

The Unique Value of the Arts in Community Development

A Case Study of ArtsWok Collaborative



Justin Lee, Andrew Lim, Sim Jui Liang, Shamil Zainuddin and Dhevarajan s/o Devadas

Institute of Policy Studies
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
National University of Singapore

&

Hana Alhadad
Singapore University of Social Sciences



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Abstract

The arts is able to engage community in imaginative ways that creates a space for dialogue on communal issues faced and also expands the horizons of possible solutions. This approach requires combining the “relational approach” of community development with a “creative approach” unique to the arts. When done well, an artistic experience can catalyse the organic and often unpredictable development of communal relationships and capabilities. This requires an aesthetic sensibility, but also an astute understanding of local contexts and relationships, the affordances of available communal spaces, and a co-creation process that engenders collective participation and ownership.

ArtsWok Collaborative (“ArtsWok”) has conceptualised and implemented projects that act as local exemplars of arts-based community development. However, given how nascent and niche this field is, there is some appreciation of its value, but little understanding of its process. Therefore, ArtsWok has had to focus on building the field even as it engages in its own creative projects. Though this has proved to be an opportunity, it is also a drain on its resources.

ArtsWok act as creative producers that contribute artistic ideas, and as an intermediary to pull together partnerships across multiple government agencies, funders, arts groups and local communities that have different agendas, offer diverse resources and use different vocabularies. This requires creating bridges across the social service sector, community development and the art world. Straddling different sectors makes for a considerable challenge, but also runs a real risk of diverse stakeholders undermining the artistic process or displacing the interests of the community. In order to ensure the quality and meaningfulness of creative work *in* and *with* the community, an intermediary organisation needs to be effectively interdisciplinary and to act as a curator that is artistically discerning and highly selective of its collaborative partners. Given that every project will be different because every community is different, ArtsWok has had to equip itself beyond just specific capabilities and standardised frameworks to be guided by a set of values, principles and vision of what counts as a strong community.

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Executive Summary

- 1) This is a case study of non-profit organisation ArtsWok Collaborative, which examines how the organisation has engaged in arts-based community development in Singapore.
- 2) Researchers carried out a literature review on the subject, as well as in-depth interviews with organisational personnel: members of the board, management and staff, to get an “insider’s” perspective of the organisation. A theory of change exercise was also conducted to understand key organisational strategies.
- 3) The research is motivated by two main questions:
 - a) What is the unique value of the arts for community engagement and development? How can socially engaged arts be used to generate community participation and build strong communities?
 - b) How can an intermediary organisation act as an effective bridge across multiple and diverse stakeholders from different sectors?

Background: Arts and Community Development in Singapore

- 4) **There are now more resources and support for community arts, but there is a tendency to regard the arts merely as a kind of “service” that achieves therapeutic outcomes for clients, or social goals like community bonding.** In the early years, policies pertaining to the arts and culture took a backseat. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s policymakers began to turn their attention to the arts and culture; but even then, only as a sector with economic potential. More recently, the role of the arts in community participation and engagement became better articulated. The arts was considered to be a platform for encouraging interracial harmony and building community pride.
- 5) **Socially engaged artists have to work within a landscape of state-sponsored grassroots organisations and community development that offers a set of opportunities and constraints.** Arts-based community engagement that focuses on building national identity and interracial harmony receives much government support and funding. Community art that helps support therapy, health and social care are also welcomed by the arts administrators, social service providers, hospitals and community organisations. Artists who choose to engage the community in dialogue on perceived sensitive issues continue to negotiate with the state for a space to do so.
- 6) A supportive ecosystem is emerging for socially engaged arts, but the field is diverse and there is no sense of collective or professional identity. While there is a proliferation of community-based arts, projects that are *by* and *with* the community are far fewer, and there is potential for arts projects that facilitate genuine community participation and ownership.

ArtsWok Collaborative in Focus

- 7) **Creative Producer and Intermediary.** ArtsWok Collaborative (“ArtsWok”) is a non-profit organisation that adopts an arts-based approach to engage community in dialogue and invite social participation, with aspirations to support communities to develop strong bonds and become mutually supportive. As an intermediary organisation, they have to work closely with diverse stakeholders like government agencies, funders, Voluntary Welfare Organisations (VWOs), community and arts groups in arts productions that serve a social goal. For example, they have made possible forum theatre, film and participatory arts experiences that champion end-of-life planning and brought them to residential neighbourhoods.
- 8) **Flagship projects:** 1) A community engagement programme involving arts performances and experiences to raise awareness of end-of-life issues and to encourage the community to make end-of-life plans (*Both Sides, Now*). 2) An annual youth theatre festival to provide a platform for youth to create and perform original work, nurture civic-minded theatre-makers, as well as create dialogue on social issues (*M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival*).
- 9) **Capability-building and field-building.** ArtsWok facilitates a **community of practice** for artists and others interested in arts-based community engagement to share, exchange and learn from one another, with the intention to elevate the quality and grow the field of arts-based community development in Singapore (*The Greenhouse Sessions*). It also organises **action-learning workshops** to equip practitioners with skills in designing, implementing and evaluating arts-based community development programmes through the process of initiating, conceptualising and seeing through a socially engaged project or raising social concerns (*The Greenhouse Lab*). ArtsWok also produces **research briefs and case studies** to raise awareness and advocate for the potential of arts-based community development as an approach.
- 10) **Strategic priorities:** ArtsWok estimates to spend about 60 per cent of its energies and resources on creative producing of its two flagship projects, 20 per cent on capability building, and 20 per cent on stakeholder engagement. If stakeholder engagement is counted as part of the work of creative producing, which it usually is subsumed under, then it amounts to almost 80 per cent of the organisation’s work.

The Value of the Arts in Community Engagement and Development

- 11) The arts is able to engage community in imaginative ways that creates a space for dialogue on communal issues faced and also expands the horizons of possible solutions. Different art forms have their own internal logics, processes and ways of working that tap diverse types of intelligences, triggering different ways of seeing and allowing the exploration of new meanings and identities. Visual arts, performances, film, etc., therefore bring a variety of unique affordances and possibilities to community development.
- 12) Despite the diversities of art forms and the varying possibilities they provide, central to ArtsWok is a dialogic approach, where social issues are often unpacked when art works are presented for sharing, eliciting further response, and offering new opportunities for clarification and imagination. This facilitates co-creation and joint decision making between artist and audience.

- 13) According to ArtsWok, an arts-based approach allows participants to explore sensitive issues suited to their own comfort levels because of the distance made possible by an artwork or performance, compared to interventions like counselling. Such an approach is comfortable with complexity and does not seek to reduce social issues to a singular dimension that a scientific approach might take, and is therefore able to create a space to understand context, circumstances and relationships instead of seeing it as an isolated or individual problem.
- 14) When done well, an artistic experience can catalyse the organic and often unpredictable development of communal relationships and capabilities. Sometimes, it is when the community participates in art-making that relationships are unknowingly formed. For example, when a person reflects on a performance that touches on difficult issues, they might also inadvertently find solutions.

The Work of Creative Producing and the Role of the Intermediary

- 15) To be a creative producer of socially engaged arts projects requires not only an aesthetic sensibility, but also an astute understanding of the local context and relationships, the affordance of available communal spaces, and a co-creation process that engenders collective participation and ownership.
- 16) **Requirements for the work:** VWOs are often gatekeepers to communities, and grassroots organisations are gatekeepers to community space. Therefore, ArtsWok has had to create bridges across the social service sector, community development landscape and the art world. It acts as an intermediary to pull together partnerships and resources across multiple government agencies, funders, arts groups, VWOs and local communities that have different agendas and use different vocabularies. This work is sustained by cultivating a strong network of partners.
- 17) **Intermediary work is invisible and underappreciated.** Just as audiences see actors and appreciate the work of directors, the producer's role is often behind the scenes and its value less obvious to stakeholders. To get around this, ArtsWok often invites their stakeholders to participate and experience the programmes themselves.
- 18) To be a producer and intermediary requires curation and selectivity, knowing whom to ask for what, and being careful with whom to partner with. This is because trust is critical in multi-partner projects where different partners have diverse responsibilities.
- 19) Playing both the "thinker" and "doer" roles stretches resources, but is also a source of strength. ArtsWok has had to "build the field" of arts-based community development even as they "do the work", unlike mature sectors where there are ready resources for well-defined services.
- 20) **Implications on sustainability:** Unlike the provision of a service, the meaning of replication and scale is different for such arts-based community development work. For it to be meaningful, work should be adapted to the local context and local relationships, which means scale cannot be achieved by standardised replication. Some aspects of the approach, like developing a toolkit that distils the creative approach can be replicable, but projects and conversations can and should be different for different communities.

