity, whether through longer or repeat residencies, or through returning to work with the same participants.

Artists did not identify fundamental weaknesses in the project model. Instead, the emphasis was on sustaining what worked well, allowing time for relationships and confidence to develop, and continuing to support artists through peer connection, collaboration and flexible delivery structures.

RECOMMEND

Respondents were asked whether they would recommend participating in similar projects to other artists and, if so, how might a future project be promoted.

- *Most definitely. Word of mouth, in particular to any artists that express interest in this type of work.*
- *Yes...a block for many artists is facilitating group workshops when they do not have experience in this area, along with going into care settings ... The 1-1 sessions are hugely beneficial... This has been an opportunity for me to explore what I need as an artist to thrive – and it could be a great experience for artists to self-reflect on what well-being means to them by opening up and sharing their experience and skills with others.*
- *Yes, I would. Future projects can be promoted to attract artists through Visuals Artists Ireland and through the County Arts Offices.*
- *Yes, I certainly would recommend...usual promotion would reach those who are working in creative outreach... 'ActiveLink.ie' which circulates related call for jobs, grants, training etc...may be an outlet.*
- *Yes. The PALS co-ordinator is with us during almost every session. I cannot emphasize enough how helpful and supportive this has been.*
- *I definitely would recommend participation to others. It was a real gamechanger for me when I started out as you really cannot apply academic learning here...it is a rewarding engagement.*
- *Yes, I would! I think I know some artists that would love to join in from theatre and puppetry areas, also a small choir.*
- *Yes, I would recommend others to participate in similar projects. A future project could be promoted through newsletters from the local arts offices, social media, VAI.*
- *I would recommend working on similar projects to others. I think if new artists were invited to come to a Q and A with existing artists, a peer support network could be quickly established and a lot of trouble shooting could be done earlier on.*
- *Yes, I would definitely recommend it. Future projects could be promoted through presentations of the work that has been achieved in 2024/25 – images of exhibitions, work created and testimonials from artists and participants.*

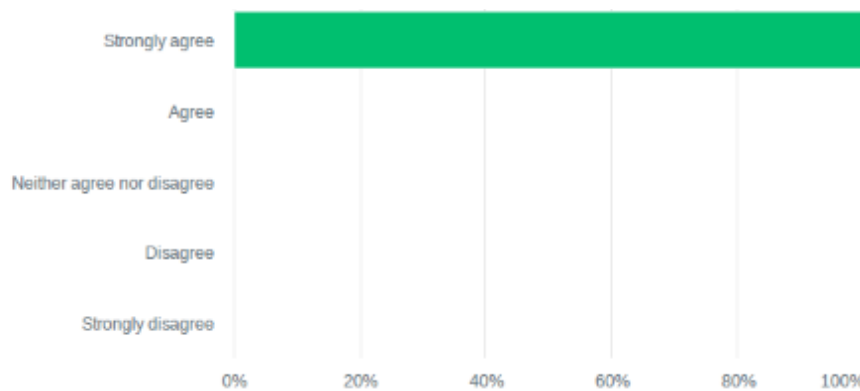
- *Artists are crying out for work like this. I know word of mouth alone within the various art networks will attract candidates.*
- *Yes. YouTube / Instagram videos promoting its value.*
- *Yes, as my project was a collaborative endeavour I think combining artists from different fields was very helpful as we had to find a common ground in order to deliver the programme.*

All respondents indicated that they would recommend participation in similar projects to other artists. Many did so emphatically, describing the work as rewarding, meaningful and professionally enriching. Several artists emphasised that word of mouth would be one of the most effective ways to reach suitable artists.

Artists suggested opportunities for new applicants to meet or hear from those with experience of the project, such as Q&A sessions, presentations or informal discussions. Others highlighted the value of showing the work itself. Suggestions included exhibitions, examples of work created, and testimonials from artists and participants. Seeing tangible outcomes was viewed as a way to help prospective artists understand the nature of the work and its impact.

WORTHWHILE EXPERIENCE

All artists responded that they **Strongly Agreed** with the statement that their experience of participating in the project was worthwhile.



