

FRESHAYR

connecting people with place creatively

CREATIVE ASPIRATION

Regeneration can only heal our ailing places when citizens are active participants

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRESHAYR is a socially engaged arts organisation to connect people with place creatively, where every aspect of creativity is important, from low commitment skills to high-end aspirational arts. Advocating creativity as a resource to improve physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing, as an aid to alleviating social isolation and poverty. The aim is to provide creative opportunities to **ALL** members of society without discrimination through **active creative engagement**.

The project started with a campaign to encourage people to become involved in our grass roots approach to creative regeneration. Starting with nothing, people were asked to get involved in an online project attracting over 150 artists from around the globe to make artwork labels for 'cans' with nothing in them, but 'fresh air' in Ayr, hence the name **FRESHAYR**.

It was set up as a voluntary organisation in October 2016 by three arts professionals and has held a number of pop-up events to measure the interest and need for spaces – to make – to show – to interact. The objective is to provide opportunities for people to use their creative energies, driven by the Beuysian notion 'everyone is an artist'¹.

The aim is to bring communities together by bridging social divides through socially engaged arts practices. The Creative Strategy of **FRESHAYR** is to hold regular events to encourage Cultural Tourism. That creates real employment opportunities to manage and run a healthy flat structure organisation, providing creative opportunities from low commitment skills to high-end aspirational arts.

The nub of providing community benefits is to develop an income source, initially from a bakery/café, which will be the kernel of generating the means of developing spaces for creative social engagement with the objective of helping to alleviate social isolation and poverty through creative engagement.

Working from the adage '*grist for the mill*'² with the meaning '*everything can be made useful, or be a source of profit*'. The aim is to become a sustainable self-funding organisation, utilising zero waste principles, growing and up-cycling in creative ways that nurture a sustainable circular economy, driven by a philosophy of social responsibility³.

If we are to have a truly circular economy this needs to start with children being active participants. **FRESHAYR** has been working with children from Newton Primary School embedded in the Wallacetown area of Ayr that falls into the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. If we are to make real change we should let a quote from Hargreaves's book: *The Fourth Way, The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*, ring loudly in our ears: '*...never, ever should [we] do for others what they can [do] for themselves*'⁴. This obligates us, to listen to our children and help them to inspire their parents to participate in social engagement.

The organisation's efforts have grown a Facebook following of nearly 2k and has shown significant benefits to diverse groups; engaging with over 350 artists/crafters (including 'can' artists), across a diverse ranges of creative genres and a host of volunteers ranging from those wishing to give something back, to those developing skills in administration, marketing, curating, making food and drinks from scratch and general help. The volunteers covered a broad section of social circumstances, some with emotional and mental health concerns, while others being displaced refugees, who took key roles in renovating spaces and up-cycling.

¹ <https://artiris.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/joseph-beuys-everyone-is-an-artist/>

² Wikipedia: A miller ground whatever grain was brought to him, and charged a portion of the final product for the service. Therefore, all grain arriving at the mill represented income.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_responsibility

⁴ Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. 2012: *The Fourth Way, The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*. London: SAGE.

The project has had support from Creative Scotland's Place Partnership administered by South Ayrshire Council Cultural Development Office with help in kind from Ayr Renaissance, in putting on pop-up events. Funding from 'Awards for All' was gained to research potential venues for permanent creative facilities, investigate audience and explore appropriate governance.

OUR PURPOSE is to carry on activities, which benefit communities creatively, in particular (but not limited) to the arts, catering and education.

Our MISSION is to support communities' participation in creativity through socially engaged practices. That values every aspect of creativity as important: from low commitment skills to high-end aspirational arts. Acting as a catalyst to improve physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing that helps to alleviate social isolation and poverty.

Our VISION seeks to place creativity at the heart of empowering communities by providing opportunities to develop life-enhancing skills. Where citizens are integral to the discussions and decisions that shape their spaces, into respectful, vibrant neighbourhoods.

