

**Arts** OLD FIRE  
at the STATION

# 2015 Evaluation



Anne Pirie and Liz Firth, May 2016



# Table of contents

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Purpose and highlights from 2015	Page 4
3. Theory of change – key findings	Page 7
4. Reflections and recommendations	Page 14
Appendix A: Links to full project evaluations	Page 17
Appendix B: AOFS foundations	Page 18
Appendix C: AOFS theory of change	Page 20

## SOME TERMINOLOGY

AOFS's partner in the Old Fire Station is Crisis Skylight Oxford, part of the national charity Crisis. Homeless people using Crisis Skylight services are known as Skylight members – and are called members throughout this report.



Vessels

Photographs: Josh Tomalin, James Sutton, Lankelly Chase

# 1. Introduction

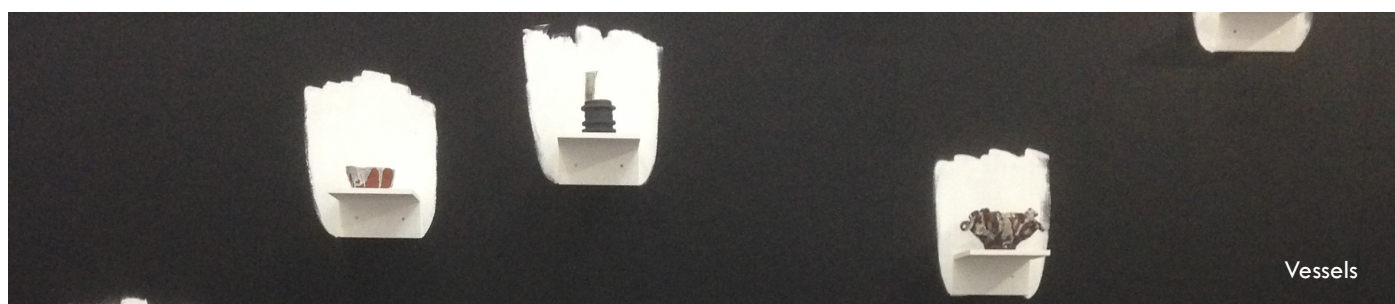
As an arts centre, sharing a building and working in partnership with Crisis, Arts at the Old Fire Station (AOFS) wants to deliver and sustain a truly inclusive artistic and cultural public space, which welcomes and celebrates difference and enables people to engage with new ideas, develop new skills and try on new identities. AOFS believes that the mix of people, activities and opportunities it offers – and the values that underpin everything it does – enable people to find their own ways to become better artists, more resilient individuals and part of stronger, more inclusive communities.

Its ambition is that everyone it works with – volunteers, artists, homeless people, staff, members of the public, professional colleagues – can find positive outcomes through engagement with the arts centre and with each other within AOFS. However, it has chosen three specific changes it wants to support through its work and developed a theory of change to enable it to monitor and evaluate progress and success (Appendix B). The outcomes it aims to achieve are:

- Everyone engaged with AOFS is more open to new ideas and different people
- Artists are more successful
- Homeless people are more resilient and stable

AOFS published a retrospective evaluation of its first three years in February 2015<sup>1</sup> and went on to carry out evaluations of four projects/activities during 2015. These are:

- Hidden Spire<sup>2</sup>
- The Arts Training Scheme<sup>3</sup>
- Vessels<sup>4</sup>
- Artist support and development<sup>5</sup>



This report gives a brief overview of AOFS' history, aims and activity and then summarises key learning from the project evaluations against the indicators of AOFS' theory of change. The project evaluations are available separately in full (Appendix C).

The focus of the report is largely on the impact of AOFS' programmes bringing together homeless people and emerging artists to create high quality work for the public and on its broader schemes to involve homeless people as active participants in the work of a busy professional arts centre. Towards the end of the period, AOFS began to explore peer and audience responses to its work, using Quality Metrics<sup>6</sup>. However, this report does not examine the artistic content more broadly or comment on general public engagement or the underpinning business model. But it should be noted that any outcomes achieved rely on the ability of AOFS to programme, produce and deliver high quality work, engage audiences and sustain the business throughout the year.

The report ends with a discussion of the changes and developments AOFS hopes to make in order to improve the impact and effectiveness of this work.

1 Link to retrospective evaluation: [https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/retrospective\\_evaluation](https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/retrospective_evaluation)

2 Link to Hidden Spire report: [https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/hidden\\_spire\\_2014-15\\_final\\_report.c](https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/hidden_spire_2014-15_final_report.c)

3 Link to ATS report: [https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/arts\\_training\\_scheme\\_2015](https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/arts_training_scheme_2015)

4 Link to Vessels report: [https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/vessels\\_report](https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/vessels_report)

5 Link to Artist Survey findings: [https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/artists\\_survey\\_-\\_summary\\_of\\_finding](https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/artists_survey_-_summary_of_finding)

6 Knell 2013

# 2. Purpose And Highlights From 2015

## Purpose

Following a major refurbishment of this City Centre landmark, the Old Fire Station opened for business in November 2011. Central government capital funding and the active backing of Oxford City Council meant aspirations for this partnership between a Crisis training centre for homeless people and a new public arts centre were high. Together the aim was to change attitudes and change lives – both raising the aspirations and opportunities of homeless people:

*'If you live in a homeless hostel, go to a homeless day centre and spend all your time with other homeless people, how can you be expected to raise your aspirations and change your life?'* (Oxford City Council, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Manager)<sup>1</sup>

And developing *'a City centre cultural space with a vision and structure that puts inclusion at its heart'* – a flexible and creative space concerned with finding and supporting new talent, developing creative industries, reaching diverse communities, being a hub for a network of cultural relationships and testing business models for arts funding in difficult times:

*'Arts organisations often have to be encouraged to think about their audiences as people and how to be truly open and inclusive. For AOFS this is the starting point. The challenge to them is to make this virtue into something that is artistically challenging, high quality and sufficiently risk-taking.'* (Oxford City Council, Cultural Development Manager)<sup>2</sup>

AOFS was established to create a meaningful public space – as an organisation that is not about homelessness but is thoroughly welcoming to and inclusive of homeless people. It is a public arts centre, which spends its time putting on shows, running workshops, supporting artists, hanging exhibitions, selling stuff, shifting scenery, moving chairs and making sure its customers are having a good time. It is in this busy public space that homeless people can redefine themselves as artists, members of the public, ushers, office volunteers or contributing members of Oxford's arts community.

### Case Study 1: Rachel (in her own words)

- I have been involved with AOFS for 3 years now – I started off volunteering with them. I was new to Oxford, I didn't know anyone and it was a chance to get out and meet people. I enjoyed it, so I did the Arts Training Scheme, focusing on front of house work; and continued volunteering after that. I eventually got paid work with AOFS as a casual worker on front of house. I really learnt a lot – about front of house work, taking bookings, doing the box office. I learnt how to organise a team, communicate with others – I learnt how to use other people's skills. It really brought me out of myself.
- The best part for me was working as part of a team, really feeling part of the whole organisation. I feel more confident now. They were really supportive, but also let me get on with it, which feels good. Like I've got a bit of responsibility.