This level of consistency is notable and suggests that the project met or exceeded artists’ expectations across a range of disciplines and settings. Given the emotionally demanding nature of the work, the unanimity of response points to a model that supported artists effectively while enabling them to deliver meaningful engagement with participants. The result aligns with the qualitative feedback provided elsewhere in the survey, where artists described professional growth, increased confidence and a strong sense of purpose arising from their involvement.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

Artists were asked to share a ‘memorable moment’ or experience of their participation in the project.

- *I have been told how very much the painting sessions have changed the quality of people’s lives. One participant said the sessions were the metronome of his week. Another said it had become his day job!*
- *For one of the 1-1 sessions where we explored creative writing, I set a task to write a haiku (3 lined poem) with the participant. Neither of us had ever written one before, yet I trusted the creative process...She loved that through the writing process she had something to speak about...In a 2 hour session she wrote this poem...*

*Cold Christmas is gone
White snowdrops are appearing
Spring is in the air*

- *She smiled when she read her completed poem. She hadn't expected that she could write one...It gave her confidence to continue exploring writing and her creativity. We also touched on the theme of Christmas and that it can be a lonely time for many older people. It was nice to capture that feeling through art without going deep into the personal experience of it.*
- *One of my participants is living with dementia. I discovered that her mother taught her a children's poem when she was a child. I had the poem in a Children's Book of Poetry so the participant was able to reminisce and also recite the poem on art/visit days.*
- *I remember the commotion in my bringing the taxidermied fox into the Plunkett...[residents] reached out to touch its fur and eyes and many began to regale stories of the fox from days on their farm.....a rich and rewarding session I am grateful to have experienced... Participant's smile...The rich stories behind the making of each piece.*
- *I found with most participants that communication and respect are key to what happens in the hour together...For that hour they were totally engaged...The conversation increased and they talked about the animals' habits and postures. This was their experience and they wanted to paint it. The hour got a little longer but they were invested. They made all the decisions and were really happy with the paintings when finished. There was a spirit and a life in the paintings.*
- *A truly memorable moment occurred with Michael, a patient who was initially very quiet, staring at the floor with no visible engagement with the people in the room. When I spoke with him and invited him to sing with me, when I started to play and sing "My Lovely Leitrim", his face lifted straight away. He smiled, sang all the lyrics for the entire song and finished by clapping with full joy. It was a beautiful moment and I will never forget.*
- *One gentleman in particular who had attended the sessions for 22 weeks but never actually wanted to engage...Even though I tried different art mediums, different members of the team and myself would chat with him...This was absolutely fine, he didn't have to engage. So long as he was happy to be there and content to watch and chat with us, that was all that mattered. However, on the penultimate session...he picked up a paintbrush and began to paint. This was the first time he had ever engaged and created art and he was so proud of his work. This was a memorable moment for everyone on the team and the gentleman.*
- *The whole project was about stories. In the Hospice... A daughter asked her mother (end of life patient) to contribute to the 'leave a mark, message or image' prompt. The mother left a profound addition to the textile piece. It also enabled her to talk to her daughter about her death. The daughter was very grateful to have this chance and to realise through this shared creative act that her mother was at peace.*
- *The older participants are humble but also surprised and proud by the work that they have produced. When we had an exhibition event families attended...the older people involved talked about it for a long time after the event. It was a great celebration. It has a lasting effect on their daily lives.*
- *I had a husband ring me and cry on the phone after his wife who lives with dementia had shown surprise and delight that she had made a particular piece of work. He was so grateful for the project.*
- *The delight on participants faces when asked to sing! The story telling and they happily participated, so satisfying.*
- *As the beginning of the project, finding our feet was very challenging. When one particular patient decided to participate, the joy she expressed was extremely uplifting, convinced me how important the project is.*

Many stories centred on participants discovering or reclaiming a sense of capability. These stories illustrate how the project created space for people to be seen, heard and remembered, often in ways that extended well beyond the session itself. Some of these are reflected in the 'Just Dip It In Blue' creative publication accompanying this evaluation.

SUMMARY

Artists were attracted to the project for various reasons, but primarily because they wanted to learn and, also, make a positive contribution to the community. Learning opportunities presented, to include mentoring, peer learning, and practical application were deemed to be excellent overall by artists. This is reflected in the increased confidence levels expressed by all artists, as compared with interim survey findings. Artists found the learning, application, and opportunity to collaborate with other artists to be beneficial to their overall professional development and the impact upon participants to be positive and worthwhile.