21) In addition to the conventional challenges of inhabiting the non-profit space, ArtsWok faces funding difficulties arising from misconceived notions about ArtsWok's role as an intermediary, and about the value of the arts. This has led to the challenges securing access to space and manpower, and kick-started deliberations about diversifying their revenue streams.

22) **Technique is important, but so are vision and values.** Given that every project will be different because every community is different, ArtsWok has had to equip itself beyond just specific capabilities and standardised frameworks to be guided and anchored by a set of values, principles and vision of what counts as a strong community. As a result, ArtsWok recognises the value of engaging and understanding the community, and chooses to invest in this process despite greater costs to itself.

Introduction

This is a case study to document and understand how a non-profit organisation, ArtsWok Collaborative (“ArtsWok”), has engaged in arts-based community development in Singapore. The research will highlight challenges faced and adaptive strategies adopted in areas such as creative producing, community partnerships, capability-building of socially engaged artists and field-building of a niche area or work in the intersections of arts and community work.

It is motivated by the following questions:

- 1) What is the unique value of the arts for community engagement and development? How can socially engaged arts be used to generate community participation and build strong communities?
- 2) How can an intermediary organisation act as an effective bridge across multiple and diverse stakeholders from different sectors?

Significance

Individuals and organisations interested in the growing field of arts-based community development in Singapore would be able to better appreciate its nascent potential, and challenges, as well as understand the capabilities and unique skill sets required to do such work.

The arts and community-building work are traditionally regarded as separate spheres, though through ArtsWok’s work, this case study will illustrate the potential of intertwining perspectives from both fields towards meaningful outcomes. As an intermediary, ArtsWok straddles multiple fields of work, and lessons can be learnt about good stakeholder management and good communicating and translation across fields.

As an entity in the business of community development, ArtsWok also has much to teach about engaging and building communities in a sensitive and empowering manner. Of particular note is the attention to community-specific needs and assets, which shape the organisation’s projects accordingly.

More broadly, this case study also contributes to a better understanding of a different approach to community building with the common objective of developing communities who are capable of mutual help and support. It also builds an appreciation of the social change potential of voluntary efforts at ground-up community development and engagement in Singapore, as opposed to a conventional pilot-then-scale-up model of replicating successful social and community services.

Approach

Unlike case studies research — used by social scientists for theoretical refinement, explication of context-dependent processes, etc. — this case study is written more for the purpose of teaching. Yin makes this distinction, noting that materials in teaching cases may be adjusted to emphasise certain points with more effect, whereas all evidence in case studies research should be presented fairly (Yin, 2014). An overview of Singapore’s community development

landscape is relevant for public policy students, while the case-writing on ArtsWok is relevant for students of non-profit management and leadership.¹

For this case study, we conducted research in two key stages:

- 1) **Literature review and local scan.** A review of the community development literature and historical review to understand generally the context of community development in Singapore, but also more specifically the landscape of community arts or socially engaged arts. This helps to better situate the current, contingent position of ArtsWok in Singapore.
- 2) **Primary data collection.** We conducted interviews with three members of ArtsWok's management team and staff as well as two board members, all of whom had been with the organisation for at least two years. We also gathered data based on publicly available information.
 - a) **Interviews.** We engaged in a broad conversation about general issues such as organisational challenges faced and adaptive strategies in areas such as: programme delivery, research and advocacy, volunteer management, corporate partnerships and government relations. We then allowed themes to emerge based on this preliminary exploration, then delved deeper into issues that had broader strategic significance or where the organisation found pressing or relevant.
 - b) **Theory of change exercise to capture organisational strategy.** Besides the interviews, we also adopted a theory of change (TOC) framework to help articulate and capture ArtsWok's organisational strategy succinctly. Just as a picture paints a thousand words, this visual diagram helps provide a strategic overview of what programmes they run, how they add up to key strategic thrusts, and how those are supposed to achieve their desired social impact.

The ArtsWok team participated in a TOC workshop that one of the principal investigators facilitated, in order to articulate, and evaluate ArtsWok's organisational strategy in terms of its logical flow; achievability of organisational ambitions; tightness of connection between activities and outcomes; and alignment of activities with available resources.

Using the TOC as a reference point, participants were further interviewed about organisation-wide challenges and their adaptive strategies in various areas and provided a sense of the amount of resources they were putting into the key strategic thrusts. (See Annex C.)

¹ See Libby & Deitrick (2016) for case examples in non-profit management.

Background

What is Community Work and Community Development?

Community development is part of a broader democratic process where the community comes together to take collective action to determine its own needs and how they should be met (Ife, 2016; Ledwith, 2016).

According to Bhattacharyya (2004), the purpose of community development is to create solidarity and agency. Solidarity refers to having a shared identity, whether from sharing a common place, ideology or interest, as well as common norms or a code of conduct that, when broken, affects members emotionally and in other ways. Agency means that people have the human autonomy and capacity to order their world, to live and act in accordance with their own meaning systems and have the ability to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others.

Achieving these twin goals means being guided by three principles: encouraging self-help; attending to subjectively felt needs; and supporting participation. Self-help entails mobilising indigenous assets in the community as well as avoiding dependency, while focusing on felt needs means that project must respond to human needs and variation as against totalising developmental impositions. Supporting participation means supporting people to take part in the production of collective meanings, and being included in debate and decision-making processes.

Community development is often informed by the principles of social and environmental justice, Ledwith (2016) describes community development as rooted in the vision of a fair, just and sustainable world (p.5). Its core values are empowerment, co-operation and collective learning, espousing the ideology of equality including respect, dignity, trust, mutuality and reciprocity (Ledwith, 2016).

While there is no consistency in the usage of terms like community work, community organising and community development, it is useful to consider that work with communities can fall along a spectrum of how much solidarity and agency is emphasised. On one end are community-based services no different from professional social services where an intervention is provided by an expert to a target client group in order to address their problems. On the other end is where the community comes together to define their own problems and implement their own solutions, with the help of a community worker or facilitator. Some find that such a distinction is important enough and prescribe specific terms to indicate such a difference. For example, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2019) defines 'community work' to include situations where the issues or problems in the community are defined by external parties, while in 'community development', groups and members in the community are supported to identify issues, problems or concerns that affect them. For the purpose of this report, there is no need to adopt any specific terminology strictly, except to acknowledge the usefulness of such analytic distinctions.

What is Arts-Based Community Development?

An arts-based community development approach is essentially the use of the arts in community development, where arts-based programmes are integrated into community development processes designed to harness the potentials of community resources, skills and ideas. It is also designed to promote personal growth, encourage citizen participation and increase cultural awareness (Stein & Faigin, 2015).

Since its beginnings in the early 1970s, the movement towards the use of the arts in community development has grown from a small movement into a larger, widespread approach (Cleveland, 2011). Once considered unconventional, the arts-based community development approach is now gaining popularity and has taken a wide diversity of forms, involving all types of art forms in the United States (Biehl-Missal & Antal, 2011).

Interestingly, the use of arts in sustainable development has caught on more in the field of business, rather than in community development, where arts-based initiatives are seen as stimuli for new ways of thinking and doing things, and to foster workplace innovation (Biehl-Missal & Antal, 2011; Carlucci & Schiuma, 2018). Pertinently, there is evidence showing that positive arts-based interventions promote social change and empowerment as well as enhance social connections and social capital in marginalised groups and communities (Buys & Miller, 2009; Cleveland, 2011; Sonn & Quayle, 2013).

The vocabulary used to describe the arts-based community development approach is diverse, such as 'arts-based initiatives', 'community art', 'community cultural development', 'socially engaged arts practice', 'art and community building', 'art and social justice', and 'community-based arts initiatives' (Azmat, Ferdous, Rentschler & Winston, 2018; Badham, 2010; Biehl-Missal & Antal, 2011; Cleveland, 2011; Stein & Faigin, 2015). One reason for the development of this varied vocabulary, is in order to be able to communicate with people who are in and out of the field and across various sectors (Cleveland, 2011).

Despite this diversity, there are some common factors. Principles and definitions from the areas of asset-based community development and sustainable community development have been adopted and common ground established (Cleveland, 2011). Also, regardless of what the arts-based approach is called or the types of art forms used, the arts-based community development approach emphasises interaction, collaboration and creativity via arts-based projects or initiatives; and facilitates individual and community wellbeing (Ledwith, 2016).

The Landscape of Community Development in Singapore

Community development in Singapore is based around a planned, service-delivery and consensus model (Ng, 2017). State-led community development — through the People's Association and the Community Development Councils — has dominated the style of community work in Singapore.