## Activities

Over the past year, AOFS has continued to establish itself as a significant part of Oxford's cultural scene, attracting support from Arts Council England (ACE), deepening collaboration with the local authority and cultural partners and running high profile events. One example is Marmalade – a week-long social innovation and design fringe event to the Skoll World Forum – which included a day focussed on Art, Money and Social Change featuring the Chair of ACE. The AOFS business model is featured as a case study on the Culture Hive website<sup>3</sup>, which shares best practice in cultural marketing, and it was described as a model of good practice

1 Firth, L. and Pirie, A. (2014) Arts at the Old Fire Station: a retrospective evaluation

2 Firth, L. and Pirie, A. (2014) op cit

3 <http://culturehive.co.uk/resources/arts-at-the-old-fire-station-business-model>



by the Minister for Civil Society<sup>4</sup>. It has also moved from a programme dominated by hires to one that is more actively curated in line with its artistic vision (see Appendix A) – featuring some of the best touring small scale theatre, dance, music, comedy and spoken word, as well as a busy programme of exhibitions and workshops exploring how and why art is made. AOFS has also increased its support for artists – helping to create the Oxfordshire Theatre Makers network, supporting the Oxford Dance Forum and hosting regular Scratch Nights across art forms. And it has supported individual artists and companies to make and showcase work, continued to sell a wide range of contemporary craft work in its shop and hosted 15 regular weekly dance classes.

Also based in the building, Crisis Skylight Oxford is AOFS's partner in working with homeless people. Crisis Skylights are *'award winning and accredited education, training and employment centres, offering practical and creative workshops in a supportive and inspiring environment together with formal learning opportunities that lead to qualifications and finding work.'*<sup>5</sup> Although long-established and with a strong arts element, Skylight Oxford was the first that Crisis decided to deliver in an open, public building.

This evaluation report focuses on three key programmes born out of the partnership between AOFS and Crisis and designed to support key outcomes in AOFS's theory of change both for homeless people and for emerging artists. These are:

**Hidden Spire** – the flagship arts production for the partnership, developed and delivered across 14 months, involving a multi-disciplinary team of artists, many Crisis members and active collaboration between staff from both organisations

**The Arts Training Scheme** – providing opportunities for members to work in and learn about all aspects of AOFS's work, developing skills relevant to the creative industries and transferable to other sectors

**Vessels** – a visual arts project in partnership with Crisis and the Pitt Rivers Museum, led by an emerging artist working with members to deliver a high quality public exhibition inspired by the Museum collection

Findings are supplemented by feedback on the support that AOFS provides to artists – particularly those who are emerging or early in their career – in their creative and career development and to showcase their work to others.



4 At the Launch of the Foundation for Social Investment Access Fund – April 2015

5 <http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/what-we-do-crisis-skylight-centres-61897.html>



## Case study 2: Keith (in his own words)

- In early summer this year I was accepted to take part in a 10 week training programme with the Old Fire Station theatre. I expected this to give me back some confidence in old skills I had not used for about 6 years. I had chosen to take part half in the backstage, and half in the event management schemes.
- Unfortunately, part way through I experienced some health difficulties and missed out on 2 weeks. However, over the 8 weeks I was able to take part in, I became familiar with this theatre and its staff. The environment was friendly and engaging, and the training scheme allowed me to discover where my limits were, and to feel at ease with what I still retained in terms of my old skills.
- Shortly after completing the training scheme, a volunteer opportunity became available, where I would be effectively working as a backstage hand at AOFS, full time for two weeks, as part of the Hidden Spire project. This was a fantastic time where I really got to grips with the role of backstage in a theatre. Volunteering as assistant back stage manager was one of the most positive experiences I've had in recent years - it feels like there is a passion inside me and there was nowhere to put it – but Hidden Spire came along and that's where I could put it.
- My experience of both the training scheme and volunteering backstage was rewarding, challenging and extremely positive. Being part of something well organised and working with experienced professionals was a great way to gain new skills and refresh old ones. It was so inspiring being part of a team and working in a collaborative environment – and having trust put in me was so satisfying. My confidence grew consistently throughout the whole process and I feel I gained a new sense of myself. (The professional stage manager) was 'very complimentary and helped my self-esteem. She made me feel fully capable of doing it. It was important that I was working towards something tangible – I didn't want to let other people involved down. I had periods of anxiety (I suffer from social anxiety) – but I felt I had to work through it for the good of everyone else. Being part of Hidden Spire surpassed all my expectations – I was blown away by it!
- I feel the training scheme set me up well for working on Hidden Spire, and Hidden Spire has set me up well for applying for an actual job working backstage at a local theatre. I've just put in an application to the New Theatre for casual back stage work. And when I'm in a better place to do it (i.e. health), I hope to be able to get more work. I now have the confidence that I do have the resilience and confidence that I will be able to do part-time work.
- Over all, the experience has been the most fulfilling activity I have done in recent years, and I am extremely thankful to the Old Fire Station for facilitating the training scheme and the volunteer opportunity. It has changed my attitudes to volunteering, too –where before I just thought about what would be good for my job prospects, now I think I want to volunteer to make a contribution; I am doing a bit of ushering at AOFS over the busy Christmas period- it's not an area that I want to work in but it's another opportunity to show my thanks for the opportunities I have had.



# 3. Theory Of Change: Key Findings

In 2015 AOFS introduced a new theory of change, reflecting its belief in the power of art, engagement, opportunity and community to challenge people's views of themselves and of others and to achieve positive change. While encouraging an environment where people identify for themselves what positive change looks like, AOFS has identified three key outcomes that it aims to achieve through its work:

- Everyone engaged with AOFS is more open to new ideas and different people
- Artists are more successful
- Homeless people are more resilient and stable

These top level outcomes are supported by eight interim outcomes – each of which AOFS believes contributes to some or all of them and can be used to measure progress and change. These are:

- People participate and have fun
- People have expanded cultural and artistic horizons
- People have increased creative ability/ confidence
- People have new skills
- People can try out new, positive identities and choose the labels they feel comfortable with and change them
- People appreciate diversity
- People contribute to and benefit from networks and collaboration
- People are more resilient

All the individual evaluations carried out this year have used the theory of change as a framework for learning. This section draws together their findings into a broad overview of learning against these outcomes. As the most ambitious programme, Hidden Spire benefitted from the most in-depth evaluation and features strongly in this overview.

## Participate And Have Fun

AOFS sees enabling many different people to participate and have fun together as an essential part of its change agenda because it believes that

- positive feelings support positive lives
- experimenting, enjoying and learning together makes us all stronger, happier and more open to others
- homeless people need opportunities to focus on their strengths and interests not their problems

### Participation

AOFS has a 130-seat theatre, dance studio, gallery and shop, and regular use of an additional studio and space in the Crisis Skylight cafe for evenings/weekends. These are used for music, theatre and dance performances, public classes, exhibitions and private hire. There is no doubt that members of the public, artists and members connect with AOFS, making it a busy and vibrant arts centre. Over 2014/15 AOFS has presented 167 shows by 107 visiting companies – with ticket sales at 8596 – and 20 exhibitions, showing work from 69 artists, including 12 homeless artists. 15 regular classes attract around 165 people each week. It is increasingly popular as a venue for festivals and other participatory events and is an active participant in City-wide events, such as the Christmas Lights Festival.