CORE VALUES

Our three guiding principles

R E S P E C T Difference

Act **R E S P O N S I B L Y**

R E S O U R C E Share

CORE OBJECTIVES

- Connect people and place creatively
- Encourage participatory engagement
- Deliver quality assured creative projects

- Explore traditional and alternative economies
- Support creative aspiration from cradle to grave
- Foster quantitative and qualitative creative research

ENTERPRISE NARRATIVE

Why and what we have done.

MOTIVATION

Why we are doing this

Annually significant numbers of students from Ayrshire gain places on degree level creative education courses across Scotland. The ‘*Terminal Decline*’ of town centres highlighted in the Mary Portas’s 2011 review, is in no small measure aggravated by Ayrshire’s Cultural Capital being usurped into the cities, lured by vibrancy and above all commercial opportunities in the flourishing creative industries.

There are many disparities as to what Creative Industries are in the Government Paper: *Creative Industries in Scotland (2016)*. It does however suggest a consensus that creative industries should be supported, as this is a major growth sector. Indeed according to the UK government the Creative Industries bring in £8.8 million per hour into the UK economy⁵.

FRESHAYR seeks to encourage our Cultural Capital to have a reason to have a foothold in Ayrshire by providing spaces:

to Make – to Show – to Interact.

ASSET OF CREATIVITY

The problem is the solution

⁵ Media and creative industries (<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/media-and-creativeindustries>)

A number of problems are identified with the decline of town centres and ailing communities and there is no single answer as to how regeneration of people and place can be achieved. What is becoming evident is that each place needs to identify its uniqueness and this requires creative direction and collaboration across many areas of interest, informed by evidence-based research. Above all, involvement with local communities has to be a priority of creative regeneration.

There are a plethora of emerging organisations that provide benefits through socially engaged arts practices like Rig Arts⁶ in Greenock, Inverness Old Town Arts⁷ and The Stove Network⁸ in Dumfries who suggest *'Place-based arts practice is a vital tool for empowering communities to take an active role in shaping their future and the places where they live, work and play'*. Indeed the Scottish government states clearly *'Culture, creativity and a rich dynamic heritage sit at the heart of Scotland's communities'*.

FRESHAYR objectives are in line Cultural Strategy⁹ initiated by Scottish Government Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop to *'enhance the vital role of arts and culture in empowering communities, organisations and individuals'*. Scottish Government have now published the Cultural Strategy Report¹⁰, which will be taken to public consultation later in 2018

CREATIVE CAUSE

What we have done



FreshAyr online 'can' art 2016

⁶ <http://www.rigarts.org>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/IOTA.art.projects/>

⁸ <http://www.thestove.org>

⁹ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-for-scotland-culture-secretarys-speech/>

¹⁰ [HTTPS://BETA.GOV.SCOT/PUBLICATIONS/CULTURE-STRATEGY-ENGAGEMENT-REPORT/](https://beta.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-engagement-report/)

FRESHAYR pop up events have been ongoing since the November 2016 HAPPENING in the Old Watt Bros Building at the bottom of Ayr High Street facilitated by Ayr Renaissance and SAC Cultural Development Office.

This drew an interested audience and was developed further in a three day Festival of Creative Diversity in early March at Ayr Town Hall. Leading to an invitation to contribute to the Burnsfest in May 2017 and a Food Festival at the Burns Birthplace Museum in July 2017. Followed by the temporary use of empty units in Queens Court. These projects were supported through the Place Partnership¹¹ administered by the SAC Cultural Development Office.



Old Watt Bros Pop up Gallery: Sculpture by DJCAD Graduate Melissa Bititci 2016

¹¹ <http://www.creativescotland.com/funding/funding-programmes/targeted-funding/place-programme>



Jewellery at Watt Bros 2016

2017



Music in Ayr Town Hall March



FreshAyr Pokey Tent at Burnsfest 2017

QUEENS COURT
Temporary creative hub



Historically Queens Court was the site of the former Country Club, which in its heyday was possibly Ayr's premier Patisserie and Coffee House until it's conversion by architect Patrick Lorimer in 1975, described by Rob Close¹² as a '*civilised shopping complex*'.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

How we can create a sustainable income

In Queens Court, we gained the use of most of the empty ground floor level units, including the café/bar to develop a Creative Hub for a short-term pop up phase and lay down the potential for how a creative circular economy could be established.