The People's Association (PA) was set up in 1960 to consolidate a fragmented and politicised community sector and provide better equipment and services to communities. It is a unique statutory body with a wide mandate to oversee grassroots organisations, community development councils and community centres. Voluntary efforts at community work will typically have to either work within the PA system or find a niche outside them. Since the

1960s and 1970s, they have assisted in initiatives to build a resilient and hardworking society (National Day Parade). They have also branched out to support childcare (PA kindergartens); youth leadership training (National Youth Leadership Training Institute, Outward Bound School); and cultivating a sporting culture (pugilistic displays, sports competitions).

Goodwill Committees, Citizens' Consultative Committees (CCC) and Residents' Committees (RC) were later set up, in 1964, 1965 and 1978, respectively, to act as a bridge between community leaders and the national leadership, in order to communicate policies and to convey feedback from the ground. The RCs in particular, provide a conduit for social interaction and support networks to form amidst the isolative effects of urban life. It also provides a platform to nurture younger neighbourhood leaders to solve social problems and act as intermediaries between government bureaucracies and residents (Vasoo, 2001).

In 1997, Community Development Councils (CDC) were formed to strengthen bonding and promote cohesion within local communities and to improve efficiency and coordination in public assistance schemes as well as the CCCs, RCs as well as various NGOs, in community problem-solving (Vasoo, 2001). There are five CDCs: Central, North East, North West, South East and South West, whose boundaries correspond to existing political boundaries in Singapore that are geographically clustered. For example, the South East CDC oversees five electoral divisions in the southeast of Singapore.

There are very few voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that engage in community development as has been defined here, even though many offer community-based programmes, choosing instead to focus on the delivery of direct services to tap into available funding. Refer to Annex A for some examples.

The Community Arts Ecosystem in Singapore

Singapore's community arts ecosystem is marked by a high degree of interdependence. The state provides funding to artists and VWOs to start or sustain their art-making projects — in contrast to other countries such as the United States where the arts are largely supported by private donations and foundations. In 2015, 80 per cent of arts and heritage funding in Singapore was provided by the government through the National Arts Council. Just two per cent of Singaporean donors give to the arts (Ho, 2017). Artists working with disadvantaged communities also often depend on VWOs for access to the beneficiaries they can work with, as VWO managers and social workers are more familiar with the beneficiaries' conditions and therefore, ascertain their suitability to partake in art-making. The state, artists and VWOs all depend on the community to supply the critical volume of participants in order to make an arts event or project a "success".

Community arts is in the process of emergence and has yet to have a professional identity. In the context of Singapore, the arts community has increasingly begun to have conversations about community arts, particularly through the efforts of Community Cultural Development Singapore and ArtsWok. Through roundtable discussions and communities of practice, manifestos and guidelines for practice, a sense of identity appears to be emerging. Various terms have emerged to describe this type of work: "arts-based community development", "community cultural development" or even the broader "socially engaged arts" practice. There

are several groups of key stakeholders that can be identified in this nascent field (Lee & Sim, 2017):

- 1) **Community artists or socially engaged artists.** They do not necessarily recognise themselves as having a shared professional identity, and are therefore not organised. Some might work within a non-profit arts company. For example, arts company Artsolute focuses on what it terms “socially based art practices” that include running workshops and performances of dance, drama, painting and storytelling at hospitals to enhance patient well-being. It has also used puppetry and storytelling to support children’s art education in Southeast Asia. However, there are also many individual artists who are not part of any organisation, such as visual artist Alecia Neo, who was commissioned for a project that paired visually impaired students with relevant mentors, so that the students can embark on art projects of their own choosing in various mediums such as theatre, song-writing and film-making.
- 2) **Arts companies and non-profits.** While there are arts companies that engage in social good to some degree, many of them also act merely as platforms or “shell” companies for different individual artists or freelancers to run community arts projects. Currently, there are only a handful of artistic non-profits that have community development in its mission statement and objectives.
- 3) **Specialised media platforms that feature community arts.** Brack (www.brack.sg) is an online platform that features socially engaged artists, writing in the intersection between art and society, and raising awareness for projects that utilise art for social good. They also run an artist-in-residency programme, where artists are invited to Singapore to devote a specific period of time to a socially engaged project. The Singapore International Foundation’s media platform for featuring stories of people doing good in Asia, Our Better World (ourbetterworld.org) also has a significant profile on many community artists.
- 4) **Market aggregators** help market the artistic products of community artists. The National Council of Social Service set up a social enterprise called Heartgifts to help the clients of social service agencies market and sell their arts and crafts. They source for products — made by marginalised and vulnerable populations such as isolated seniors, people with disabilities, low-income single mothers, ex-offenders, etc. — and help to package and market them to companies as corporate gifts. Another example is BeenSprout, which helps social enterprises and non-profit organisations sell their arts and craft products and services.
- 5) **Intermediary organisations.** An emerging group in the arts community, of which ArtsWok is an example. They help to connect socially engaged artists to community organisations, build artist capability in working with communities and bring stakeholders across diverse fields and knowledge in order to engage in projects.

ArtsWok Collaborative in Focus

What is ArtsWok Collaborative?

ArtsWok Collaborative (“ArtsWok”) is an arts-based community development organisation, creative producer and intermediary that harnesses the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.²

As an intermediary, it has to work closely with diverse stakeholders like government agencies, funders, VWOs and arts groups to produce engaged arts experiences that serve a social goal. For example, they have made possible forum theatre, films and participatory arts experiences that champion end-of-life planning and brought them to the heartlands.

The organisation’s niche is arts-based community development, and it regards the arts as critical to its work; ArtsWok will not enter into the space of non-arts based community development, especially as there are other stakeholders in that space.

ArtsWok’s work can be broadly categorised into three functions:

- 1) **Creative Producing.** This involves a process that takes a concept and making it a reality. It involves working closely with artists/creatives to generate and develop ideas, assembling the right team of collaborators and partners, securing resources for the work, fund-raising, convening multi-disciplinary stakeholder meetings, project management and finally monitoring and evaluation. For example, ArtsWok has made possible forum theatre and puppet shows that champion end-of-life planning and brought them to the heartlands, co-created by various stakeholders.
- 2) **Intermediary.** The fields of arts and community development have different vocabularies, terms of references, funders and evaluation criteria — and are overseen and populated by different ministerial and community agencies. ArtsWok’s work is to straddle both fields, and to harmonise conversations between and within stakeholders, from artists, voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) and funders, to communities and the public. One particular aspect is conveying the value of an arts-based approach.
- 3) **Training.** ArtsWok is interested in articulating and growing arts-based community development in Singapore, and is one of the few organisations that facilitates consistent training in this field.³ It organises regular action-learning programmes, networking sessions, and facilitates a community of practice to share strategies on creative approaches to community development. It also publishes case studies, papers and reports, including an e-newsletter, for others to learn from.

² See Annex B for ArtsWok’s mission, vision and values.

³ Another organisation is Singapore Polytechnic, which carries a Diploma programme in Applied Drama and Psychology.

The History of ArtsWok

Established in 2012 by co-founders Ngiam Su-Lin and Ko Siew Huey, ArtsWok Collaborative started out as a private limited company, and later became a company limited by guarantee with charity status in 2014. From 2013 to 2015, ArtsWok initiated its three flagship programmes: *Both Sides, Now*, an immersive and community-driven arts experience on end-of-life issues; *M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival*, an annual festival to nurture civic-minded youth theatre-makers; and *The Greenhouse Series*, a series of initiatives aimed at growing the field of arts-based community development in Singapore.

During this period, ArtsWok also became a recipient of the National Arts Council (NAC) Seed Grant (2015-2018). It also obtained office space under the NAC's Arts Housing scheme, before being confirmed as a Major Company in 2018. The organisation has also grown from two to five full-time staff.

ArtsWok's Approach to Arts-Based Community Development

Given that there are already various agencies doing different degrees of community development, with some using established approaches such as asset-based community development — what is the unique value of the arts in community development work?

ArtsWok believes that an arts-based approach creates open-ended and safe spaces for communities to engage in dialogue about difficult issues, which would otherwise be challenging through direct discussion. When asked what constituted an “arts-based approach”, one respondent described it as such:

Where artists or creatives are involved, where the arts is pivotal and central to the process. It is the process as well as the medium as well as the output. The way of working as well as the communication are arts-based, and alongside there are certain assumptions — that it is an imaginative and creative space, so the act of making and co-creating is very powerful, and that it is a form of expression or communication that is part of change work.

The arts are able to catalyse the organic development of relationships and the discovery of new perspectives, and their dialogic nature allows complex issues to be processed and unpacked more effectively. Where differences arise, an arts-based process embraces differences as desirable rather than problematic; some friction can lead to positive outcomes if there is the space to talk about differences.