43 artists were identified as receiving active creative and career development support from AOFS, with a further 75 using the shop as a route to market. And 103 members were involved with a range of activities at AOFS – including significant arts projects like Hidden Spire, one-off or shorter term arts workshops and classes, volunteering, the Arts Training Scheme and taking up free seats for shows. Around 15% were very actively involved with over 20 different engagements during the year, usually across at least 2 of the arts, volunteering and the Arts Training Scheme. 25% had between 5 and 20 engagements and 65% up to 5. AOFS had 71 active volunteers during 2014/15 contributing 1,077 hours. 24% of these were members, together contributing 44% of this total.

The individual evaluations all speak to the positive impact of engagement, active participation and having

fun. Comments from Hidden Spire participants – professional and non-professional alike – demonstrate that fun was not trivial, but important and life changing:

*One of the most positive experiences I've had in recent years.....There's a passion inside me and there was nowhere to put it – but Hidden Spire came along and that's where I could put it. (Member)*

*It is possible to get a bit jaded/tired when working in the theatre and to forget the sheer joy of creating something together out of nothing. The best theatre experience I can remember.... I've never felt so much joy at a finished product. (Professional artist)*

*I liked making people laugh – it's one of the things I like about myself. (Member)*

And Crisis staff reflected how rare an opportunity this can be:

*(Homeless people) have hidden within them the capacity for joy – and there aren't many places where they can really let that go....it's great if Hidden Spire is one of those moments that people will look back on and smile – that's really good for them. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

## **Engagement**

Engagement – particularly over a protracted period – can be particularly challenging for members. For Hidden Spire, flexibility is key – enabling members to participate in as many or as few sessions as they wanted, and to participate within those sessions in whatever manner felt right to them. This pragmatic response to the sometimes chaotic and unpredictable lives members are leading, the conflicting demands on their time, and the different priorities or paths members were following meant that people with a wide range of interests, needs and ambitions were able to take part.

*It's important to remember how much is going on in members' lives. It's good to see people on a weekly basis but it's important that they can come in, get involved and move on when they have got what they need from it. (Member)*

*You come [to AOFS] and they say 'yes, you may have depression or other problems but you can still do things – just do them at your own pace'. (Member)*

And this flexibility stretches other participants – both professional and members – in coping with uncertainty and change right up to the last minute of delivering a high quality production for a paying audience:

*It is inspiring to have the chance to keep evolving this project. Initially we were really creating something in the dark and putting together a project from scratch. This year I could build on that knowledge and experience alongside a full professional team who could support me as I pushed us all further. As a result I feel I was able to push my own capabilities and create a show that I am proud of. I have also been tested further – more team to manage, a smaller cast with much bigger mental health needs, a more ambitious show, has motivated me to continue with this type of work. (Hidden Spire Director 2013)*

Anecdotally, it is clear that some members have been on the margins of engagement with previous Hidden Spire productions – building their confidence or simply finding the right time to become more involved. But, equally, some of the most active member participants 'seemed to come from nowhere'. Developing a better understanding of the journeys members take in relation to all that goes on at the Old Fire Station will help AOFS to engage members with its most ambitious programmes when they are most ready to benefit.

## **Expand Cultural And Artistic Horizons**

AOFS aims to expand the cultural/artistic horizons of audiences, artists and members alike. It believes that

- Exposure to interesting, high quality new work stimulates new thinking and different ways of engaging
- Exposure to work created by and with marginalised people challenges stereotypes
- Seeing 'people like me' as artists builds confidence and hope
- Engaging with the arts within AOFS opens doors for other artistic opportunities

### **Impact for participants**

Participants in both the arts projects evaluated this year clearly found their horizons stretched – whether they were members

*Because of being involved in Hidden Spire, I ended up going to the Playhouse to see the Tempest – that was my first piece of Shakespeare. And understanding more about what was going on behind the scenes and really understanding this process added to my enjoyment. (Member)*



*The visit to the Pitt Rivers for me was the catalyst for creating the clay work....I have been back many times since the talk. The visit has also taught me not to try and take the museum in as a whole but approach it more gently and to concentrate on small parts at any one time....then I can truly enjoy the experience and be amazed by what's on display (Member).*

Or professional artists:

*I think differently about social theatre – its purpose, outcomes and potential. (Professional artist)*

*As a piece of art it stands on its own, unsupported by caveats of 'considering' or 'despite'. By any standards, it's a bloody good show (Professional artist)*

*I think it's fascinating that this experimental practice has developed out of the ancient pottery collection from the Pitt Rivers Museum. Such an inventive exploration of material and interpretation on the theme of the vessel (Professional artist)*

### **Audience reactions**

And the quality of the work meant it was both enjoyed for what it was, rather than simply for what it did for participants, challenging perceptions and stereotypes:

*Thank you for creating such a wonderful piece of theatre with a wonderful cast. All were thoroughly engaging and the mix of experience even made it more real for me. The set was remarkable, it took the show to another level. It was amazing to see the players within such a beautiful sculpture that added magic and sophistication to the overall vision. (Audience member – Hidden Spire)*

*I particularly appreciated the costumes, and of course the quality of performance - and maybe most of all, the imagination that led to the stories. (Audience member- Hidden Spire)*

*Adventurous. Dazzling and full of fantasy (Exhibition visitor)*

*Explorative, inventive and above all revealing the artist's inner world (Exhibition visitor)*

It is interesting to note that peer reviewers selected as part of the Quality Metrics process to comment on Hidden Spire did not have high expectations of its quality. But their post-show feedback showed an average 62% improvement in their scores, when they rated it an average of 8.13 out of 10 – less than a point behind the average audience score of 8.89 (from 90 respondents). These results demonstrate that the Hidden Spire team clearly succeeded in delivering a high quality, professional show that satisfied a paying audience.

## **Increase Creative Ability And Confidence**

AOFS believes that increasing creative ability and confidence can be transformational because

- developing a voice as an artist is powerful
- people who face disadvantage and are marginalised in society are too often denied a voice as artists
- a stimulating and supportive environment enables emerging artists to grow and share their ideas
- the mix of people engaging with AOFS is itself stimulating and supports better art

### **Members' creative development**

Even in a relatively short-term project like Vessels, many members reported a step change in their creative confidence and ability.

*It wasn't like a class. I liked it being experimental - to learn enough technique and then be set free. This was the real motivation – although it was good to have the exhibition to share the work with others (Member)*

Those who were most deeply involved in Hidden Spire clearly saw it as a transformative experience:

*It was really powerful hearing the words I'd written performed on the stage. (Member)*

*People think I'm quiet in real life. But in acting and in writing my subconscious comes out. (Member)*

*The experience of going onstage and giving voice to that script that you've contributed to, in front of 100 people, was amazing. (Member)*

And members have since carried on with creative activities independently, aiming higher than they would have before.