What we mean by circular economy is a system that is sustainable and is inclusive of Natural, Cultural, Social and Economic Capital that avoids the depletion of natural resources by minimising waste, while regenerating creative employment through growing, up-cycling, making food and drinks from scratch with surplus profits funding creative projects.

VOICE OF CHILDREN

Change by design: Newton Primary Culture Group

¹² Close Rob, Ayrshire & Arran: An Illustrated Architectural Guide

FRESHAYR from the outset has been working with the children of Newton Primary School embedded in the Wallacetown area with a malaise of some of the most problematic social problems in Scotland.



Voice of Children: change by design 2016

The 'Voice of Children', started as an art in the park event in the late spring of 2016 where they were asked to give their ideas for: *'what would make your area a better place to live in'*. This led to the children designing and hosting a one-day festival in Wallacetown's Church Court.

A Culture Group has now been established at Newton Primary where a small group of children are encourage to explore the value of creativity as a way of instigating positive change. This is in accord with the First Minister's commitment to communities being involved in designing public services. The aim is to develop a proposal to participate in the 2019 Fire Starter Festival¹³ celebrating creativity and innovation in Public Places.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A fusion of business and arts

Food is, not only our basic need, it is also the very roots of socially engaged art as defined in Food Matters¹⁴. In 1971 Gordon Matta Clark

¹³ <https://firestarterfestival.com>

¹⁴ [https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/food-matters-when-eating-and-art-became-one/Food Matters/ When Eating and art became one](https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/food-matters-when-eating-and-art-became-one/Food%20Matters/When%20Eating%20and%20art%20became%20one)

with some artist friends set up FOOD as an artist run restaurant where eating and art were united and became known as Relational Art, an art born out of social context that is now better known as Socially Engaged Art.

Conflict Kitchen¹⁵ is a contemporary outcrop of FOOD as Art and a successful contemporary model of public engagement addressing important cultural issues. Indeed as is pointed out in Participation (Bishop 2006)¹⁶ 'traditional aesthetics are no longer grounded on objectification, *'but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political'*.

Growing and eating food not only feeds us, but it also generates a massive amount of food waste¹⁷. In the early days of Relational Art when art was moving away from making objects towards social engagement, artist's like Mierle Laderman Ukeles wrote a treatise on the importance of preservation. She became the first artist in residence in the New York sanitation department *Touch Sanitation Performance*¹⁸.

Bringing things back to our own shores, in Edinburgh Stacy Boldrick's work focuses on trash as art¹⁹.

Food as art, art of the everyday, trash as art²⁰ all are rooted in socially engaged practice opens up many possibilities to find ways to earn incomes by working creatively within the policies of Zero Waste²¹ that can lessen dependency on handout funding.

B R E A D

Making dough

Bread, the oldest food made by hand, which metaphorically and actually is the core of the **FRESHAYR** purpose, which is to earn the dough to fund and support creative projects. To develop a sustainable circular economy that can bring communities together in purposeful, inspired ways.

¹⁵ <https://www.conflict-kitchen.org>

¹⁶ Bishop. C. 2006: Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art. London: The Whitechapel Gallery

¹⁷ <https://www.greenerscotland.org>

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/arts/design/mierle-laderman-ukeles-new-york-city-sanitation-department.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.nanocrit.com/issues/issue7/trash-trash-art>

²⁰ <https://www.netwaste.org.au/waste-to-art/>

²¹ <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk>



Gallery space at Queens Court 2017

There are a host of community models of successful enterprises that are more than just the provision of bread, but driven by social conscience and social purpose. We have looked at a number of models and explored some of the concepts during the Queens Court pop up, when we explored the concept of Café/Bread as the hub of creative interaction providing a simple menu of hand crafted bread/bakery goods, along with food made from scratch from fresh ingredients with a policy *'if we don't make it, we don't serve it'*. This was well received along with our programme of contemporary art exhibitions, film shows, poetry and spoken word events, music, workshops and craft fayres.