ArtsWok's Programmes and Activities

The Greenhouse Series. The Greenhouse Series is aimed at building awareness and growing the field of arts-based community development in Singapore. It hopes to equip and empower artists to seed and initiate projects with communities independently, and to promote multi-disciplinary collaboration across fields and sectors. It comprises three components:

- 1) **The Greenhouse Sessions.** A community of practice for artists, creatives and other stakeholders interested in arts-based community engagement to share insights, exchange and learn from one another.

- 2) **The Greenhouse Gathering.** Curated talks and discussions for stakeholders to mingle, ideate and establish partnerships.
- 3) **The Greenhouse Lab.** Action-learning workshops to test methodologies and equip arts practitioners and community workers to design, implement, monitor and evaluate community arts programmes based on social purposes.



Figure 1: Izzaty Ishak facilitates an activity at The Greenhouse Sessions #18: Creative Leadership and Re-Imagining Communities II (The Community Theatre: Giving Choices Back). Photo: Zinkie Aw

M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival. An annual youth theatre festival that provides a platform for youth to create and perform original work, nurture civic-minded theatre-makers, as well as create dialogue on social issues. The festival provides a platform for youth aged 13 to 25 to create and perform original work at professional theatre venues under the mentorship of theatre professionals. It aims to nurture civic theatre-makers, creating dialogue on social issues and showcase youths’ perspectives on them. It comprises hands-on workshops, experiential learning and research, and staging plays on a chosen theme.

Started in 2015, Cultural Medallion recipient Alvin Tan was the first Artistic Director of the festival for the first three years, before passing the baton to veteran theatre actress, director and educator Jean Ng.

The theme of the 2018–9 edition of the festival was “poverty”, and it brought together youths from Anderson Secondary School, Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road) and The Community Theatre (Beyond Social Services) to delve deeply into what poverty means in Singapore. This included a Human Library segment where youths got to interview people on their perspectives on poverty, visits to communities living in rental flats and VWOs that provide services to such

communities, all the while guided by arts-based processes and local professionals in the arts. These experiences culminated in three festival plays, performed by the youth as well.

Both Sides, Now. A community engagement programme through performances and arts experiences that raises awareness of end-of-life issues and encourages the community to make end of life plans. The programme engages seniors and communities in arts performances and experiences to break the taboo on death and dying, and encourage reflection and planning on end-of-life matters. It comprises art installations and participatory arts, speaker sessions, forum theatre, community conversations as well as puppetry performances that aid in facilitating end-of-life conversations.

Both Sides, Now first started as an immersive arts experience in Khoo Teck Puat Hospital in 2013, where it aimed to promote end-of-life conversations among patients, caregivers, doctors and healthcare professionals. It has since travelled to residential communities such as Khatib and Toa Payoh (2013–2014) and across 50 senior centres in Singapore (2014–2016).

Recently, *Both Sides, Now* was produced in two communities, in Chong Pang and Telok Blangah. Along with arts experiences and artworks that were co-created with residents, there were also performances, workshops, talks and a resource toolkit with accompanying training was also developed to enable healthcare staff and community care workers to use creative approaches in having end-of-life conversations. Anchor community partners were also identified in order to support long-term community work and engagement, and included Yishun Health's Wellness Kampung in Chong Pang, and Montfort Care's GoodLife! programme in Telok Blangah.

Commissioned by the Lien Foundation and Ang Chin Moh Foundation since 2013, *Both Sides, Now* is produced by Drama Box and ArtsWok in collaboration with Yishun Health and Montfort Care, and supported by Tote Board and the Living Matters initiative.

Case studies, reports and articles. ArtsWok also publishes case studies and reports, including a biannual e-newsletter, to advocate for arts-based community development as a field. In particular, it documents insights from local arts-based community development projects in Singapore, such as the work of ground-up volunteer group Cassia Resettlement Team, the creative movement programme *Everyday Waltzes* by The ARTS Fission Company, and The Community Theatre, a programme by Beyond Social Services.

Organisation Strategy and Impact

Adopting a TOC framework, we articulated ArtsWok's organisational strategy in three key strategic thrusts:⁴

- 1) Field Building and Capability Development for Socially Engaged Artists
- 2) Creative Producing in and with the Community
- 3) Stakeholder Engagement

In order to develop practitioners of arts-based community development in Singapore, ArtsWok actively reaches out to artists, creatives, students and other potential stakeholders to expound the ethos and method of the field. This also includes conducting training sessions such as *The Greenhouse Lab*, developing actionable toolkits and training guides for care workers using arts and creative approaches through *Both Sides, Now* and *Everyday Waltzes* projects, as well as writing articles and case studies targeted at the various players in the arts, creative and community development ecosystem. According to the TOC, it is expected that when artists know and are interested in arts-based community development, they would be able to equip themselves with relevant methods to engage communities in dialogue, towards the goal of co-creating solutions.

The bulk of ArtsWok's work lies in creative production: in and with the community as well as locale-specific stakeholders. As an intermediary, ArtsWok participates heavily in the project conceptualisation and management process, and expends copious resources in implementation as well. This is reflected in its flagship programmes, *Both Sides, Now* and *M1 Peer Pleasure*, both of which involve immersive arts experiences and engagement processes with members of various communities (e.g., residents, students), which are as equally important as the final, public-facing productions that are often associated with the programmes.

ArtsWok's intermediary role is exemplified in the final thrust — stakeholder engagement. Aside to creative production, much of ArtsWok's work also involves liaison work, space and logistics coordination, as well as funder and VWO engagement. These activities represent the work that is required to pull together arts-based community projects. Of particular concern to ArtsWok is that funders, VWOs and other gatekeepers to valuable resources understand and appreciate the value of arts-based community development as an approach. As one of the pioneers in this regard, ArtsWok needs to expend time to grow awareness and cognisance of the field, in order to set the stage for meaningful dialogues with, and in the community.

⁴ See Annex C for ArtsWok's Theory of Change.

The Value of the Arts in Community Engagement and Development

An imaginative space that extends understanding and expands solutions

The arts are able to engage community in imaginative ways that creates a space for dialogue on communal issues faced and also expand the horizons of possible solutions. Different art forms — visual arts, performances, film, etc. — bring unique affordances and possibilities to community development. Each has its own internal logic, processes and ways of working that tap into diverse types of intelligences, triggering different ways of seeing and allowing the exploration of new meanings and identities. Tapping into diverse types of intelligences also has implications for community education and development, in recognising the various styles of learning and understanding, as well as developing various learning and engagement tools through different art forms.

According to one respondent, this potential of arts-based approaches is matched with the propensity and capability of socially engaged artists to engage complex issues in a fresh and non-linear manner. This is analogous to how deep, personal change and transformation, and mindset change, happens:

Socially engaged artists go in with no special or strong agendas, and they have a way of looking at complex issues. We are not afraid of going into potentially difficult topics.

We know what the project objectives are, but it's not a straight road. Knowledge and change and transformation happen in complex ways. Sometimes it's through painting or performing something. It's not just through talking about your problem that the change will occur. In fact, oftentimes it's not focusing on the problem, but doing something else together that you feel motivated to want to change. You feel motivated to change through art. That's the beauty and magic of socially engaging arts.

Another respondent pointed to the centrality of respectful dialogue in an arts-based approach to thinking about and asking questions:

Talking about a serious topic in a fun way, observing from a third-person, outside perspective to reflect on one's own life — it's very powerful sometimes. And if you are not comfortable, you can change topic.

Unlike incumbent social work approaches, which tend to produce top-down, directive and solution-specific ways of assessing community problems, the process of art-making does not artificially limit responses or compel individuals into action. Instead, an arts-based approach expands the available modes of engaging with issues, allowing different people to interpret them in their own particular and subjective ways without seeking a one-size-fits-all answer.

Imagination and reflection play into creating a safe space for diverse responses and deep reflection, which is important especially for taboo or challenging issues, which require innovative and thoughtful ways of engaging communities beyond established modes that tend to be limited and output-driven:

Main thing is that imagination is activated Interpretive thinking is crucial, not just deductive, and therefore open-ended. Multiple perspective is central to what we do, and as a result, difference is not a problem, difference is desirable, it means disagreement is possible without it being disruptive for cohesion to occur.

A dialogic approach to unpack complex issues with the community

Amidst the diversities of art forms and the varying possibilities they provide, central to the arts-based approach to community development is a dialogic approach. This means that art is brought into being through exchanges between people as they interact with information, objects, and each other. While typically it is finished works of art that provoke dialogue among viewers, in dialogic art the process of conversation and interaction — of dialogue — becomes an integral part of the finished work itself (Kester, 2005). Social issues are often unpacked when artworks are presented for sharing as well, eliciting further response, offering new opportunities for clarification and imagination. The process thereby facilitates co-creation and joint decision-making because the finished product is not actually ‘finished’ as it continues to elicit reflection and dialogue.