*I have been working on my portfolio to apply to the creative writing course at Ruskin – putting in 5 hours a day for about 6 weeks to get it ready. (Member)*

*After Hidden Spire, I wrote a 15-minute 2-man play, a black comedy about a carer and a client, with one of the*

*Hidden Spire member actors as the main character. (Member)*

## **Learning for professionals**

And professional artists often commented on learning from the non-professionals – as well as from the range of disciplines found in AOFS and some of its programmes and from its inclusive and generous approach:

*The connection with Crisis is unique and stunning and essential and puts art on the shop floor where it should be. It offers joined up thinking and contextualises what I do as an artist and how and why I do it (Professional artist)*

*They have “created” those roles by putting themselves and their personalities into the characters freely and generously. It’s a lesson in clarity for most of us. (Professional artist)*

*Working on such an interdisciplinary project led me to new ways of working and resulted in work which was transformed and animated by other disciplines; lighting, dance, the story and theatre (Visual artist)*

*...being part of a nurturing organisation. The confidence that created freed me to believe in my own abilities and encourage others to value their abilities too (Actor)*

## **New Skills**

AOFS aims to support both artists and homeless people in developing artistic and other skills that build their confidence, employment prospects and life choices. The evaluations for 2014/15 found that both reported on technical and personal skill developments across a range of areas. Two achievements stand out particularly strongly.

### **Collaboration**

The aim to create good work that stands on its own merits means that the bar is high in all aspects of AOFS arts programmes. For example, in Hidden Spire, all concerned found that working together to achieve this was a learning process:

*They warn you it is going to be hard and draining. (Member)*

*I’m usually impatient. It wasn’t a quick process, I had to work in a different way. It has influenced my professional work. (Professional artist)*

The approach to teamwork and support was often commented on, with both members and artists learning from this approach and valuing it. For some this was a lesson in whole-hearted collaboration:

*A different way of acting. A true ensemble. Here nurturing and supporting others to even be there on the night was the most important thing, and not a more insular, possibly selfish approach, where everyone does ‘their job’. (Professional artist)*

*I suffer from social anxieties and found working in a group in a collaborative sense very difficult. I have found the course has been structured in such a way to be very inclusive even for those who have difficulties such as mine. This has helped me to feel I am able to contribute to the whole and individually. I have enjoyed the process although it has been challenging for me (Member)*

*Being part of the team has been really good. Before, I was critical of how people did things, whereas this experience has made me more appreciative of the contribution that everyone makes. (Member)*

While others spoke about the excitement of sparking off other people’s ideas and building something stronger:

*I enjoyed being part of something where we could explore thoughts and disagree with each other but it was always done in a constructive way. I found it very useful being in a creative, positive and open environment..... It was both motivational and inspiring working alongside other creative people (Member)*

*I have never been involved in a creative project that involves so many people and disciplines. This has been both interesting and challenging. Interesting as I can see parallel ideas being developed in different disciplines which is really inspiring. Challenging as we all work in different ways and need to communicate closely to understand each other. (Professional artist)*

### **Confidence**

Members involved in both the Arts Training Scheme and the arts programmes spoke about the skills and confidence they would take into their search for jobs, homes and new opportunities

*I learnt a lot – Front of House work, taking bookings and doing Box Office. I learnt how to organise a team – it brought me out of myself, helped me to communicate. I learnt how to manage difficult situations. (Member)*



*You don't even need to have an interest in the theatre – you learn skills in finance, admin, communicating with different people. And that builds your confidence and self-esteem. (Member)*

However, it was renewed confidence and self-belief that stood out most strongly in their responses:

*I've been volunteering full time for 2 weeks – which gives me the confidence that I do have the resilience to commit to full time work for a short time where it is something I can put all my passion into. And this gives me confidence that I will be able to do part-time work. (Member)*

*It's taken lots of different steps to make it possible for me to be ready to apply for a course... Now I want to set some goals for this year to work towards. (Member)*

*My confidence has improved, I wasn't ready to work in an office, but now, with you by my side I am ready (Member)*

And AOFS staff emphasise what an achievement this can be:

*At the beginning of her (ATS) placement, she was so scared she shook. She couldn't leave her bag anywhere – she was so used to carrying her life around in it, and not being safe. By the end of her placement, she was treating the place like it was her office – and was able to put her bag in a locker and leave it! (AOFS staff)*

## **New Identities**

Part of AOFS' aim is to help participants experiment with new identities – for example, to move away from seeing themselves primarily as service receivers, to seeing themselves as service providers – from accepting a label of 'homeless person' to trying on new identities such as 'artist', 'volunteer' or 'stage manager'.

Identities are crucial in wider society. Members sometimes spoke of the difficulties they have encountered, when other people's perceptions of them stop them from taking up new identities.

*I applied to go to a new arts centre but they turned me down when I told them I had a criminal record – here [at AOFS] they don't even ask about your past, which is amazing. They don't judge you on your past – they just care about who you are now. (Member)*

This subtle concept can be difficult to measure in evaluation, but several members spoke of identities – particularly in the Hidden Spire evaluation. It may be that the activity of acting, in particular, helps people to develop skills in trying on new identities – although feedback from visual arts programmes also touched on these ideas:

*I like the idea of being an actor...being able to fulfil someone's ideas, to be believable in a role... every pigeon is slightly different. They are quite confident – they come up to you even though you could easily squish them. Confident and good looking. (Member)*

*X changed over the course of Hidden Spire – how he interacted at reception, the professionalisation of his behaviour. He had more confidence, he interacted more. His body language – bigger gestures, how he walked, taking up more space. He came into the building in the same way as the actors. (AOFS staff)*

*– I think everyone is happy with what they have done – but three people are quite taken aback by how good their work looks. There is a real sense of achievement and pride....and this isn't just about other people liking it (Crisis staff member)*

Participation in the whole range of activities that contributed to Hidden Spire – and to AOFS more generally – has helped a number of members to see themselves as artists and as people with something to contribute to the arts or to an organisation. Members have gone on to apply for employment, volunteering or arts projects in other organisations following participation in Hidden Spire.

*I've just put in an application to the New Theatre for casual back stage work. (Member)*

*I'm doing a class at Pegasus, and we're putting something on in February. I'm writing for that. (Member)*

*I got a lot out of (ATS) - good experience for my competence and communication skills. And I got experience in finance/cash/excel spreadsheets.... now I am doing spreadsheets for my local church. (Member)*

*After focusing on a Shop placement in the ATS, I got accommodation and paid shop work (Member)*

*I am looking at volunteering with Oxfam as an HR assistant to get more experience. (Member)*

## Appreciate Diversity

AOFS sees a commitment to diversity as a driver for positive change – in attitudes to marginalised people, in genuine relationships growing from common tasks and in stimulating and supporting better art.

Respondents involved in collaborative activities often spoke of how diverse these groups were, the value they drew from this individually and how it contributed to the quality of the project.