Survey findings point to the success of the promoters' efforts in achieving the stated aims and objectives of the project. Evidence of this can be found in their responses to the quality of supports and opportunities provided, but also in their unanimous desire to participate in similar initiatives in future and to recommend doing so to other artists.

CARE SETTING SURVEY

As part of the final evaluation, an online survey of participating care settings and stakeholder agencies was conducted. A total of seven care settings responded to the survey representing a hospice, hospitals, ALONE, the HSE and Age Friendly Ireland. The following section provides an overview of their responses to the survey.

AWARENESS

Asked how they became aware of the project, the following replies were given:

- From *Breda Mayock* (the Project Coordinator)
- *Through meeting with the key stakeholders from the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity Team*
- From a *work connection*
- *Approached by Breda [Mayock] re potential participants*
- *Co-ordinators & artists of the project made contact with Mayo Hospice*
- *E-mail from Áine Butler* (Roscommon Creative Communities Engagement Officer)
- From the *Project Coordinator*

As indicated by their responses, all care settings and stakeholders became aware of the project as a result of direct contact initiated by the project promoters or the coordinator.

DELIVERY

Respondents were asked to give their thoughts on the delivery of sessions within their respective care setting, whether their needs were met, and any improvements they would recommend.

- *Yes the participants referred to the project really enjoyed it.*
- *Excellent and very helpful for our patients, families and staff too.*
- *Feedback was great from participants.*
- *10/10. Participants have informed me that they thoroughly enjoyed the sessions, and it appears to be having a tremendous impact on their overall well-being.*
- *Absolutely. Families and patients engaged so well in the art work. They found the space so useful and naturally shared stories and became lost in the pieces of work that they added to. It allowed them an escape for a brief period.*

- *The sessions with artist were great. Emma had previously worked here and was familiar with the setup, she was absolutely brilliant, so talented and related so well to the residents and they to her.*
- *Yes, it is a wonderful programme and fantastic artists. Worked very well in the hospital and hospice.*

This level of consistency suggests that the project met or exceeded the expectations of participating organisations, especially in relation to the benefits delivered to participants.

IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS

Respondents were asked what impact the project had upon participants.

- *Inclusion into an activity of choice.*
- *I feel it was extremely worthwhile, it gave an opportunity for our patients to explore various creative arts and techniques, it also was helpful in getting stimulation for patients and certainly from some of the work I saw it demonstrated some patient's abilities where they thought they had lost or couldn't do certain skills. It demonstrated to me that there are many facets to supporting a patient's recovery and rehabilitation and arts and creativity is a very valuable one.*
- *They very much enjoyed the creative and social aspects of the programme.*
- *Increased well-being, positive impact on mood, reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation, increased social engagement.*
- *The project really added to the hospice in that the coordinators/artists were set up on the corridor in a space that gets lots of traffic in and out of the hospice and particularly the inpatient unit. Families and friends visiting patients and patients themselves were afforded the opportunity to opt in to engaging or even to observe the process in a very gentle way.*
- *A very positive impact.*
- *This programme has had very positive impact on patients and staff. Completed art works are displayed on the main corridor of the hospital showcasing the work.*

Responses indicate that the overall experience of care settings was very positive, with staff, visitors, and family members benefitting from the experience, as well as participants.

FUTURE PARTICIPATION

Asked whether their organisation would be interested in participating in similar initiatives in future, and if so what changes or improvements would be of benefit, the following responses were provided.

- *Yes*
- *Yes – I feel that it was beneficial and interested in continuing the good work that has been started.*
- *Yes, we would like to participate, we need to engage more men in such projects, and people who have never engaged in art related projects.*
- *Yes, we are interested in participating in future projects. I cannot identify any changes at present.*
- *I feel the organisation would, but again this would need to be planned/discussed with senior management...maybe do it on a day where day care patients attended the hospice so they could also participate in the project so on a Tuesday. I feel the project worked very well here in Mayo Hospice. Its gentle flexible approach really suited the nature of the people who use the service.*
- *Yes definitely.*
- *Yes, we would be very grateful to be considered in future projects.*

Respondents were unanimous in expressing interest in future participation in similar projects, emphasising again the positive impact of the project on residents, staff, and families.