COMMUNITY MODELS

Makers of daily bread

Freedom Bakery²² put social conscience behind helping inmates at HMP at Low Moss get training in bread making, which has been

²² <https://www.freedombakery.org>

successful in reducing reoffenders, *‘The idea is that if a person with a conviction can hold down a job they are unlikely to reoffend again’*. There is now a city centre bakery supplying some of Glasgow’s top restaurants that buy into and support the concept.



Homebaked²³ a community land trust and co-operative bakery in Liverpool saved an iconic bakery from demolition. This is a project that has regeneration of their high street as their social purpose, *‘brick by brick and loaf by loaf’* using profits to returning people to town centre living. Like most community bakery/café’s they pay living wage and invest surplus profit into job creation, learning and celebration.

Handmade Bakery (HMB)²⁴ pioneered the idea of the Community Supported Bakery owned and run by its members. They developed their project supported by local people who committed to a regular bread bond subscription, the first of its kind in the UK. That has now become a flourishing small-scale producer of 2000 artisan loaves and handcrafted patisserie, they run bakery courses and service a vibrant contemporary café.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Developing our concept

²³ <http://homebakery.org.uk>

²⁴ <http://thehandmadebakery.coop>

FreshAyr has now teamed up with **the smoking goat** at 2a Academy Street, Ayr. Where we are baking a range of slow fermented breads and running food taster session with live music, to developing our concept of funding creative projects.



Presently we have permission to use two empty units on the Sandgate and corner of Cathcart Street, to host a programme of exhibitions, performances and workshops. Loudon Hall and the courtyard are being investigated for a two-day summer festival. These events will be synchronised with a public meeting to present what **FRESHAYR** has done since its inception and discover how the public would like to see cultural activities developed in the future and how they want to participate.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Creativity for All

Our cultural strategy is to be proactive in organising bimonthly festivals to support creative engagement for all members of society. We will continue to be active in seeking the use of empty or vacant spaces, while seeking permanent spaces to develop employment for creative entrepreneurialism.

A number of businesses have benefited from our activism, including the Smoking Goat, Newmarket, The Wee Windaes, Cameron's and the Glen Park Hotel, who all, now host cultural events, initiated by **FRESHAYR**. We are in discussions with other groups and organisations as to how to develop a Creative Strategy to make Ayr part of a culture of cross-pollination of Scottish creativity.

AUDIENCE

PARTICIPATION

FRESHAYR commissioned Culture Republic from our Award for All funding, to do an audience analysis²⁵ In summary, There is demographic information available for theatre attenders and footfall numbers covering galleries/museums in Ayrshire. However, there is no robust evidence about the needs of creative people or what the public wants from cultural activities, or about the demographics or lifestyles of potential audiences for **FRESHAYR**. The conclusion of the audience report suggests that there is a need for a research project to discover what the public wants from cultural activities, whom they are and how they wish to participate.

CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT NEEDS

As we deepen into the twenty-first century it is becoming apparent that Cultural Tourism is going to be a route towards economic regeneration of town centres. Cultural Tourism is not only a matter of bringing visitors from afar, but also encouraging local denizens to participate in town centre activities. While retail will always be a part of town centre purpose, there is a growing interest in cultural activities that give people reasons to be socially interactive. Aberdeen City Council has taken a lead in this with a ten-year strategy to boost culture²⁶.

FRESHAYR has been proactive in holding events and discussions about how creativity can be a major part in healing ailing places. This started prior to our first pop up event, when we asked the children and their parents of Wallacetown's Newton Primary School at an art in the park event *'what would make your area a better place to live in'*. Since then we have had conversations in Ayr Town Hall and the Arc in Ayr.