*The best thing about it was meeting the professionals – I like watching people with experience do their job – taking in all the information that you can. And working with a diverse range of people..... Hidden Spire made me realise the talents other members have. (Member)*

*It was very open and inclusive – a genuinely collaborative thing. It didn't matter who you were – it was a level playing field (Member)*

*The ideas that the Crisis members brought to the table - these often offered a new way of looking at things and inspired our thoughts/discussions/improvisations to take unexpected directions. Their ideas often led to thinking outside the box which is always exciting. (Professional artist)*

*I think this is one of the most valuable and rich theatrical experiences I have had. It required us all to develop a trust far deeper than in any ordinary acting company as we are all from such vastly different backgrounds, levels of theatrical experience and ways we experience and move through life. (Professional artist)*

Not all the relationships were easy. And this tested both participants' ability to get on with people who they found difficult, and the limits and strengths of the process of working together.

*X presented various difficulties for the team in terms of ability to understand instructions and interpret when certain behaviours are appropriate.....It is down to the flexibility of our process and the structure of the script that we were able to cast him in a role that drew on his strengths and the final piece was rewarded as a result. (Hidden Spire Director)*

*People worked at such different levels – I was genuinely surprised by how good it looked (Member)*

## Networks And Collaboration

At the heart of AOFS is a commitment to positive community and networks that give people greater resources to define their own futures. The development of relationships is an important part of AOFS' aims, and feeds into helping members develop networks outside of homelessness, strengthening all professional and non-professional artists' networks, and strengthening participants' skills in collaboration and working with others.

*The arts is a bridge into a different community – not for everyone but for a lot of people. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

The 2104/15 evaluations demonstrate that artists see improved networks as one of the key benefits of working with AOFS – with its roots in an 'inclusive, welcoming, friendly culture that has been created in the building':

*AOFS has become a hub for the local professional theatre scene....It has helped me maintain relationships with so many creative people, and to work with many of them. It keeps us going when things are quiet, and is the best-located, best-equipped small to mid-scale theatre space in Oxford (Theatre-maker)*

Nearly every participant who provided feedback on Hidden Spire commented on the importance and quality of the team work on the project and on how Hidden Spire was truly a group effort.

*It was a group effort – when people said how good it was, they meant the whole ensemble, the totality of it. (Member)*

*On the first few days of the project, there was an unspoken line that divided the professionals from the Crisis members. But as the days passed away, and we worked closely together to create 'Before the Tempest', that line gradually disappeared. It didn't feel like 'us' and 'them'. It was very simply "the cast". (Professional artist)*

Members commented on how they felt part of something, and how valuable that was for them.

*Being part of the team and having a place in it and having trust put in me was very satisfying. (Member)*

*It made me feel like I belonged to something. It gave me self-worth. It made me realise people depended on me. (Member)*

*The inclusiveness really worked – and the collaboration. Members were made to feel significant and it was important to be there. They wanted to continue to do it – and their self-esteem goes up and up. Standing on*



*stage and realising 'here I am, I can do this' is brilliantly empowering. (Member)*

And Crisis staff agreed that this was an unusual and valuable experience for members.

*It's an incredibly powerful process for our members and hard to imagine where else they could have the opportunity to play such an important part in something and feel so valued. (Crisis Skylight staff)*

And there are indications that – at least for some – the connection of a powerful shared experience persists over time:

*I see people from the first Hidden Spire and there is still a strong connection, a shared experience. (Professional artist)*

## Resilience

AOFS seeks to have impact for people long after the show is over, aiming to help all people involved with their work to feel more confident and valued, to be able to bounce back under adversity, and to be hopeful. Many of the respondents in the 2014/15 evaluations – and especially members – commented on the impact that their engagement with AOFS had had on their confidence, self image, courage, hope, feelings of safety and sense of connection:

*I felt like I had self-worth, that someone wanted me. (Member)*

*Facing an audience exposes you to risk both individually and collectively, makes a person more brave. (Member)*

*Regardless of how far from their comfort zone members may have felt, many of them just 'went for it'. This, in turn, inspired us (the trained actors) to have greater bravery and to take more risks. (Professional artist)*

*Hidden Spire helped me to accept criticism because I felt safe. (Member)*

*Coming here gave me hope and a purpose – it empowers people who've been disempowered. If this place wasn't here, I wouldn't be here or I would be into crime. (Member)*

*Since Hidden Spire, my attitude to volunteering has changed, it's not all about what is good for me and my job prospects. I want to make a contribution. (Member)*

Artists, too, point to the importance of having an organisation like AOFS that accepts people as they are, believes in their potential and does its best to support them and create opportunities for them to grow:

*The belief shown in us was the most pivotal part our development as this translated to audiences' belief in us and we have grown concomitantly. Being able to sit face to face and discuss our dreams and for them to be taken seriously.....has helped us to plan for our future direction (Professional artist)*

*AOFS are prepared to take risks and offer artists opportunities to work in new ways.....most commissioners look for previous experience of a particular way of working and it can be hard to get the first break (Professional artist)*

### Case Study 3: Helen (as described by AOFS staff)

- Helen approached AOFS to become a volunteer. She was dealing with mental health issues, and due to this, and her homelessness, she needed a lot of support, so was referred to Crisis for additional help.
- Her support needs and lack of experience together meant that our initial programme for her had to be revised dramatically, as it was too much for her. She was very far from the job market. But initially she did not have realistic expectations of the outcomes of the Arts Training Scheme, feeling that she would be able to get a job on finishing the Scheme. After some conversations with the Deputy Director she had a better understanding of what level her skills were at – this required some skilful handling.
- Helen was very useful - helping us collect flyers, distribute posters and set up a refreshment area - and seemed to enjoy working on marketing and event organising. She has become more able to ask for what she wants to do, and much more at ease with the team.
- It can be frustrating to work with Helen as I am unsure if I am actually helping. I hope that further work with her will help her move towards her goals.

# 4. Reflections And Recommendations

## Overview

All of the evaluations on 2014/15 showed considerable impacts on both members and artists engaging with AOFS – as well as the important contribution that they made to its artistic output and the day to day running of a busy arts centre.

Members are very much part of the fabric of AOFS – working as volunteer ushers, attending shows and taking part in the arts training scheme, as well as being integral to Hidden Spire, its biggest in-house production to date. Throughout the evaluations, members have spoken about the impact of their engagement with AOFS in terms of skills, confidence and self-esteem. In many cases, they described transformations in attitude, wellbeing and ability to function socially. And these transformations result in people who were multiply excluded developing the skills and attitudes to bring about significant change in their lives.