RECOMMEND PARTICIPATION

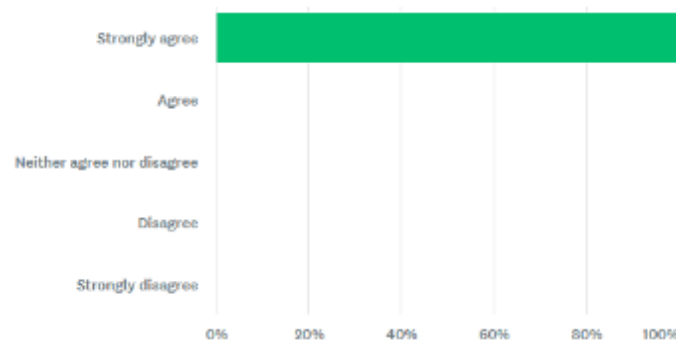
Respondents were asked whether they would recommend participating in future project to other care settings. The response was unanimous.

- Yes
- *Yes – again it is particularly useful, in my opinion, for patients who may be in hospital for a longer term and do need to have various outlets to fill their day.*
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes

Again, the unanimity of responses is indicative of how positively the project was received and appreciated by all care settings and agencies involved.

WORTHWHILE

The respondents were asked to respond to the statement that their organisation found their participation in the project to be worthwhile. Again, the response was unanimous in that all ‘strongly agreed’ with this statement.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Lastly, as with the artists, participating organisations were asked to share a memorable or noteworthy story from their experience of the project.

- *There is one story where a patient believed that they did not have any movement to do art and drawing, however in the skill of the team (Artist and Movement Therapist and with music) the patient produced a piece of art. I think this speaks volumes about the programme and the facilitators' skills too.*
- *One participant noted that coming back to painting has increased her confidence in general.*
- *I feel having the physical piece of work has been brilliant. Even staff have spoken about their own contribution to the work.*
- *Just to see the residents content and happy at the sessions, at the end we had a coffee morning and exhibition of the residents work and that was lovely, it gave the residents a sense of pride and achievement.*
- *Creating an exhibition space with works completed by patients for all visitors, staff and patients to experience. Personal moment, patient post stroke worked with the artists at the bedside-they drew a painting with their non-dominant hand, they cried when they saw the completed work.*

The positive impact of the project on the organisations and participants is reflected in their stories, most of which refer specifically to creative pieces and the desire to exhibit these publicly.

STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

The following section provides an overview of insights and comments provided by stakeholders interviewed as part of the final evaluation process.

PARTNERING ORGANISATIONS

The following insights and comments were provided by representatives of partnering organisations and stakeholders.

- *[The] health care systems are challenged by the ageing population...people report being satisfied with services when they are in receipt of their supports, however at end of life people move between them...[The] project suggests with artists working in homes, residential care and hospice, is a possible way that people who are moved between health care services might be accompanied... a form of care that people most want from health care services, someone trusted to be with them on their patient journey.*
- *[The population] is ageing at scale, and therefore there is a need to move to Public Health care from acute. However to do that the silo-ed agencies need to connect. [This] is where projects like...Mayo and Roscommon come in, they create habits of collaboration.*
- *[Due to] changing demographics there is a shift in focus from acute care towards a public health model...articulated as Compassionate Community...The Mayo/Roscommon project builds on this thinking and practical work, and, were it possible to develop it further, one consideration would be how to align the creative connection with the formal health supports.*
- *Irish Hospice Foundation have been working in Mayo/Roscommon and Cork and Cavan/Fermanagh - [both] projects have a good deal in common and much to learn from each other. We managed some online information exchange, but more time for exchange between the artists-facilitators and beneficiaries and formal health care staff might be educational for all.*
- *[Initially, there was] a lot of nervousness...concerns about awful things that might happen [to artists working in acute settings].*
- *The provision of similar supports and services to older people need to be imbedded in care strategies.*
- *Older people in more rural areas tend to be more isolated and physically removed from established services and supports.*
- *Already established relationships, and trust, existing between care settings and artists was the basis for successful delivery of the project in hospice settings.*

Responses reflect the growing awareness of Ireland's ageing population and the need to address quality of life and wellbeing challenges facing older people, especially in more rural areas. The experiences of and learnings from this project and similar initiatives offer potential responses to these challenges and how they might be incorporated in making care strategies more impactful.

