

**CULTURAL
WEAVE
CONFERENCE
REPORT**

COMMUNITY

ARTS

FORUM

DOWN

COMMUNITY

ARTS

ARTSEKTA



CULTURAL WEAVE DELEGATES: (L-R from top left) Brenda Kent (Voluntary Arts Ireland), Naz Koser (Ulfah Arts) , Karen Baxter (PSNI), Nisha Tandon (ArtsEkta), Deepa Mann-Kler (Artist), Heather Floyd (Community Arts Forum), Vicki Maguire (Down Community Arts) and Geetha Upadhyaya (KalaSangam).



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	TITLE	PAGE
1	Introduction & Background	5
2	Main Conference Aims	5
3	The Organisers	5
4	Funders and Support	5
5	Venue	5
6	Conference Format	6
7	Marketing	6
8	Speakers	6
9	Speakers' Presentations	
9.1	Karen Baxter	6
9.2	Vicki Maguire	6 - 7
9.3	Geetha Upadhyaya	7 - 9
9.4	Deepa Mann-Kler	9
9.5	Naz Koser	9
10	Delegates	9
11	What Speakers Conveyed	10
12	Afternoon Practical Workshops	10
13	Notes From Workshop Groups	10
14	Future	10
15	Conference Outcomes	11
16	Next Steps	11
APPENDICES		
Appendix A	Organisational Information	13
Appendix B	Speaker Biographies	14
Appendix C	Delegate List	15
Appendix D	Comments From Evaluation Forms	16



1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The conference, which was the first of its kind in Northern Ireland, was a response to the recent wave of racist attacks in the region.

With the speed of local demographic changes and change in the structure of the population, this problem is likely to increase. Northern Ireland is a very insular region, with a history and culture of segregation - and some may feel threatened by new people and cultures they are not familiar with and don't understand.

Organisers of the conference were interested in exploring how community arts organisations could help to address racism. They were aware that there is very little infrastructure in the Down area to support the integration of minority ethnic communities.

In light of this, they wanted to bring people together to both raise awareness of this issue and celebrate different cultures. These cultures have much to offer.

Above all, we believed in the importance of welcoming people from minority ethnic backgrounds into the Down area - whether they are new here or part of the already long established Indian and Chinese communities.

Although the focus of the conference was on the Down area, the issues highlighted and discussed were relevant to the whole of Northern Ireland.

2. MAIN CONFERENCE AIMS

- To profile minority ethnic arts to increase public awareness
-
- To raise awareness of minority ethnic integration and challenges we face
-
- To provide a networking opportunity and platform to stimulate and develop ideas
-
- To provide a networking opportunity and impetus for partnership development
-
- To agree aims and objectives for a way forward

3. THE ORGANISERS

The conference was jointly organised by the Community Arts Forum (CAF), ArtsEkta and Down Community Arts (DCA).

The conference was chaired by Brenda Kent from Voluntary Arts Ireland. Brenda facilitated delegates to learn and enjoy the day as much as possible

Please see appendix A for organisational information.

4. FUNDERS AND SUPPORT

The conference was funded by the Community Relations Council, Down District Council, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Equality Commission.

We gratefully acknowledge the help of these funders, without which the conference would not have taken place. We would also like to thank the staff at Down Civic Arts Centre for all their help and in-kind support.

5. VENUE

The conference was held in the main theatre in Down Civic Arts Centre which is a focal venue for arts in the Down area.

6. CONFERENCE FORMAT

The conference was timetabled as follows:

Morning: Key speakers, artist performances and discussion workshops

Afternoon: Arts workshops in Chinese lantern-making, Egyptian dance and drumming

7. MARKETING

The conference was marketed:

- Via flyers and emails to all local and regional minority ethnic community groups, artists and local community groups and organisations from both DCA and Voluntary Arts Ireland (VAI) databases
- Via CAF and VAI e-newsletters
- Via DCA, CAF, ArtsEkta and VAI websites
- By invitation to key local political activists and decision-makers

8. SPEAKERS

It was decided that, as well as giving a platform to local speakers from a minority ethnic arts background, speakers from further afield would also be invited to gain ideas and inspiration as to how community arts can help with minority ethnic integration.

A senior member of the PSNI community safety division - Superintendent Karen Baxter, Community Safety C Division - was also invited to give an overview of the situation with regard to minority ethnic integration in the County Down area.

The speakers were:

- Superintendent Karen Baxter - PSNI Community Safety, C Division
- Vicki Maguire - General Manager of Down Community Arts
- Geetha Updahaya - Director of Kalasangam Arts in Birmingham
- Deepa Mann-Kler - an artist from County Down
- Naz Koser - Director of Ulfah Arts in Bradford

Please see Appendix B for speaker biographies.