In *Both Sides, Now*, residents play a significant role in defining what the art works look like and how they should be presented. When the final works are showcased to the public, they are done so back to the community as well. During the *Both Sides, Now* Public Arts Installation at Telok Blangah, residents were invited to share about their works and the process of art-making to a wider audience. For example, in thinking about how memories relate to the process of dying, photos that a Telok Blangah resident took of his family’s keepsakes were printed onto postcards, which participants could take home, or use to pen thoughts to a significant individual that they would like to reconnect with. The process is therefore able to create a space to understand context, circumstances and relationships instead of seeing it as an isolated or individual problem. Members of the general public were also invited to participate, reflect and contribute to the artworks in various ways.

Reflecting on *Both Sides, Now*, one respondent said, “The arts is able to attract people into a safe space on difficult conversations. You can just watch [if you want]. [There is] no need to engage if you are not ready, unlike counselling.” Talking about end-of-life issues can be a sensitive matter to some, and an arts-based approach is valuable in its accommodation of distant and face-up modes of engagement *by* participants as well.

The Wind Came Home, a puppetry performance about an elderly couple struggling to make end-of-life choices, featured a post-performance discussion segment where participants were invited to weigh in on various parts of the show, which were related to specific stages in end-of-life planning. Following the performance’s conclusion, participants were also invited to more intimate discussions about their own end-of-life plans with trained volunteers, who can also refer them to end-of-life planning avenues and resources.



Figure 2: Participants of artist anGie Seah's workshop for *Both Sides, Now*, who are residents of Blk 7 Telok Blangah Crescent. Photo: Zinkie Aw

This illustrates two points. First, unlike a conventional service-based approach, arts-based approaches like this facilitate multiple modes of engagement for participants with different comfort levels, and permit safety and distance in unpacking issues that are sensitive. In *The Wind Came Home*, for example, real-life situations that might have been uncomfortable to confront in a more direct and personal manner, were narrated from the perspective of a stray cat. These scenes, which mirror real-world complexities and dilemmas in which elderly caregivers are mired, ranged from everyday sacrifices to one scene when the care recipient inadvertently causes the death of the caregiver. When one is able to observe arts-based performances in the third person, the feeling is different and not as “in your face” as, say, counselling. They do not bring people to where they are not comfortable.

Second, the multiple methods and forms afforded to arts-based approaches allow complex issues to be engaged with at different levels of comfort. Although the post-show discussion had intended to spur conversations on end-of-life planning, not all participants were ready and forthcoming about making end-of-life plans. For instance, an elderly community resident may wish to consider end-of-life plans, but their children may not be ready; or, they may have more pressing day-to-day concerns at that moment. As one ArtsWok respondent put it, “You can’t have conversations about the future if they can’t even see through the next few days.”

Another respondent observed that one of the elderly residents watching the *Both Sides, Now* performances this year, did so last year as well albeit from outside of the event space, and remarked, “Especially for sensitive issues like this [end-of-life issues], people need the time and space to process their own issues, and to engage [in *Both Sides, Now*] at their own pace and comfort level.”

This feature of the arts approach has to be balanced with programme targets that are set. Unlike conventional services that rely significantly on showing results in specific, rigid outputs, *Both Sides, Now* and ArtsWok's other programmes are governed less by rigid key performance indicators (KPIs⁵).

A catalyst for organic relationships and capabilities

An arts-based approach is comfortable with complexity and does not seek to reduce social issues to a singular dimension that a more scientific or social-service approach might take, and is therefore able to create a space to understand context, circumstances and relationships.

As opposed to seeing people's issues as isolated or individual problems, when done well, an artistic experience can catalyse the organic and often unpredictable development of communal relationships and capabilities. According to a respondent, sometimes, it is when the community participates in art-making that relationships are formed unknowingly:

The unique value of an arts-based approach to community development work is that it feels like playing and having fun. It allows people to have their own creative expression. When you are playing and doing arts, relationships are formed and learning is done unknowingly, time is filled up meaningfully, and you are happy.

Sometimes change occurs through the process of creation. Often it is not focusing on the problem that you feel motivated to connect and to change. That's the beauty of the arts.

When people are meaningfully engaged in free, loose processes of art-making, they may inadvertently find solutions to difficult subjects. However, the propensity of an arts-based approach is relationship-building, which is a fundamental tenet of the change work necessary in community development. ArtsWok takes the development of interpersonal relationships between and among stakeholders and the community as its priority, and achieves this through taking advantage of the free expression that art-making affords.

⁵ This is elaborated on in the next section, which discusses the work needed to be an effective intermediary in arts-based community development work.

The Work of Creative Producing and the Role of the Intermediary

Building bridges between partners from different fields

To be a creative producer of socially engaged arts projects requires not only an aesthetic sensibility, but also an astute understanding of the local context and relationships, the affordances of available communal spaces, and a co-creation process that engenders collective participation and ownership.

As an entity that brings people and resources together, ArtsWok works with a whole gamut of stakeholders, including artists and arts groups, schools and students, VWOs, funders in the form of foundations, profit-driven corporations and governmental agencies, state-level arts institutions and agencies, and community members from specific neighbourhoods. Its “real value” as an intermediary, according to a respondent, is that “we have the ability to translate across disciplines.” ArtsWok acts as an intermediary to pull together partnerships and resources across various stakeholders with different agendas and logics and that wield different vocabularies, towards joint outcomes.

Figure 3 is an example of what different stakeholders that work with ArtsWok think about what “community development” means to them. It is helpful to showcase these interpretations not just for the sake of obtaining a collective understanding of the phrase, but to also think about how interpretations of what “community” constitutes differ, and what they imply in the course of working together.

Featuring prominently amongst the sectors that ArtsWok straddles are the arts but also social/community services. VWOs are often gatekeepers to communities, and grassroots organisations, to space. However, bringing people and resources from these two sectors together can be harder than it seems, as two respondents have observed:

It is not a case of working with the arts only. It's actually also very much about working with the social systems and the community, which requires the community, practitioners, supporters and stakeholders to have the sensibility of saying, “I am not there to appreciate good art only. I am also there to appreciate what is happening in the community and understand the issues behind it...” This is not a perspective that everybody is ready to embrace. So you have potential people that go, “I am happy to support the arts but I am not happy about this issue of workers in my neighbourhood” or “I am keen on elderly and end-of-life issues but why arts?” So you have people like that.

Some funders tend to regard the arts and the social services as mutually exclusive categories, privileging their support for social services over the arts when limited funding enters the picture. Many artists tend also not to think about their work in terms of social or community relevance. Said a respondent on the priorities of some funders, “The social service sector deals with immediate social needs. If you are hungry now, can you eat art? If they have \$10,000, they won't do an arts project.”

WHAT DOES COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LOOK LIKE?