A key achievement of the project was the establishing of new relationships between artists, stakeholders, and care settings as well as the strengthening of existing ones, which is essential to the development and delivery of such initiatives. This success underlines the importance of the view that such services need to be imbedded in formal care strategies and sustainably funded.

PROJECT TEAM

The following comments and insights into project design, delivery, and results were provided by members of the project team.

TRAINING

- The project was designed by people who wanted to upskill artists, build capacity, and create a panel of trained artists. *“Our priority is the artists...training, mentoring...support.”*
- Artists previously participating in Hearth were attracted to the project by the offering of capacity building opportunities, mentorship, and practical application.
- In-person training was more beneficial to artists and the sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- *“So much learnt, so much skill building.”*

The creating of a panel of artists trained to work in care settings was the primary aim of the project. In this regard, as shown by responses to the surveys, the project was successful in achieving its goal. The benefits of providing artists with opportunities to share knowledge and experience was especially noted.

RELATIONSHIPS

Establishing new, as well as strengthening existing, relationships between artists, stakeholders, and partnering care settings was also an important project goal, and essential to its delivery.

- Artists were concerned about working with new people, organisations, and agencies.
- Allowed for the making of connections at all levels that may not have otherwise existed (*“...didn’t know Roscommon folks, needed to build relationships.”*)
- Existing relationships and the ability to adapt to participant and care setting needs was essential in identifying appropriate approaches to the delivery of creative sessions, especially in hospice settings.
- Some care settings have a *“lack of experience in dealing with artists”*
- Established relationships and artist experiences provide a *“platform for growth”*.
- Need to meet with care setting staff early on to establish relationships and determine most appropriate approach to take in creative session delivery.
- There is a need to continue artist development and the fostering of relationships with care settings.
- Stakeholders have identified others wanting to contribute to similar initiatives.

Many artists, as well as care settings, expressed concerns about how to deliver the project. While part of this can be attributed to the need for upskilling on the part of artists, much of the uncertainty arose from a lack of experience in participating in such initiatives especially in more acute care settings. Overall, the importance of establishing and maintaining effective relationships between artists, stakeholders, and care settings has been emphasised throughout the project.

DELIVERY

Despite the previous experience of the project promoters in delivering similar initiatives, challenges were still encountered in delivering the project.

- Challenging to deliver sessions within a hospice setting due to few patients and their ability/ inability to engage with artists.

- Some care settings did not welcome exhibitions or too much activity, preferring to keep quiet and peaceful environments.
- The delivery and nature of creative sessions had to be adjusted to meet the needs and interests of participants, as well as care settings.
- Physical distance to travel restricted delivery of sessions in more remote project areas.
- The project has been building and taken more time to establish.
- Setting up home visits in Roscommon was *challenging*.
- Nursing homes allowed for both group and individual interactions.
- Sensitivity to local concerns extended to terminology used by the project with a hospice preferring the term ‘*session*’ instead of ‘*workshop*’.
- Art should be viewed as an essential aspect of “*holistic care vs activity*”, i.e. a social or recreational activity only.
- Continuous care provided by example of artists initially engaging with a person in a care setting who they then ‘followed’ home where one-to-one sessions were delivered.

The experience of the promoters in delivering sessions varied, as previously described in this evaluation. Challenges were encountered in delivering home visits and hospice sessions, much of which can be attributed primarily to not having established relationships with agencies and care settings at the outset. Other challenges included care settings, for example hospices, having different policies and procedures which required adapting project delivery to meet local needs. The flexibility of the project, and artists, enabled sessions to be successfully delivered in most care settings.

ARTISTS

Additional artist insights and comments derived from online and in-person training sessions attended by the external evaluator are included below.

EXPERIENCES

Working in new care settings and situations was initially challenging for artists, as well as for care settings, as both had to overcome concerns about how to deliver the project.