9. SPEAKERS' PRESENTATIONS

9.1 Superintendent Karen Baxter - PSNI Community Safety, C Division

Karen opened the conference and welcomed all participants. She spoke about the importance of minority ethnic integration and the current work of the PSNI hate crime unit as well as applauding our initiative and hoping it would provide the impetus for similar events and action across the region.

9.2 Vicki Maguire, general manager, Down Community Arts

Community arts and minority ethnic integration in the Down area

Vicki outlined the conference aims which are detailed on page 5 of this report

She then outlined the current situation which is:

- There is a growing culture of racist attacks in Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland has been historically isolated
- There is a lack of information regarding statistics for people from minority ethnic backgrounds - the last census was in 2001
- Accessing minority ethnic groups can be problematic
- Minority ethnic groups may not wish to be integrated
- The Down area is very rural which creates more problems for integration
- There is a lack of strategic planning by statutory and government agencies to address the problem

Vicki then addressed cultural integration - what does it mean?

- Being able to maintain cultural practice and identity
- Developing an understanding of the culture and values of the host society
- Having access to participation in the cultural life of the host society
- Host communities understanding and appreciating the culture and values of the minority ethnic community

She then looked at how community arts can help:

- It brings people together in an unthreatening environment
- It provides a safe space for difficult and/or challenging discussions
- It is flexible - it can offer a variety of artforms
- It provides opportunities to profile different ethnic artforms and for showcasing the work of migrant artists
- It provides a means of communication which can overcome language barriers

Conclusion

DCA believes that community arts can encourage and support the process of building a more inclusive society in Northern Ireland and the Down area. Integration is a two-way process and relies on the interaction and exchange of both the host and minority communities. Minority ethnic integration can have a positive impact on the 'two-sides' sectarian dimension to Northern Ireland society.

9.3 Geetha Upadhyaya - chief executive officer/artistic director, Kala Sangam, Yorkshire

South Asian Arts in a Multicultural Britain: Opportunities and Challenges

Geetha opened her talk with the following quote:

"Beauty diversified into the Arts is the true refiner and uplifter of Humanity, the Instrument of Culture, the Broadener of the Heart"
Annie Besant, Theosophist

She then explained the meaning of the words Kala Sangam: kala means art and sangam confluence. She talked about the mission, vision, current work, principles, opportunities, outcomes and challenges of Kala Sangam.

Mission:

Bringing people together through South Asian Arts

Vision:

To be a beacon centre of excellence for South Asian arts, culture and heritage

Current work:

- Life long learning
- Performances
- Health/disability programmes
- Youth art programmes

Artforms:

- Dance/creative movement/urban and break dance
- Music/DJ-ing and scratching skills/song writing
- Drama/creative writing/story telling
- Poetry
- Visual art/crafts/textiles/sculpture
- Photography

The principles of Kala Sangam's work:

- Innovation
- Creativity
- Partnership
- Quality and excellence

Opportunities:

- To promote South Asian arts
- To enhance creativity - create new collaborative work
- To address socio-economic issues
- Learning/sharing opportunities
- Diverse community links
- Varied art forms
- New audiences

Outcomes:

- True multiculturalism
- Community cohesion/inclusion
- Social economic regeneration
- Cultural awareness/harmony



DCA | DO
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*Bringing high quality
arts experiences
to the Down Co*



performances
throughout the
Down area

ing
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Challenges:

- Community needs
- Human resources
- Adequacy of skills
- Long term funding
- Local politics
- Equal opportunities
- New policies/procedures
- Income generation
- Effective marketing
- Sustainability

Gheeta concluded her speech with Kala Sangam's four guiding principles and another quote

- Celebrate
- Consolidate
- Collaborate
- Create

"Life is not a brief candle but a splendid torch that I want to make burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations"

G B Shaw

9.4 Deepa Mann-Kler - artist

Deepa's presentation wove three strands in terms of her personal, professional and artistic practice in Northern Ireland:

Deepa has lived in the Down area for 14 years, arriving just after the ceasefires were announced. She talked about her career path since she arrived. Her first jobs were with Barnardos (as research officer), the Committee on the Administration of Justice and Save the Children Fund on Northern Ireland's first piece of racism research on racism called "Out of the Shadows." This report worked with the Chinese, Indian and Pakistani communities and Irish Travellers across Belfast, Craigavon and Derry. It documented first hand experiences of life as a minority ethnic person trying to access statutory services. The conclusions of the report set out recommendations for: education, health, social services, policing and accommodation.