Key elements that members identified as contributing to impact were:

- Flexible working. This allowed members with different needs to participate at the level they needed to
- Being part of a team working towards a real goal. Members are given responsibility, and this supports self-esteem and achievement
- Working alongside non-homeless people in public facing roles. Social networks outside of homelessness are developed, and sense of stigma overcome

Artists too reported a wide range of benefits from their engagement with AOFS – in terms of creative and career development and the professional opportunities it opens. There is a real sense of ownership of AOFS – but not in an exclusive way. Many of their ideas for future development centre on AOFS as an inclusive and interactive hub, providing support and facilities so that people can connect with others they might not otherwise meet and make things happen for themselves. As for members, for many artists it is AOFS's attitude and approach that is at the heart of its success – and that makes it distinctive:

*Please keep being warm and encouraging and enthusiastic it's what makes it a great place to have in the city!*  
(Professional artist)

*Your interest and support feels really genuine, not just there when needed to fulfil an objective or tick a box. You are honest about your resources and open about the realities you face but you also make things happen and actively seek to help each individual artist. You are not pretentious or self serving. You know when to let artists be free to create. All this is most unusual. Don't lose your energy. Keep your belief in the way you do things* (Theatre maker)

Overall, AOFS's methods of working are all about relationships – between members, professional artists, staff and the public – and on ensuring that these are supportive, inclusive and respectful of diversity. These qualities are seen throughout its work and at every level of the organisation. Much effort goes into ensuring that as the organisation develops and grows, these qualities are retained.

Each project evaluation highlights specific recommendations arising from the project or activity reviewed, including some specific proposals for further development of AOFS's work. AOFS will be investigating potential sources of funding to put its development priorities into action, as staff and budgets are stretched. There are some overarching areas of learning, summarised as follows:

## Data and systems

Evaluation within AOFS has suffered from a lack of connection between core business management data (e.g. volunteering records; workshop participation; audience information) and data on the individuals it seeks to support. This means it is hard to see the journey that individuals take in their relationship with AOFS and to connect this with the outcomes they achieve for themselves. It has been forced into a more 'project by project' approach to evaluation than is desirable in an organisation that aims to support transformational change for both homeless people and artists through a range of engagements and interactions.

It is hard for small, new organisations to find the resources and time needed to invest in high quality data collection and management systems. But, as a result of the findings of AOFS's 2014/15 evaluation, this has been a priority during 2015/16. Implementation during the current year will enable some developments for next year's end of year report. And the aim is to achieve significant improvements in capacity in this area for



2017/18.

Much of the success of the Old Fire Station rests on the partnership between AOFS and Crisis Skylight, with their shared aims and strong and integrated way of working. At present, data sharing between the two organisations is limited, making it difficult to judge the impact of their partnership for the members who work with both organisations. There has been discussion this year about how this might be further developed, with proper protection of personal data – and it seems likely that positive progress will be made in 2016/17.

### **Evaluation methodologies**

AOFS has adopted an evaluation for strategic learning approach<sup>1</sup> to help it learn quickly from its work and develop and adapt its strategies. Since 2014 it has worked with external evaluators as an independent but embedded part of the team. They provide independent insight into AOFS's work and help it to develop its effectiveness in bringing a wide range of data and perspectives to bear in making timely strategic decisions on how best to use limited time and resources to achieve change.

During 2015, AOFS has used a variety of monitoring and evaluation methods, including:

- Analysis of core business data
- Structured self-assessment outcomes questionnaires
- 'Before and after' surveys
- Individual reflections and feedback
- Participant observation
- Audience surveys
- Group learning events
- Semi-structured interviews
- Personal stories and case studies

Key areas of learning:

- **Audience feedback** – AOFS used a version of the Quality Metrics questionnaire for the first time in 2015, to collect audience, peer and internal responses to Hidden Spire. This gave interesting and in some cases surprising data. There are improvements to be made – such as in the slightly patchy take up of 'before and after' questionnaires for peers, which limited learning. But overall, results were interesting and positive. The approach worked well for AOFS and its audiences, with a high response rate and both positive and valuable feedback on a range of quality measures – including presentation, rigour, captivation and challenge. There are good arguments for using this model across AOFS's activities, testing its effectiveness for visual as well as performing arts.
- **Outcomes questionnaires** were piloted with members involved in intensive work with AOFS, as a relatively light-touch monitoring methodology. However, these proved difficult for staff to deliver, which meant that very few before and after questionnaires were completed. The main barrier appears to be a feeling that this approach does not properly reflect the 'normal' relationship that AOFS aspires to have with members and requires them to dwell on their 'deficits' or needs. It is also clear that many members see too many of these forms and do not feel motivated or engaged with this kind of reporting.
- **Semi-structured interviews** continue to be a rich source of data with members, artists, staff and volunteers, with an emphasis on interviewee 'voice' and insights. All provide thoughtful and often surprising insights into how change happens for individuals and where they find value. The resulting data has been informally structured by AOFS's external evaluators, based on the theory of change, and has provided the bulk of data used for evaluations to date. So, although time consuming, this method is relatively time-efficient in terms of 'learning product'. However, it does rely on people's willingness to devote time and thought to the evaluation and to discuss personal issues, with some potential skew in the results towards those who are willing or able to take part.
- **Structured and unstructured reflections** – professional artists, in particular, seem very ready to share their learning in writing, whether in response to an open invitation or to qualitative questionnaires. Members are often willing to contribute to case studies and there have been good examples of

---

<sup>1</sup> Coffman, J. and Beer, T. (2011) *Evaluation to support strategic learning: principles and practice* Center for Evaluation Innovation

supporting individuals to reflect on their and learning, within the structure of a programme. There may be scope to build on this positive interest for future evaluations.

The indications are that mixed methods all make a contribution to building a picture of AOFS' impact and the journey that members and artists have undertaken. There remain challenges in developing a cost-effective approach to outcomes monitoring which speaks to AOFS's asset based approach, enabling homeless people to focus on their skills and aspirations while still finding a way to demonstrate distance travelled for people with significant needs. There may also be scope for involving participants themselves more directly in developing evaluation approaches and in exploring stronger use of peer to peer methodologies.

### **Journeys**

Although there are practical benefits in project by project evaluation – particularly in reporting to their funders – this approach tends to obscure the longer-term journey that members and artists take with AOFS. Preliminary analysis shows that the majority of members engaging with AOFS do so across more than one of its services – volunteering, the Arts Training Scheme, participating in arts projects such as Hidden Spire or Vessels and/or attending performances, talks and exhibitions. People stay involved with AOFS for different lengths of time, too – some staying for as long as 2 years or more, while others only engaging over several months.