We have had conversations as far away as Dundee, which has resulted in the possibility of a collaborative project, which will be discussed in a forthcoming meeting with Dundee City Council's planning officer for public art and Creative Scotland.

²⁵ AUDIENCE REPORT BY CULTURE REPUBLIC URL LINK: [HTTPS://WE.TL/TX3ZE6VCP](https://we.tl/TX3ZE6VCP)

²⁶ [HTTPS://WWW.ABERDEENCITY.GOV.UK/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2018-04/CULTURE%20ABERDEEN.PDF](https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018-04/culture%20aberdeen.pdf)

There had discussions with academic staff at the UWS campus in Ayr about the possibility hosting a Scotland's Creative Needs Symposium in the early part of the 2018/2019 academic-term, to generate cross-pollination across Scottish Creative Educational Institutions.

PERMANENT SPACES

TO MAKE - TO SHOW - TO INTERACT

FRESHAYR commissioned Collective Architecture²⁷ from our Award for All funding to investigate a number of possibilities for permanent locations which in summary included 15 Sandgate, 21-25 Newmarket Street, Queens Court and an Underground Car Park at Davidson Place, Wallacetown.

While **FRESHAYR** seeks a highly visible location in Ayr town centre, Collective Architecture recommends the Underground Car Park in Wallacetown as the most viable space to develop at this stage.

For this reason it is suggested that an outline cost plan and phased development of the Underground Car Park is produced with recommendations for the next steps, both in the short term for 2018 and medium to longer term funding & investment strategy for capital works. The aspiration is that investment in the Underground Car Park space will provide the catalyst for other social and environmental creative regeneration in the immediate Wallacetown neighbourhood and Ayr as a whole.

The Underground Car Park offers good connections to the town centre and high visibility form key public transport links, providing a high profile potential for **FRESHAYR** and its Creative Aspirations.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

NURTURING THE NEXT GENERATION

This document outlines the Creative Aspiration of **FRESHAYR** to encourage creative entrepreneurialism by making cultural activities available to All members of society. The aim is to instigate evidence based research about the needs of the creative community for permanent facilities to deliver social engaged practices. To achieve positive impact on social inclusion and the value, creativity brings, to improving individual and community wellbeing. Setting a

²⁷ *REPORT AWAITED*

precedence of cultural ambition that nurtures the next generation of creative leaders to create a respectful, responsible, resourceful society.

OUTSIDER OPINION

PROJECT ADVOCACY

Why does Ayr need 'Fresh Ayr'?

In the few weeks that Fresh Ayr occupied the Queen's Court premises, what I saw was an earnest attempt to create a space in Ayr town centre in which a colourful variety of exhibitions, films, poetry readings, musical performances, evening classes and workshops took place. Among the most memorable of these events were a showing of an early black and white German Expressionist silent film, a young harpist re-inventing popular songs for her instrument, drawing classes (including the most demanding discipline of all – life drawing) and a string of thoughtful, question-provoking exhibitions of work by local artists – but not only by local artists.

I would like to focus on one exhibition in particular: 'Beuys für Alle' ('Beuys for Everyone'); the German Joseph Beuys being one of the 20th century's most significant artists. What Robert Singer succeeded in doing was to draw together a number of young graduates (and one lecturer) from Dundee School of Art, each of whom set out to interpret Beuys work in their own way. The result was a group exhibition, which drew the attention of Richard Demarco who has been an important player in the Scottish and international art scene for many years. He travelled to Ayr in order to attend the opening event where he was heard to comment favourably on the unusual nature of the venue. This to me provides strong evidence of the potential pulling power of the Fresh Ayr endeavour.

Speaking personally, what attracted me to Fresh Ayr was the distinctive combination of strong boundary-pushing creative activities and a refreshingly casual environment where everyone and their dog were made welcome.

I would hope that resources can be found to support a venture from which the town of Ayr can only benefit.

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