After this report Deepa went on to work for the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), then Belfast City Council and it was when she was working for the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland that she decided to leave to work full time as an artist.

On a personal level, she has lived in Killyleagh in County Down for most of the 14 years she has been in the region. In 2000 she married and now has two children, who both attend local integrated schools.

Over the past three years Deepa has exhibited widely across the north of Ireland and this year has been especially busy with international shows in China and Germany and with private and corporate commissions. Her work is influenced by her Indian roots, in particular her fascination with and exploration of colour, form and subject. It is equally influenced by her life in Northern Ireland and her keen interest in cycle paintings, which celebrate the heroes of the road. One of Deepa's artistic principles is to bring art into public spaces and to this end she has exhibited in the Waterfront Hall, Lisburn and Bangor libraries, in Bikedock (a bike shop in Belfast) and she is exhibiting in the Grand Opera House during November and December 2009.

9.5 Naz Kozer - director, Ulfah Arts, Bradford

Naz outlined:

- The power of arts and its impact on communities
- Engagement strategies for inclusion of muslim communities
- The muslim context in Britain
- The significance of the engagement of black, minority ethnic (BME) communities for the arts sector
- Engagement strategies and methodologies used by Ulfah Arts
- Issues during implementation in designing and delivering projects

11. DELEGATES

In spite of the rurality of the location, high levels of sickness and the general financial climate, circa 40 participants attended the conference.

Please see appendix C for delegate list.

12. WHAT SPEAKERS CONVEYED

- The wide variety of projects shows the flexibility of community arts
- Personal and inspirational stories, e.g. Naz Koser's muslim women's choir
- Community arts can really push back boundaries
- It's about reaching out to the community and using community arts to convey a message
- Community arts can make people feel secure
- Communication is key

13. AFTERNOON PRACTICAL WORKSHOPS

Three arts workshops were programmed in the afternoon: Egyptian dance, Chinese lantern-making and international drumming – all given by local artists – Stella Tsang (lantern making), Krystene Borland (dance), Aidan Milligan and Wilson Magwera (drumming).

14. NOTES FROM WORKSHOP GROUPS

Issues raised:

- There are two main areas of activity: (1) working with minority ethnic groups and (2) using art and culture from these groups
- The arts is a common denominator for everyone
- There is no arts representation on the Down Diversity Forum
- Raising awareness and communication is key
- There are different perceptions of ethnic migration
- There is a need to lobby local politicians and decision-makers
- The PSNI appears to be unaware of community arts activity and what outcomes it can achieve

15. FUTURE

Please see appendix D for comments from evaluation forms

Is there a need for a regular event of this type in future?

The majority of respondents would like to see follow-up events, with a point being made that it should concern the whole of Northern Ireland and not just the Down area.

At an open discussion at the end of the conference, it was suggested that smaller events/networking sessions could be held as follow-ups rather than a 'big' conference event.

All delegates would like to have follow-up feedback/notes from the conference.

What did respondents gain from the conference?

The two key benefits to respondents from attending the conference were:

- Opportunities to network
- The opportunity to hear speakers' experiences

General positives

- Variety and quality of the speakers
- Excellence of venue and catering

General negatives

There were no negatives other than we would have liked more people to attend.

16. CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

1. The conference raised awareness of:

- The role of community arts in supporting the integration of minority ethnic communities
- Minority ethnic culture

2. Conference participants were given information on ways of working with culturally diverse groups

3. The conference showcased and demonstrated ways of incorporating diverse cultures via the practical workshops

4. New partnerships mooted/to be developed:

- PSNI/Down Community Arts
- ArtsEkta/Kalasangam/Ulfah Arts
- Down Community Arts/Kalsangam
- Ards Borough Council/ArtsEkta
- Ards Borough Council/Down Community Arts

17. NEXT STEPS

- Conference report to be disseminated to all participants, funders, minority ethnic community groups, Down Diversity Forum, artists, local councils and other interested parties
- A member of the community arts community in County Down will join the Down Diversity Forum
- An informal follow-up meeting to be arranged which will include participants and organisers early in 2010 to discuss any developments and possible format for next year's event



APPENDIX A: ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Community Arts Forum

The Community Arts Forum (CAF) is the umbrella and networking organisation for community arts in Northern Ireland. Since its establishment in 1993, CAF has been a key advocator for arts in a community context. The mission is:

CAF will be an organisation which builds communities through collective creativity

CAF aims to support the community arts sector through a programme of:

- Training
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Research
- Publications
- Information, advice and guidance
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Networking

CAF delivers a weekly e-bulletin to 1,100 email addresses containing key information about community arts across the region. The web site, which is a first port of call for people seeking information about community arts in the region, receives 2000 hits per day. CAF carries out research into the impact of community arts.