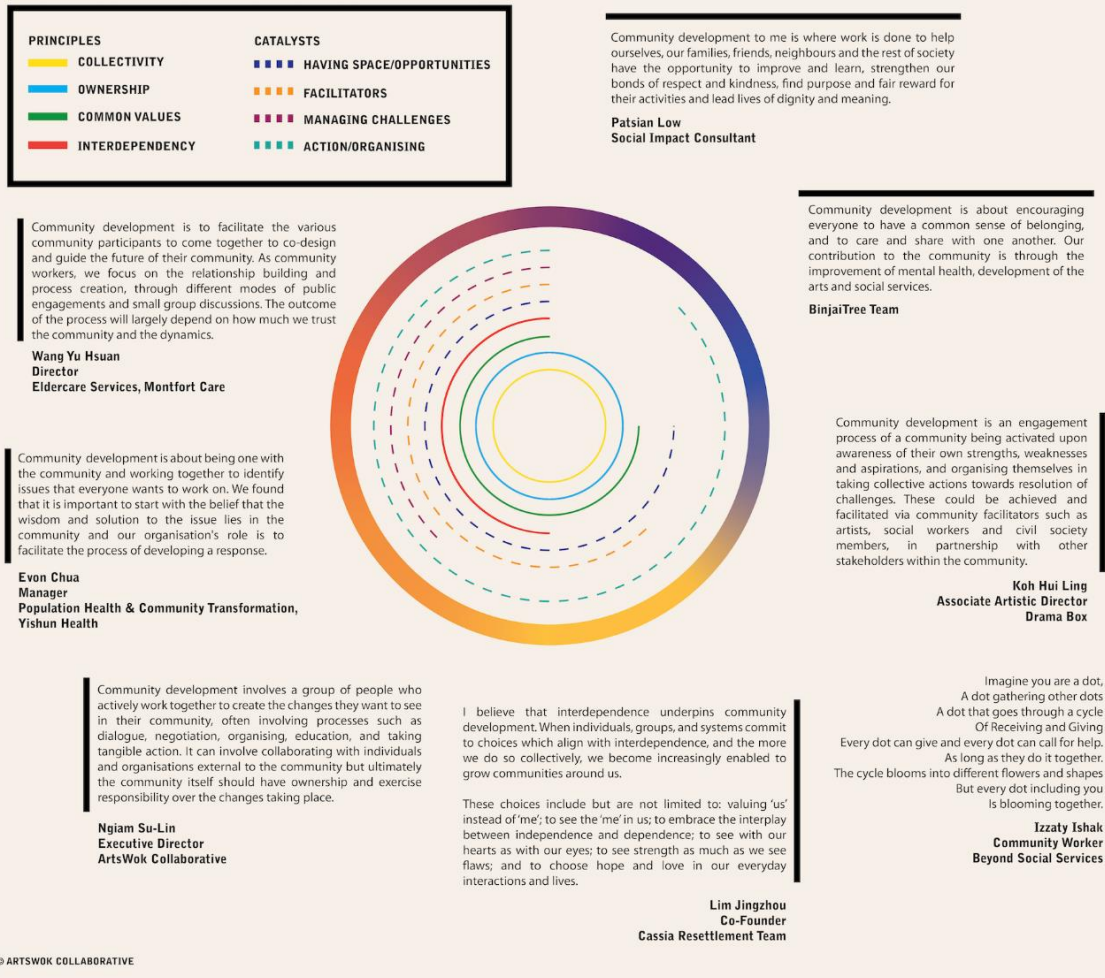


Figure 3: Different perceptions of community development from different stakeholders that ArtsWok works with.⁶

Funders may struggle to appreciate the potential of weaving arts-based approaches into community development work, while other stakeholders who are unfamiliar with the arts may not understand arts-based approaches and processes. This necessitates many meetings and conversations in order for value to be understood. Adding to this conundrum is that arts-based approaches are fluid, experiential, and can be challenging to communicate to stakeholders who are cognisant in a specific set of logics and vocabularies with a limited range of outputs and foci in mind.

Especially where its partners do not know or trust one another, ArtsWok is also often caught in situations where they have to mediate between different stakeholders, and have to be careful of inter-stakeholder tensions that can arise as a result. Taking the example of mediating between arts groups and government agencies, one respondent observed:

⁶ A higher-res version is available [here](#).

The importance of perception or how one is perceived, and the issue of trust are pivotal to being an intermediary. There are risks involved in holding the tension between relationships, e.g., danger of being perceived by artists as being co-opted by the state or being perceived by the state as being oppositional or a trouble-maker because of associations with particular artists, activists etc. Therefore the cognitive and emotional load of intermediaries is high because our work requires *care* (emphasis added). High levels of reflexivity, attention, communication, and negotiation take place all the time.

Invisible, underappreciated and nebulous work

Just as audiences see actors and appreciate the work of directors, the producer's role is often behind the scenes, its value less obvious to stakeholders. What of the people supporting the producer, then?

As one of the few, if not only, arts-based intermediaries intersecting community development in Singapore, ArtsWok faces less competition from similar players when pitching for projects and funding. However, the relatively novel notion of an arts intermediary also means that it is an unfamiliar, uncharted terrain for some of ArtsWok's existing and potential stakeholders.

Compounding the situation is that, often, the public's only interaction with ArtsWok is likely to happen at the phase of its final product, during an arts performance or event. The audience is likely to be oblivious to much of the intensive, behind-the-scenes work that ArtsWok typically engages in as an intermediary before the curtain rises.

Taking the example of the *M1 Peer Pleasure Festival*, some of the work that goes behind the youth theatre shows, which are the only products that the public sees, include:

- Curating and inviting the artists and youth participants, convening a resource panel of experts to guide the research process on particular social issues
- Workshops for the student-performers to conceptualise, develop and write the play's script
- Facilitating the research process for student-performers prior to putting on the show, which would have taken up a year or so to be completed
- Liaising with arts institutions and state agencies like the Esplanade and the Info-communications Media Development Authority on licensing and venue issues
- Seeking sponsorships to defray the costs of the production
- Marketing efforts including press engagement and managing social media outlets, to generate publicity and ticket sales for the event

For other projects such as *Both Sides, Now*, volunteer management is another time-consuming aspect of work, given that ArtsWok relies mostly on volunteers to facilitate the conversation engagement processes with residents after the performances. Besides providing compulsory training for volunteers, another area is that of pairing newer volunteers with more senior ones. Furthermore, although ArtsWok is not involved directly in producing an art work

or an arts event (managed by co-producer, Drama Box), it is still heavily involved in the creative process as well as stakeholder engagement, contributing towards curating the creative team, shaping the direction of the project, and providing inputs during meetings with artists and other stakeholders, for instance.

This lack of understanding can extend to funders and sponsors as well, and ArtsWok staff frequently take extra effort in explaining their business model to them. Because ArtsWok frequently straddles the arts and community sectors, their applications for funding can be seen as “double dipping”, as seen in the case of the *M1 Peer Pleasure Festival*, which involves schools and arts groups. As one respondent communicated:

For *M1 Peer Pleasure* this year, we wrote this 20-pager sponsorship letter, stating the different components and what we were trying to do. All that being said, they called us and asked us what we were fundraising for ... the business model is a bit different. The money they're going to give us is not [necessarily] going to go into production costs. We had to explain the money goes to research and advocacy It's hard for people to wrap their heads around what we do.

People see arts and community as mutually exclusive areas of work. If we write a grant letter to a foundation, they get confused as to what our programme is doing or achieving.

Another respondent faced similar challenges in “explaining what we do to the community and the arts sectors. We don't do social services or arts performances. It's a no man's land.”

The value generated and the costs incurred in the time and expertise invested in the resource-intensive process of art-making, leading up to the final product, is not well understood or well appreciated. The nebulous nature of being an arts intermediary translates into difficulties among the staff in communicating the value of their work to stakeholders, including funders.

Hence, ArtsWok as an arts intermediary faces the double whammy of having its *concept* and *practice* not well understood by an audience that does not see its work; some stakeholders have asked if ArtsWok is an arts organisation or a social service organisation.

The background nature of intermediary work not only obfuscates ArtsWok's professional contributions; it also has the effect of obscuring its association with its flagship programmes. For *Both Sides, Now*, the public tends to recognise co-producer, Drama Box, as the face of the campaign, and according to a respondent, “ArtsWok is a secondary mention although we are organising the training. We need to rethink how to get the name out.”

While there is increasing appreciation for the arts as an important tool in community engagement — demonstrated partly by the state's foray into community arts — and art therapy, an instrumental and pragmatic attitude towards the arts prevails. In practice, this can be seen where stakeholders only want to engage ArtsWok for once-off projects with pre-determined outcomes, when “the arts can lead to multiple outcomes in the long run, with more patience,” especially as a tool and process, rather than an output. Artists also tend to be invited into community projects as vendors of arts services or programmes, as opposed to being on equal terms as collaborators.



Figure 4: *The Ground* (part of the *Double Bill* of *M1 Peer Pleasure 2019*), devised and performed by Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road). Photo: Zinkie Aw

Some funders “might not see the need for continuing with the project. They don’t see that giving more time could hit more outcomes. They don’t necessarily come with a long-term view.” This mindset could also stem from the lack of understanding of the sheer amount of time required for arts-based community engagement to make progress, and for benefits to be realised (e.g., change in mindsets or attitudes). Taking *Both Sides, Now* as an example, one of the respondents observed that getting members of the community to speak on taboo issues like end of life was a challenge, and after catching the performances, some participants might remain at the “periphery” for the first two years of the running of the programme, before taking a small step to engage in a conversation with the volunteers.

To mitigate this lack of awareness of their work, one strategy that ArtsWok employs to expand stakeholders’ understanding of the arts is to invite them to attend ArtsWok’s performances and events, though only few are convinced to make the time. ArtsWok holds direct experience by stakeholders as an important means to showcase its work, because “it’s hard to talk about it if you don’t experience it.”

One respondent explained that a social service professional had exclaimed, “Oh, that’s what you mean” after attending a workshop as part of *Both Sides, Now*. The individual also commented that ArtsWok was “brave” to do — in social work terms — “group work in public”.

“We also cite other case studies from abroad and benchmark against them. They like such case studies,” said one respondent. Terms such as “group work” and “case studies” illustrate

the need for vocabularies that collaborators can understand. Direct experience is ideal, but where it is not possible ArtsWok also produces videos of the event for stakeholders.