- Artists “*had to figure out how to work together*” with practitioners of other arts forms and experiences.
- Some staff seemed to be “*kind of scare[d] of [the artist] coming in*” to the care setting.
- In the Daycare facility, “[the staff] *were scared of me. I was scared of them.*”
- The “*head nurse was amazing*” in facilitating creative sessions.
- “If the staff are on board and feel it is beneficial then sessions are a great experience for participants.”
- Sessions were initially delivered in a ‘*family room*’ which was not suitable. The sessions were moved to a corridor with participants guided to the artist. This too was not suitable as it was busy with visitors, families, and staff.
- “*There was a bank of language I didn’t have initially...[it was] difficult to penetrate because we were unknown [to staff].*”

Again, the establishing of relationships between all involved, especially care staff, as well as adapting a flexible approach in delivering session in different settings, was essential to achieving project objectives.

LOSS

Artists were trained in how to deal with grief and loss, in order to prepare them for working in acute care settings.

- Grief, loss, and death was the *“elephant in the room”*.
- *“I didn’t expect to know so many people, staff, patients [in the hospice] ... it was difficult [for me]*
- *Finishing up one-to-one sessions with individuals...”that’s very difficult, leaving people... feels bloody awful.”*
- In many cases it’s not end-of-life, but the end of the project, it’s *“more how to leave them.”*
- *“You have to detach yourself, it’s an art thing.”*
- Finishing up group sessions *“...leaving them, they were angry. [One participant] gave me a chocolate bar, crushed and everything, and a hug, then shuffled off crying.”*

Despite their training, artists still found their experiences to be emotionally challenging at times, especially where they knew participants and when it came time to finish up sessions and leave.

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

OUTPUTS

The table below provides a summary of outputs achieved by the project, demonstrating its success in delivering upon key actions identified by the promoters.

| Activity | Achieved |
|--|-------------|
| Number of learning events/ training sessions | 7 |
| Number of artists upskilled | 13 |
| Number of care setting partners | 9 |
| Number of mentoring sessions provided | 12 |
| Number of private home creative sessions delivered | 320 |
| Number of care setting sessions delivered | 332 |
| Total number of creative sessions delivered | 652 |
| Total number of home session participants | 31 |
| Estimated total number of group engagements | 2322 |

The achieving of these outputs has delivered:

- A panel formed of 13 professional artists trained with an understanding end-of-life care, grief support and bereavement.
- Collaboration between two local authorities, nine regional care settings, 13 artists, healthcare professionals, and local, regional and national organisations.
- In excess of 2350 total engagements by older people in creative sessions.
- Project evaluation and a creative publication 'Just Dip It In Blue' documenting the project.

OUTCOMES

Desired project outcomes, as identified in the funding application (and earlier in this document), included artists having the knowledge and confidence to work in various settings, wider access to creative arts practice, supporting creative practice in acute care settings. Feedback and survey responses indicate that the project has achieved these desired outcomes, highlighting the impact of the project on artists, care settings, and participants.

- Through training, mentoring, knowledge exchange, and practical application, 13 artists are more knowledgeable and confident in their ability to empathetically respond to or engage with themes of grief and end-of-life: *"I feel more confident in my abilities to work in Care settings after this project"*.
- Access to creative art practice throughout the region has been enhanced by the creating of a panel of trained and experienced professional artists available to provide services and supports, especially to those living in acute care settings.
- Care professionals have an increased knowledge and experience of working with and supporting artists in delivering creative initiatives in acute care settings.
- Relationships and networks in the region have been strengthened through collaboration in delivering the project, providing the basis for future initiatives.
- The quality of life and wellbeing of those living in acute care settings has been enhanced through access to and engagement with creative arts activities.

The project has had a broad and significant impact in enhancing the professional development and learned experiences of artists, as articulated by their survey responses and general feedback received. It has had a

similar positive impact upon all organisations, agencies, and care settings involved in the design and delivery of this collaborative initiative. Lastly, through the practical application of artist training, the project has benefited the quality of life and wellbeing of those living in care settings, their friends and families, and health care staff.

RESPONDING TO STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In their funding application, the promoters outlined how the project would address Healthy Ireland and partnering Local Authority Culture and Creativity Strategy objectives. The project's success in addressing these is summarised below.