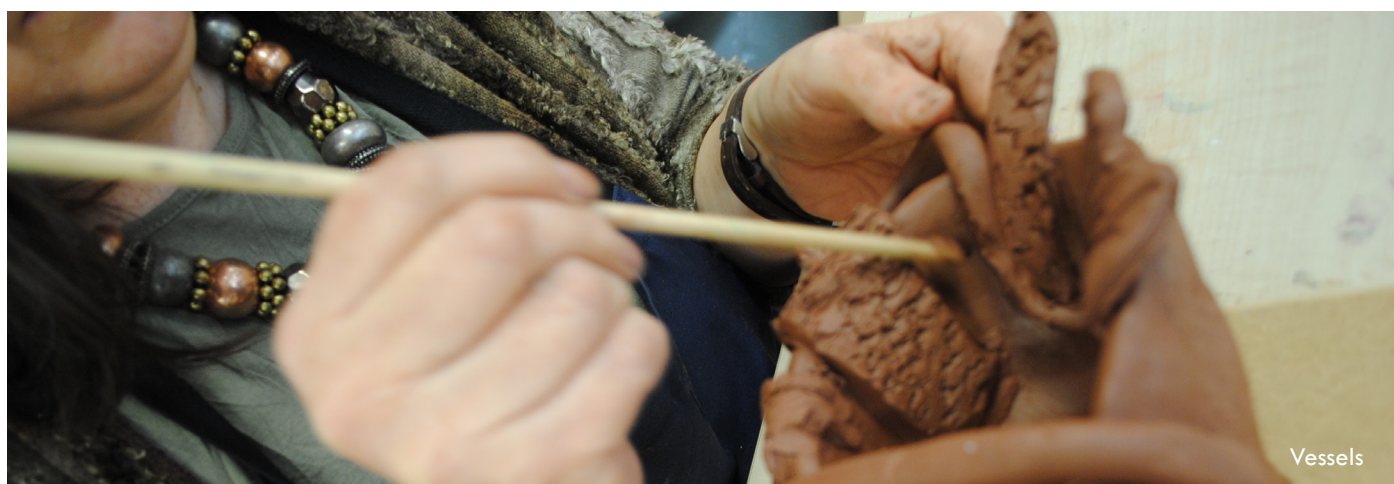
Quantitative data is not yet available on the different engagement paths taken and a key monitoring goal in future years will be to look at the patterns of individual engagement over time. However, the case studies highlighted in this report indicate the variety of journeys that people take, the different goals people have in engaging with AOFS, what AOFS has to offer and the impact this has for them. Developing a better understanding of the journeys members take in relation to all that goes on at the Old Fire Station will help AOFS to continue to develop accessible entry points and opportunities for engagement and to take a holistic view of how change is achieved for different individuals.

### **Public space**

The question of public space is at the heart of the outcomes that AOFS seeks to achieve in its partnership with Crisis and in what it does as an organisation. In 2016/17 we want to begin to explore key evaluation questions in this critical area including:

- What makes a public environment genuinely inclusive?
- Why is this important? What impact does it have for the people who experience it?
- How do we need to change and develop as an organisation in the light of this learning?

It is particularly to understand how the space that has been created at the Old Fire Station 'works' for homeless people. As people who, by definition, have little or no private space, there is an added brutality to attitudes and policies that exclude homeless people from public space. Yet they are regularly moved on, denied access or made to feel unwelcome in places that are meant to be open to all. AOFS believes that being part of an inclusive public space makes a distinctive contribution to positive outcomes for homeless people – and challenges the stereotypes and negative attitudes they so often face. By evaluating the Old Fire Station as a public space it aims both to improve its own accessibility and impact and help others to make their spaces more inclusive.



## Case Study 4: Abigail (through interview)

- Abigail first took up art, drama and writing classes with Crisis Skylight, and ended up in a Hidden Spire script writing session almost by mistake. She had only written privately before, and thought it was just another class where they would be working on their own writing. ‘I was a bit scared to go on the drama side – just writing was scary enough. It’s a vulnerable thing to have people read your work. I felt quite scared and intimidated. I had done some writing before but only in my own way – and privately. I was scared that I wouldn’t have anything to say. But we were thrown into it – encouraged to just start writing and see what comes out’.
- It turned out to be great. ‘We were working together collaboratively – it was like being an apprentice script writer’. And seeing the final play performed, ‘It was really powerful hearing the words I’d written performed on the stage’.
- In July, after working on the Hidden Spire script, she started as a volunteer usher at AOFs. She has enjoyed this a lot – she started doing it because she wanted to see plays and music, and meet people who are interested in the same things as she is. But in addition, she is finding that there is a lot of satisfaction in learning how to do the little things, like tearing the tickets professionally, and doing them well.
- And she is currently applying for a college writing course. ‘I have been working on my portfolio to apply to the creative writing course at [a local college] – putting in 5 hours a day for about 6 weeks to get it ready.’ It has taken time to build up her confidence to do this. It’s taken all of these steps (different classes over 1.5 years, Hidden Spire writing, volunteering, getting feedback on her work) to make it possible for her to prepare the portfolio. She now wants to set some goals to work towards for this year.



## Appendix A: Links To Full Evaluations

Report	Link
Hidden Spire 2015 evaluation	<a href="https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/hidden_spire_2014-15_final_report.c">https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/hidden_spire_2014-15_final_report.c</a>
Vessels evaluation	<a href="https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/vessels_report">https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/vessels_report</a>
Arts Training Scheme evaluation	<a href="https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/arts_training_scheme_2015">https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/arts_training_scheme_2015</a>
Summary of artist survey findings 2015	<a href="https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/artists_survey_-_summary_of_finding">https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/artists_survey_-_summary_of_finding</a>
Retrospective evaluation of our first three years (Feb 2015)	<a href="https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/retrospective_evaluation">https://issuu.com/artsattheoldfirestation/docs/retrospective_evaluation</a>



# Appendix B: AOFS Foundations

## Our Mission

### Great art for the public

We want our reputation to be good quality art aimed at adults which takes a risk, asks a question and entertains. We want our audiences to have fun and be open to new ideas and different people.

### Professional development of artists

We support local early to mid-career artists from all disciplines with advice, subsidy, networks and promotion to help them become more successful.

### Building the confidence and skills of homeless people

We help homeless people choose their own labels by including them as audience, participant, trainee, volunteer, contributor or artist. This helps develop networks, build resilience and leads to more stable lives.

### A new kind of public space

We offer a public space which is shared by very different people and helps to break down barriers and promote solidarity.

## Our Values

### Belief

Art is for everyone. Everyone has potential.

### Focus

- Great art for the public
- Professional development of artists
- Building the confidence and skills of homeless people (through our partnership with Crisis Skylight).

### Outcomes

Enabling:

- The public, through arts and culture, to have fun and to become open to new ideas and different people
- Artists to become more successful
- Homeless people to become more resilient and lead more stable lives.

### Values

**Inclusion and participation:** We want everyone to feel welcome and able to participate

**Excellence:** We strive to present work that is high quality in terms of art, technical skill and engagement of the public.

**Creativity and Fun:** We think it is important for everyone to be able to access art, to experiment, create and learn.

**Diversity:** We celebrate diversity and appreciate positive difference

**Enterprise:** We look for enterprising ways of creating a sustainable business and help others do the same

**Risk:** We recognise the need to take risks so we can learn and develop.

**Networks and collaboration:** We believe in strong supportive networks and communities

**Public space:** We think everyone should be able to occupy public space with confidence in a way that does not impinge on the ability of others to do so.

## Sustainability

We will create a sustainable social enterprise enabling us to secure enough income from supporters and customers to be able to make the impact we are seeking.

# Our Theory of Change and evaluation process



We have developed a series of measures which help us describe whether and how we are achieving the impacts we are seeking. These consist of numbers counted over the year and surveys/interviews conducted in relation to specific projects and activities.