The difficulties in communicating the value of ArtsWok's work and of the arts in general have also presented the dilemma of whether the organisation should "charge the project lower and demonstrate worth [to stakeholders], or to charge what we think the value of this project is."

Due to the amorphous nature of arts-based approaches, but more so the lack of concrete vocabularies to encapsulate the work of arts-based intermediary work, ArtsWok has had to use specific examples to publicise the field. To advocate for something that is not explicitly understood, suggested one respondent, ArtsWok does not rely as much on its avowed vision, mission and values, but the delivery of its flagship programmes such as *Both Sides, Now*. Said a respondent:

It is very hard to explain it in these terms, the mission ... but we say, remember *Both Sides, Now*? ArtsWok designed it, then they go ... "oh". Advocacy is done through the actual delivery itself. And how we advocate for those activities is where you see the value of ArtsWok. Instead of advocating not necessarily what ArtsWok does but ArtsWok's projects and the results of these projects, then there is a different understanding.

Unfortunately, the pool of funders and stakeholders that understand remains small, and this could restrict the range of projects and prospects that ArtsWok is capable of.

For advocacy to be effective, smaller and leaner organisations like ArtsWok can leverage its partners to promote its merits on its behalf. While ArtsWok engages with a lot of partners, one respondent noted that there appears to be a "lost opportunity" in that very few of ArtsWok's partners actually "market" ArtsWok's work for them. While *Both Sides, Now* and the *M1 Peer Pleasure Festival* are well-marketed, it is difficult to recognise ArtsWok's involvement, and the nature of it, until one reads the fine print.

However, the same respondent added that this depends on whether the ArtsWok team has the time and bandwidth to cultivate these opportunities with their partners and converting relationships into resources. Currently, the organisation does not have a staff member fully devoted to fundraising and partnership development, and when the day-to-day pressures of putting together an arts programme set in, fundraising is likely to take a back seat.

Being selective with like-minded partners

Much of the work behind the scenes depends on partners who have similar goals and an aligned vision in mind. To be a producer and intermediary requires curation and selectivity, with one of its key roles being knowing whom to ask for what, and being careful with whom to partner with. Stakeholders have to be "gung-ho, and thrive on risk and innovation," and be willing to take risks or allow ArtsWok to take risks on their behalf and be "open to new approaches". Likewise, ArtsWok prefers to work with artists and stakeholders it is familiar with and trust, and who are aligned with the organisation's mission and vision (see Annex B), and who understand ArtsWok's work. This constitutes a core value of ArtsWok in its beliefs about community development, which other stakeholders must share.

While there is no standard criterion, ArtsWok thinks that stakeholders should be ready, clear about and broadly aligned with their own vision and processes in order to avoid operational issues later on. This includes early consensus on what is at stake, how value is understood and measured and how much time is required for value to be realised. Stakeholders must also understand the importance of “space and time”, the need to innovate and sometimes fail, and be committed to both the process and for the long haul.

One aspect in which this manifests is its KPIs, which are flexible and respond to changing project requirements, and where value is given to the dialogic process in engaging and building community with regard to those KPIs. In return, ArtsWok has to keep itself accountable, and staff often have meetings with funders to update them on the progress of projects, which has created a good working relationship with its partners and funders.

Building the field while doing the work

One way in which ArtsWok builds the field of arts-based community development is through *The Greenhouse Sessions*, a community of practice where practitioners from artists, creatives to other stakeholders interested in arts-based community engagement, come together to share insights, exchange, and test ideas and methodologies. ArtsWok also produces case studies and reports, including a biannual e-newsletter, to advocate for arts-based community development as a field.

Unlike well-defined sectors where there are ready resources for defined services, ArtsWok also often gets its hands dirty, which in turn allows it to gain rich experience, build credibility and document progress as a forerunner in the field. This includes participating in the creative production process and giving ideas, volunteer management and coordination, and also looking out for new ideas to determine their worth and feasibility. According to a respondent:

We are constantly on the look-out for new ideas, to determine their worth and feasibility in our local context. This keeps us tuned in to developments in various fields — ABCD [asset-based community development], cultural mapping, etc. — so that we can raise the level of awareness about these tools, and also better appraise their utility as we try them out.

Playing both the “thinker” and “doer” roles stretches resources, but is also a source of strength. ArtsWok has had to “build the field” even as they “do the work”.

Implications for sustainability and scale

Unlike the provision of a service, the meaning of replication and scale is different for such arts-based community development work, which needs to be adapted and tailored to specific contexts, communities and relationships in order for it to be effective. This means that a simple cookie-cutter approach may not be possible. While some aspects of the approach may be replicable, such as developing a toolkit that distils the creative approach, projects and conversations should be different for different communities.

Case in point, the success of *Both Sides, Now* in spreading the word on end-of-life issues can be attributed to its sensitivity to differences in communities across different iterations. The 2013 edition started out at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, where it aimed to spur healthcare workers, caregivers and patients to be more comfortable in exploring end-of-life issues. The

artworks, experiences and outputs in this edition would be different in subsequent iterations at Toa Payoh, Chong Pang and Telok Blangah, which target different communities with different demographics and different needs, issues and strengths.

However, this also has implications on future sustainability: The funding difficulties arising from the misconceived notions about ArtsWok's role as an intermediary as well as the value of the arts have partly led to the organisation experiencing resource constraints. ArtsWok operates with a very lean team, with all members juggling numerous responsibilities and tasks at the same time.

Many admitted to feeling "stretched" by the challenges at work and from having to juggle multiple tasks simultaneously. Nevertheless, they continue to feel "motivated and encouraged" because of the satisfaction and meaning derived from their work. Said one respondent, "We pour ourselves a lot into the work, which is not healthy. We [should] either slow down or hire more people."

Space — its office rented from the National Arts Council in Goodman Centre — is in scarce supply as well. Another respondent noted that as there is inadequate space in their office to hold meetings, they have to "coordinate when to work, from home".

There has already been discussion among the staff and management on diversifying revenue streams, other than relying on funding. One option is to monetise the products and services of ArtsWok, as developed from previous and existing projects. However, given the collaborative nature of an arts intermediary, there is a need to consider and balance the interests and concerns of the various stakeholders and some form of a consensus from all stakeholders involved might have to be reached.

Perhaps, as a board member has raised, ArtsWok might need to "recognise and balance whose perspectives are the most important" as it is practically impossible for a small organisation to develop in the sometimes conflicting ways its stakeholders had expected it to do so. Of course, priorities shift from time to time and ArtsWok could focus on different stakeholders as it evolves as an arts-based, community-engaged intermediary.

Vision-driven and investment in community

Given that every project will be different because every community is different, ArtsWok has had to equip itself beyond just specific capabilities and standardised frameworks to be guided and anchored by a set of values, principles and vision of what counts as a strong community.

Even though ArtsWok aims to grow in the long run, we are currently focused on getting it right first. Community development is a process, like making friends, establishing trust, etc. It would be foolhardy to rush into things, even though there is always pressure from some stakeholders to scale or expand.

The reason as to why staff need to spend so much time on its projects is because ArtsWok pays attention to process as "arts-based work is process-driven, not product-driven", which is "important because process is transformative." For example, before engaging in theatre making, youth participants in the *M1 Peer Pleasure Festival* spend a year researching,

attending workshops and thinking deeply about a chosen theme. It is hoped that the youth would be transformed through this process of research and discovery, and in deep, enduring ways. Said one respondent:

You invest in a deeper experience because what you're trying to develop needs more time and can't be singular in its approach. When you want that kind of deeper connection and reflection, then the arts is valuable as it provides all these different layers that you can keep revisiting.

As an arts-based intermediary invested in community development, ArtsWok regards a healthy community as one that upholds diversity, collective agency and co-creation, and takes ownership to change things for the better if things are not right — as opposed to pointing fingers. Community is also about looking out for and making sacrifices for each other, for the longer and greater good.

Case Lessons and Insights

The Value of the Arts

- 1) There is potential for ground-up efforts to develop strong bonds and mutual support amongst local communities, especially when it is community-centric and allows genuine participation and ownership.

An arts-based approach is comfortable with complexity and does not seek to reduce social issues to a singular dimension that a scientific approach might take, and is therefore able to create a space to understand context, circumstances and relationships instead of seeing it as an isolated or individual problem. Arts-based approaches have the potential to tap on diverse types of intelligences in the course of community education, learning and development

- 2) Arts-based community development work needs recognition from community groups and partners of the worth of such work, and also space and permission from the authorities.
- 3) Such work will not be scalable or replicable in the same way as structured social services because of the critical role of the artistic process that focuses on a dialogic process and attends to the specific context, existing relationships and community spaces available. Therefore, KPIs designed to hold such projects accountable should be flexible enough to accommodate some uncertainty in the final outcomes, because it is often an open question what are worthwhile outcomes. Sometimes it is the exploratory and dialogic process that helps to identify what really matters to the community.