HEALTHY IRELAND

The Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity project, in training and upskilling 13 professional artists to enable them to work with older people in acute care settings, directly responded to the vision of Healthy Ireland to create a society where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and where wellbeing is supported at every level. Working in partnership with other bodies, the project delivered upon Healthy Ireland objectives to:

- *“build capacity and structures at all levels across national and local government and various settings to improve the health and wellbeing of the population”*
- *“Work with relevant partners to continue development of existing settings-based health and wellbeing programmes and progress new settings-based approaches.”*

The project has resulted in the creating of a panel of trained and experienced professional artists capable of working in acute care settings, and in rural settings. Furthermore, the project also resulted in the establishing of new and more effective working relationships between Local Authorities, artists, care settings and local, regional, and national agencies and organisations. These outcomes provide a foundation for future projects and initiatives supporting good physical and mental health and wellbeing in the Mayo Roscommon region.

LOCAL AUTHORITY CULTURE AND CREATIVITY STRATEGIES

In the funding application the two partnering Local Authorities, Roscommon County Council and Mayo County Council, each identified how the project would address respective Culture and Creativity Strategy objectives.

Roscommon County Council stated that the project would address the Roscommon Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 strategic priority to *“support, develop and deliver projects that support the ambitions of creative people, that develop creative skills, and build valuable relationships and networks.”* Specifically, the project would respond to *“Creative Ageing in Roscommon”*, a priority to support *“Projects which contribute to a meaningful life for older people.”*

The project has resulted in the upskilling of artists to enable them to more effectively support older people. In doing so, the project has directly and successfully responded to the objectives of Roscommon to develop creative skills and contribute to the wellbeing of older people, as well as building relationships and networks.

Mayo County Council identified that the project would directly respond to the County Mayo Culture & Creativity Strategy 2023–2027 priorities *“Enabling Creativity in Every Community”* and *“Value and support artists, crafters and other creatives”*. The project has directly and successfully addressed these priorities as well by valuing and supporting artists in increasing their skills and professional development, which enables them to more effectively support creativity, especially within older communities.

In successfully delivering the desired outputs and outcomes identified for the project, the promoters have, as summarised in the sections above, responded to the key national and Local Authority strategic policy objectives set forth in the application for Creative Ireland funding.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This final evaluation was carried out to review and assess the success of the Mayo Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context project in delivering agreed outcomes and outputs. Building upon the interim evaluation, this report has been informed by a review of documentation, analysis of progress and achievements, interviews with Project Managers and final surveys of both artists and stakeholders. A summary of the evaluation, which is discussed in more detail throughout this document, is provided below.



IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

The following is a summary of some of the challenges encountered by the project team, stakeholders, and participants during the delivery of the project, which needed to be addressed:

- Attracting adequate numbers of artists interested in participating in the project.
- Overcoming concerns and fears of some less experienced artists and providing them with adequate support over the course of the project.
- Adapting proposed training and method of training delivery to meet the needs and time constraints of participating artists.
- Rules and procedures vary and differ between similar care settings, e.g. hospices, etc.
- Ensuring the level of information provided to artists is adequate and appropriate.
- Establishing new relationships with care settings, especially hospices given the nature of their role.
- Maintaining effective communication and partnership with participating care settings and their staff.
- Adapting to changes in setting, audiences, individual participant circumstances, etc.
- Responding appropriately to 'high care needs' participants.
- Identifying participants for one-to-one sessions in County Roscommon, which unlike Mayo did not have an established programme catering for this target audience.
- Transitioning at the end of a programme is difficult for artists, and more so for participants who may feel abandoned.
- Distance, especially in more remote rural areas, restricts effective delivery of sessions.
- Managing funding and implementation of a project delivered between two local authorities.

LEARNINGS

The following is a summary of some of the key lessons learned over the duration of the project, as identified in this Final External Evaluation as well as the Interim Evaluation, survey, and supporting documentation.

- Trust is key to developing effective collaboration between all parties involved at the earliest stages.
- Care settings, especially those with experience of similar initiatives, appreciative of having access to project and services that enhance the quality of life and wellbeing of residents.
- A more flexible approach needs to be taken by artists when working with participants in multiple settings, and adjustments made to delivery in response to changing local situations.
- The level and quality of training provided was appropriate and well received by artists, though a flexible approach needs to be adopted in response to the needs of artists.
- Training needs should be regularly reviewed and assessed to meet arising requirements.
- A lack of access to dedicated spaces in care settings, while challenging, may also be addressed through creative approaches, e.g. a mobile "art cart", open 'drop-in sessions, etc.