# Appendix C: Theory Of Change In More Detail

## The change we want to see

We believe that art is for everyone: everyone has potential. Seeing, participating in and making art engages, excites and stretches people, encouraging new voices and unexpected connections. As an arts centre, sharing a building and working in partnership with Crisis, we want to deliver and sustain a truly inclusive artistic and cultural public space, which welcomes and celebrates difference and enables people to engage with new ideas, develop new skills and try on new identities. Our job is to put on shows, exhibitions, events and workshops – and to work hard selling tickets, running the bar and the shop, hiring out spaces and keeping our customers happy so that we keep the money coming in to make this all possible. We believe that the mix of people, activities and opportunities within AOFS – and the values that underpin everything we do – enable people to find their own ways to become better artists, more resilient individuals and part of stronger, more inclusive communities. Together, they will create outcomes that we could never have planned for or predicted. Our ambition is that everyone we are working with – volunteers, artists, homeless people, staff, members of the public, professional colleagues – can enjoy these opportunities and benefits. Within this, we have chosen three specific changes we want to support through our work.

## Top level outcomes

Everyone engaged with AOFS is more open to new ideas and different people	Artists are more successful	Homeless people are more resilient and stable
---	-----------------------------	---

Interim outcome	How this happens	Why it contributes
People participate and have fun	Through watching art Through making art Through engaging with the development of new work Through interacting with others (e.g. as member of a team or class)	Because positive feelings support positive lives Because experimenting, enjoying and learning together makes us all stronger, happier and more open to others Because homeless people need opportunities to focus on their strengths and interests not their problems
People have expanded cultural and artistic horizons	Through exposure to new work Through seeing creativity in their own community Through AOFS commitment to creative partnerships and networks	Because exposure to interesting, high quality new work stimulates new thinking and different ways of engaging Because exposure to work created by and with marginalised people challenges stereotypes Because seeing 'people like me' as artists builds confidence and hope Because engaging with the arts within AOFS opens doors for other artistic opportunities



<p>People have increased creative ability/ confidence</p>	<p>Through opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiment and develop ideas</li> <li>• Collaborate across art forms</li> <li>• ‘Engage with difference’</li> <li>• Test new works with engaged audiences</li> <li>• Show work in a high quality space</li> <li>• Attract a paying audience and the attention of critics and commentators</li> </ul>	<p>Because a stimulating and supportive environment enables emerging artists to grow and share their ideas</p> <p>Because developing a voice as an artist is powerful</p> <p>Because people who face disadvantage and are marginalised in society are too often denied a voice as artists</p> <p>Because the mix of people engaging with AOFS is itself stimulating and supports better art</p>
<p>People have new skills</p>	<p>Everyone has the opportunity to develop new skills through engaging in classes and workshops, and learning through collaboration</p> <p>Artists develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• business skills</li> <li>• technique</li> <li>• skills in participative arts practice</li> <li>• skills in working with vulnerable people</li> </ul> <p>Volunteers and trainees develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general work skills and disciplines</li> <li>• skills in arts management and delivery</li> <li>• skills in working as members of a diverse team</li> </ul>	<p>Because having fun, experimenting and learning together makes us all stronger, happier and more open to others</p> <p>Because developing as an artist – and earning a living - calls for a creative, practical and business knowledge and confidence</p> <p>Because engaging with and learning from vulnerable people is in itself stimulating and supports better art</p> <p>Because working in and around the arts in a busy public space which takes inclusion really seriously helps people develop new skills and confidence</p> <p>Because practical work experience builds transferrable skills for employment and life</p>
<p>People can try out new, positive identities and choose the labels they feel comfortable with and change them</p>	<p>Through trying out new roles and experiences</p> <p>Through working as peers with others</p> <p>Through being a valued member of a team, group or community</p>	<p>Because homeless people need a place where they are not labelled, bringing their skills not their problems</p> <p>Because becoming confident in new roles and in collaborating and contributing builds new public and self-identities</p>
<p>People appreciate diversity</p>	<p>Through engaging artistically with ‘difference’</p> <p>Through learning how to relate to and work alongside ‘unexpected people’</p> <p>Through seeing the skills and talents to be found in new, emerging or ‘pre-emerging’ artists</p>	<p>Because the mix of people engaging with AOFS in itself stimulating and supports better art</p> <p>Because working on a common task breaks down barriers and builds genuine relationships</p> <p>Because exposure to work created by and with marginalised people challenges stereotypes</p>

<p>People contribute to and benefit from networks and collaboration</p>	<p>Through the boundary crossing relationships within AOFS – and in its extensive external networks  Through the partnership with Crisis that lies at the heart of the Old Fire Station  Through opportunities to collaborate across disciplines, engage with audiences and test new ideas and new work</p>	<p>Because positive community and networks give people greater resources to define their own futures  Because working with vulnerable people who are well supported in tackling their problems enables AOFS to focus on their strengths and interests  Because positive exchange of ideas and approaches – and two-way feedback with engaged audiences – stimulates a creative community of value to all</p>
<p>People are more resilient</p>	<p>Through developing creative confidence by making and showing work  Through developing new skills and confidence as artists and in working in and around the arts in a busy public space  Through being part of teams, networks, groups and a creative community  Through being trusted, relied on and appreciated</p>	<p>Because developing an increased sense of recognition in a role that satisfies them gives people greater hope and confidence  Because being appreciated and valued for your contribution matters to everyone  Because positive community and networks give people greater resources to bounce back after setbacks – and to support others</p>

### Case Study 5: Roger (through interview)

- Roger had been in the army, and faced many difficulties as a civilian. In the army, he had been taught about honour, decency and respect, and he found in his dealings with civilian life, that playing by the rules didn't work – he has been on zero hours contracts, had bullying landlords, was living on £13/week, was a victim of violence and was very frightened, and living out of a bag so that he could sleep rough whenever necessary.
- He says that he would not have survived the last few months without AOFS and Crisis. He wouldn't have seen himself as a 'theatre person', but coming to the Old Fire Station 'gave me hope and a purpose. It empowers people who have become disempowered. If this place wasn't here, I wouldn't be here or I would be into crime.'
- 'They treat you just like any other person – they don't care that someone has slept rough or has issues. I've worked with lots of people here – and on things where people have strong views. People were very respectful of each other. It teaches you collaboration – which is hard to learn.'
- But the last year has not been straightforward for him – he has had a rough time recently because of mental health issues and the many challenges of living in insecure accommodation and sleeping rough – and he says that the work he did with AOFS previously has built up his capabilities, so he has taken the bad things that have happened recently in his stride. He particularly mentions how much he has learnt from being a volunteer usher. 'You have to be assertive with the public, while not upsetting them – that's a really useful skill in dealing with lots of difficult situations, and I've used that in dealing with my housing situation recently.'
- And he found that while the bad things were happening, the Old Fire Station provided a place where he was treated decently, and he tried to come in every day as a 'check in point', to keep himself steady.
- Roger's journey has been up and down – but he feels better able to face difficulties now, thanks to the support he has received.