The Work of the Intermediary

- 4) Straddling different sectors creates considerable challenge, but also runs a real risk of diverse stakeholders undermining the artistic process or displacing the interests of the community. In order to ensure the quality and meaningfulness of creative work *in* and *with* the community, an intermediary organisation needs to be effectively interdisciplinary and also act as a curator that is artistically discerning and highly selective of its collaborative partners.
- 5) Unlike well-defined domains with ready resources (e.g., social services), for a new niche area of work, organisations like ArtsWok have to do both field building and the work itself, a tremendous opportunity to define the field, but also heavily resource intensive.

Case Questions

- 1) How embedded in the community do artists need to be, in order to do the work well?
- 2) What is the role of a community development organisation in the age where interest groups can be formed easily and people can find one another through social media or the internet?
- 3) Will the professionalisation of community arts or socially engaged artists be a boon or bane?
- 4) Are flexible KPIs an intelligent way of holding socially engaged artists responsible as partners, or merely a way for them to wriggle out of their responsibility to be accountable to funders? To what extent do funders need to cede control and allow what kinds of autonomy to socially engaged arts?
- 5) How should a creative producer like ArtsWok price its services or fundraise for a lot of the intermediary work that is invisible?
- 6) Some social issues are considered sensitive or too divisive for public dialogue, but they continue to be issues that matter to communities. How should NGOs navigate the local landscape of social services and community development so that they can contribute productively without alienating other voluntary organisations, be seen to compete with grassroots, or perceived to be agitating the government?

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Annex A — Voluntary Efforts at Community Development

Alongside entities in the PA system and the CDCs, the following are various examples of non-profit organisations and voluntary groups that do community development work in Singapore:

Beyond Social Services is a non-profit organisation that works with low-income neighbourhoods in Singapore. They aim to provide opportunities for children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid a life of delinquency and break free from poverty. To do so requires working with their families, who are also embedded in their local community, and thus, Beyond Social Services adopts a community development approach and acts as a focal point for community dialogue. These communities are themselves situated within larger social structures, so Beyond Social Services also acts as a conduit to external resources and support.

In one respondent's own words, because it takes a village to raise a child, Beyond Social Services is "an organisation that nurtures villages". In 1991, it became one of the first Family Service Centres (FSC) to be piloted as a community-based social service facility, and today some FSCs practise community development in varying degrees, the most prominent being South Central Community FSC.

Cassia Resettlement Team (CRT) is a ground-up initiative that seeks to understand and address challenges faced by residents of Block 52 Cassia Crescent. The majority of people staying in that block were relocated from rental flats in Dakota Crescent and Sims Drive, after news of the redevelopment of Dakota Crescent broke in July 2014. The team's objective is to "walk the journey of life with residents and facilitate the growth of communities" (Lim & Howe, 2019). A key principle of CRT is listening to residents — not just about what they need but what they would like to have, be it escorting them to medical appointments, linking them with new service providers, or organising potluck lunches between old Dakota Crescent residents. This principle has also influenced how CRT support programmes are run; they are responsive and can be ceased or created based on residents' changing needs.

CRT's members came together out of various civic initiatives: *IgnorLAND of its Loss*, a community-engaged arts project; *Between Two Homes*, a documentary about the relocation process; and Dakota Adventures, which organised resident-led tours of Dakota Crescent. The team is made up of a number of smaller groups of volunteers, each carrying out their individual civic initiatives — all sharing a common goal of community development.

Geylang Adventures was founded by Cai Yinzhou, who also started Dakota Adventures. Growing up in Geylang, Cai wanted to re-present his neighbourhood to others from his perspective as a resident who grew up in Geylang. He organises tours of Geylang, guiding people through not only the red-light district for which it is famously known, but also sites of historical significance in Singapore's history, iconic buildings and architecture, and hawker centres. At times, he also introduces tour participants to people who have lived and worked in the area.

The tours aim to challenge negative perceptions surrounding Geylang, and to introduce elements in Singapore's history not often taught or thought about. Other than Geylang and Dakota Adventures, Cai also founded Backyard Barbers. Together with other volunteers, Cai

cuts the hair of mainly migrant workers for free. This has promoted meaningful interaction between volunteers and members of the community, people that the volunteers would otherwise never have interacted with (Wong, 2019).

My Community is a heritage group that “documents social memory, celebrates civic life and champions community heritage” (My Community, 2017). It carries out historical research primarily about the Queenstown neighbourhood in Singapore, and has organised festivals, residential carnivals and urban tours to capture and document Queentown’s cultural heritage. From 2010 to 2017, My Community’s tours have reached out to nearly 3,000 Singapore residents with the help of some 50 volunteers (Lim, 2017). Specific initiatives include a cultural mapping exercise in Tanglin Halt, and Museum@My Queenstown, a community museum that preserves and features everyday stories about Queenstown told in the form of old photographs and artefacts, and which is “funded, curated and managed mostly through the efforts of residents” (Choo, 2019).

Community for Successful Ageing (ComSA) is a programme by the Tsao Foundation, a non-profit organisation dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older people. ComSA is an initiative that challenges senior residents to work with other stakeholders to come up with community-relevant solutions for issues that they are experiencing. The programme aims to be a community-wide public health planning approach to create an integrated health and social care system that promotes health and well-being over the life course, and to enable ageing in place (Harding & Lee, 2017).

Annex B — ArtsWok’s Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

Inclusive communities that allow the full expression of human potential

Mission

To nurture thriving communities by harnessing the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.

We pilot and produce innovative community-based projects through creative producing; build the arts-based community development field through capability development; as well as share and generate knowledge and practice through research and advocacy.

Company Values

1) ***Collaboration***

Harnessing strengths and sharing resources through processes that foster mutual respect, shared decision-making, honesty and open communication.

2) ***Empathy***

Connecting with others by maintaining an openness, suspending judgement and listening deeply.

3) ***Creativity***

Permitting time and space to play, fail, imagine and experiment.

4) ***Agency***

Recognising everyone has strengths and abilities to be agents of change and to be equipped to realise their potential.

Annex C — ArtsWok’s Theory of Change

ACTIVITIES / PROGRAMME COMPONENTS	OUTPUT	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MID-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES	SOCIAL IMPACT
Artist outreach & engagement	Number of professional artists and creatives, arts and creative students who sign up with ArtsWok or indicate interest in ABCD projects, upon engagement	Artists know what is ABCD, and are interested in ABCD [Proportion of artists engaged in or interested in ABCD, signed up to ArtsWok mailing list]			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct trainings (e.g., Greenhouse Lab) Writing of case studies and articles Develop project-specific toolkits or training guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of labs conducted Number of participants who attended labs Number of case studies and articles written Project-specific toolkits or training guides developed 	Artists are equipped with the ABCD approach and have the know-how to engage specific client groups of their choice, e.g., elderly			
	Number of people who sign up with ArtsWok, or commit to implementing an ABCD project	Artists are interested to put ABCD into practice			
Conceptualisation of projects			COMMUNITIES ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE TO CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS [Number of viable and potentially impactful projects conceptualised]		
Project Management & Implementation of ABCD projects	2 flagship programmes 1 smaller scale project			COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATE IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES USING ARTS APPROACHES [Level of ownership and participation from community]	
Monitoring and evaluating outcomes of projects	2 flagship programmes 1 smaller scale project				COMMUNITIES CONNECT WITHIN AND ACROSS / INCLUSIVE, THRIVING COMMUNITIES [KPIs of specific projects achieved, e.g. proportion of participants who made Advance Care Plans]
Liaison and logistics		Space is available for community dialogues and activities			
Funder Engagement / Donor Relations	Number of donor solicitation sessions	Funders understand what ABCD and its promise is, and are willing to fund it [Number of funders who understand and recognise the value of, or willing to fund ABCD]			
NPO/VVO Engagement	Number of VVOs willing to host ABCD projects	VVOs and other community gatekeepers are willing to partner artists to work with their members			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community of practice (Greenhouse Sessions) Research & advocacy Case studies Newsletters, press releases 	Number of projects documented and shared	Artists and other stakeholders appreciate the value of ABCD as an approach			

Field Building & Capability Development for Socially Engaged Artists* (20%)

Creative Producing in and with the Community (60%)

Stakeholder Engagement (20%)

*Also includes social workers and other professionals interested in community-based arts and practices

Legend

[] = indicates potential outcome indicators
 ABCD = arts-based community development