- Learning participant names and talking with them helps to build rapport and break down barriers, removing any sense of mystery from the creative process is essential.
- Practical methods and props help to simulate memory and conversation, for example the use of clay, sponges, etc., and improve levels of engagement.
- Visibility and integration into care settings is beneficial, as is keeping staff informed and liaising with activities coordinators.
- The provision of mentoring support was viewed by participants as a valued aspect of the project and its expansion may benefit the practices of other artists given the opportunity.
- Artist collaboration provides emotional support, peer support, and opportunities for creativity.
- Artists assigned to hospices and hospitals settings preferred to work in pairs, which had not been part of the original plan, as a shared delivery method provided peer support in challenging situations.
- Providing a relaxing atmosphere through music, colours, accessible furnishings (tables and chairs appropriate to resident abilities), etc., is important to participant engagement.
- Signposting sessions, explaining what they entailed and how they were delivered, was helpful in attracting participants, and raising awareness among staff and families.
- Having a point of contact in a care setting is important as is seeking and receiving feedback from staff.
- Budgets for art supplies for sessions in care settings may need to be increased given the large number of residents often participating.
- Exhibitions or public displaying of creative pieces provides an opportunity for participants to shine, for their families and staff to engage, and to promote the initiative to wider audiences.
- There should be a transition process at the end of a programme to ensure that participants do not feel suddenly abandoned having benefitted from their engagement.
- Terminology, especially in care settings, can be an issue, e.g. 'sessions' instead of 'workshops', etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon all the information gathered during the course of this evaluation, the following section outlines recommendations for future projects and initiatives, including the mainstreaming of creative supports and services to older people living in acute care settings.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to more training, networking, knowledge sharing, and practical application opportunities, etc., general recommendations for future initiatives of a similar nature, as identified by artists, the project partners, and stakeholders, as well as through the evaluation process, include:

- Development of *"a concise guide... outlining key resources related to the work being done by the artists, recommended books, videos to watch, and an introduction to some of the projects"* to make navigating the information easier and more practical.
- Creating a *"toolkit of responses when conversations about death arise."*
- Provision of transport to enable people living at home to be brought to a care or community setting where they can socialise and participate in professionally delivered creative workshops.
- Hosting of 'open day' taster-type events in care or community settings where potential participants can learn in advance about planned creative programmes.
- Promoting the project more widely throughout the region to garner public awareness of and support for future initiatives.
- Provide for shared delivery of creative programmes in acute care settings, to meet the needs of artists in delivering services more effectively in more challenging environments.

BUILDING ON PROJECT RESULTS

As a direct result of this project, the region now possesses the resources, experiences, and relationships needed to expand the delivery of creative health and wellbeing initiatives to older people, in a range of care settings. The enhancing of health and wellbeing of citizens is an objective specifically referred to local, regional, national, and global strategic policies. This includes, for example, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to which the Government of Ireland has committed to attaining, specifically in this instance Goal 3: “*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*”

The experiences and learnings of the project provide a strong foundation for the delivery of future initiatives throughout the region. Combined with the knowledge and learnings gained from similar initiatives, to include other Creative Ireland funded projects, a stronger foundation now exists for the delivery of health and wellbeing initiatives nationally.

However, achieving this goal requires the integrating of creative supports and services benefitting health and wellbeing into national health and wellbeing strategies. It also requires Government commitment to sustainably funding such initiatives, either directly or indirectly through Local Authorities, Healthy Ireland, the HSE, or other organisations, on a county, regional, or national basis.

Sustainable funding is a necessity if the acknowledged benefits of such activities are to be realised by Irish society, in keeping with key Government strategic policy objectives. Not only will the continuation of funding ensure the effective delivery of supports to older people, but it will also enable the expansion of services, and the training of more artists to deliver these to meet the needs of Ireland’s aging population.

As a once-off project, opportunities to utilise the skills and lessons learned from the Mayo and Roscommon Care and Creativity in Context Project, and to build upon its foundations, are limited. However, the identification of sustainable funding streams will ensure that the recognised value and benefits arising from the successful delivery of the project are more impactful and long lasting.