ArtsEkta

ArtsEkta (Ekta means bonding/uniting in the Indian Language) was established in 2006. It is a cutting-edge, vibrant and progressive organisation with an international outlook, based in Belfast. The organisation's purpose is to enhance the practice, understanding, appreciation and advancement of education and ethnic arts throughout Ireland. ArtsEkta is committed to using the arts to address social agendas, and the organisation uses the arts as the medium through which it addresses social issues such as racism, prejudice, conflict and discrimination.

ArtsEkta provides services in training, education and community work in an extremely creative and innovative manner. It endeavours to promote relevance, openness and excellence in all arts forms. The organisation prides itself in showcasing innovative projects that cherish the individual artist and encourage diversity and social inclusion with no sex, age, religious or disability barriers.

Down Community Arts

'Bringing high quality arts experiences to the Down Community'

Down Community Arts (DCA) is a unique organisation in the Down area, offering a high quality participative arts service to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

In addition to its regular programme of innovative arts workshops; visual arts, dance, music, crafts, storytelling, it offers a tailor-made service to community groups and organisations across the area.

Established in 1992, DCA has a wealth of experience in providing a local community arts service and is constantly evolving and adapting to meet the needs of the local community. DCA programmes workshops in a spectrum of art forms including: visual arts, dance, music, crafts, across the Down area and beyond.

Down Community Arts:

- Produces exhibitions, murals and performances
- Works with a huge variety of community groups across the Down area, in central and rural locations
- Works in partnership with schools and library boards, councils, health trusts and community groups
- Tailors projects to meet the specific needs of groups and individuals

APPENDIX B: SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Geetha Upadhyaya - Kalasangam

Geetha qualified in medicine from Madras University, Chennai (India) and obtained a post graduation in Chemical Pathology and a PhD for her work on trace elements and cancer.

Her career started in the Madras Port Trust Hospital, Chennai and continued as a consultant chemical pathologist for the University of Science, Malaysia for 10 years. Moving to the UK as a consultant in Guy's Hospital and later at Hull Royal Infirmary, she worked in metabolic medicine and endocrinology. During her stay in Malaysia, Geetha worked with children with learning disabilities and autism. She became interested in using the arts with a variety of health problems and in the area of disability.

Her career in the arts began when she was in school and trained in classical Indian dance and music leading to a post graduate specialism in mime, expression and choreographic techniques. Geetha taught and performed classical Indian dance and music in India, Malaysia and continues this work in UK.

On moving to Hull Royal Infirmary, Geetha identified a gap in the field of health/disability and south Asian arts. This prompted the formation of Kala Sangam, (kala=arts; Sangam=a meeting point) - a south Asian arts/culture and heritage company with the mission of 'bringing people together through south Asian and collaborative arts'. Based in Bradford, Kala Sangam works regionally, nationally and internationally and is acclaimed for its innovative, high quality, inclusive, cross collaborative work.

Geetha worked for Kala Sangam as a teacher/performer in a voluntary capacity until the company grew and needed a full time artistic director. Geetha left her full time medical job to become the artistic director/CEO of Kala Sangam. Kala Sangam is now working towards establishing a centre of excellence for international collaborative arts and heritage at a grade II listed heritage building, St Peter's House.

Geetha is a fellow of the Royal Society of Art and a director on the board of Arts and Business, Jabadao, the Arts Council of England, MANAS – Mind, Body Care trust and is the vice chair of Shipley College and the National Diabetes Forum.

She has served on the boards of: West Yorkshire Learning Skills Council, Connexions, the National Network for Arts in Health, Asian Business Development Network and was nominated and short-listed for Asian woman of the year in 2002.

Naz Koser - Ulfah Arts

Naz is a founder of Ulfah Arts. Naz was born and brought up in Walsall, West Midlands by immigrant parents, she finished her education with a degree in travel and tourism.

Naz believes that religious fundamentalism and cultural isolation have a big impact on society, especially on muslim women. She felt that she rarely encountered any practising muslim women and wondered where they were. After undertaking research, she identified the need for Ulfah Arts and step by step things began to take shape.

As soon as she established Ulfah Arts in 2004, Naz gained support and recognition from the muslim community who welcomed her approach and ideas to empower and inspire disadvantaged muslim women, and in 2006 she received an award for her contribution to the arts from the Islamic Bank of Britain.

She is also a member of the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group, on the steering committee of the Prince's Trust mentoring programme, a founding member of West Midlands World Music Consortium and an active board member of Community Touch - a charity which works closely with disabled individuals from BME communities.

She has contributed to books and research published by the Arts Council of England, the National Youth Agency, European Union Youth Inclusion Programme and the department of communities and local government. Naz also works with the British Council and United States Department of State and advises on issues such as how to promote tolerance through arts.

Vicki Maguire - Down Community Arts

Originally from Belfast, Vicki spent most of her life in England and after graduating in modern languages she worked in London as an account manager in advertising, PR and design. Following her return to Northern Ireland she has worked in fundraising (NI fundraising manager for RNID) and the arts - as director of Dance Northern Ireland and general manager of Down Community Arts. She also conceived, launched and directed EarthQuake Festival of International Dance. She has an M.A. in Cultural Management from the University of Ulster, is chair of the NI Institute of Fundraising and a former board member of the Community Arts Forum. She is also an active member of the Downpatrick Town-Twinning Committee and speaks fluent French and Italian.

Brenda Kent - Voluntary Arts Ireland

Brenda was born in England and moved to South Africa and then Zimbabwe as a child. She gained a BSc in Social Administration from Coleraine University in 1984 and moved to Belfast. Postgraduate studies include an MBA course and Social Research Methods Diploma.

Since July 2001, Brenda has managed Voluntary Arts Ireland (VAI), the charitable body which promotes participation in arts and crafts across the island. VAI has a team of eleven encouraging participation, supporting local arts groups and representing their needs to policy makers.

Prior to this Brenda worked with the Integrated Education Fund, the Prince's Trust, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and the Simon Community. Having been employed at Opera Northern Ireland, she was also a member of the Golden Thread Theatre committee, and organised concerts in Clandeboye House, Glenarm Castle and the official opening of Waterfront Hall. She also worked with an advertising and PR agency and served on a variety of committees for housing, the travelling community, community development and other third sector projects.

Current arts committee roles include: Down Arts Forum, the Cross Border Arts Centre, Downpatrick Blues and Roots Music Society, Audiences NI and the NICVA Arts Forum.

Deepa Mann-Kler - Artist

Deepa Mann-Kler is an artist living and working in County Down. She is also a management committee member of Wheelworks and a non-executive director with the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust. She is also a management committee member (former co-chair) of Women in Politics and a member of the Race Funding Selection Committee, OFMDFM. She has been chair of Killyleagh Community Association and a former non-executive director of Victim Support Northern Ireland.

APPENDIX C: DELEGATE LIST

Name

Damian Brannigan
 Amy McKelvey
 Jenny Long
 Clare McKenna
 Tanya Kirk
 Leighanne Carmichael
 Bonnie Soroke
 Charo Lanao
 Aoife Murnan
 Nick Mack
 Nisha Tandon
 Pritam Sridhar
 Barbara Sweeney
 Karen McFarlane
 Stella Gilmartin
 Orla Gardiner
 Vicki Maguire
 Philip Campbell
 Ryan Darragh
 Caragh O'Donnell
 Heather Floyd
 Brenda Kent
 Krystene Borland
 Aidan Milligan
 Wilson Magwera
 Mukesh Sharma
 Stella Tsang
 Deepa Mann-Kler
 Geetha Upadhyaya
 Naz Koser
 Robert Emerson
 Karen Baxter
 Joy Millar
 Denise Griffith
 Iain Davidson
 Rachel Kennedy

Organisation

Down District Council
 Ards Borough Council
 Down Arts Forum
 Sticky Fingers Early Years
 Wheelworks
 Student
 Arts Consultant
 Centre for Global Education
 Down Arts Centre - work placement
 Research consultant
 ArtsEkta
 ArtsEkta
 Artist
 Partisan Productions
 Gilmartin Consulting
 Down Community Arts
 Down Community Arts
 Down Community Arts
 Community Arts Forum
 Community Arts Forum
 Community Arts Forum
 Community Arts Forum
 Voluntary Arts Ireland
 Dance artist
 Musician
 Musician
 Musician
 Artist
 Down artist
 Kalansangam, Bradford
 Ulfah Arts, Birmingham
 PSNI
 PSNI
 PSNI
 Down Arts Centre
 Down Arts Centre
 Down Arts Centre

APPENDIX D: COMMENTS FROM EVALUATION FORMS

“Great, really interesting and inspiring...extremely useful”

“An excellent day, informal and purposeful”

“(It was) refreshing to hear the perspectives of people from outside Northern Ireland”

“I really enjoyed the practical side...I would never normally have the chance (to take part)”

“Like-minded people communicating ideas and helping to raise awareness”

“Very interesting - excellent range of speakers”

“This conference will help broaden and deepen the network”

