

Introduction

We know that practitioner support is a critical aspect of building more sustainable practice in culture, health and wellbeing. This document brings together information from the 11 shortlisted programmes and projects from CHWA's Practising Well Awards in 2020 and 2021, devised in collaboration with Nicola Naismith. The programmes and projects were nominated by practitioners and shortlisted by teams of judges with expertise and both professional and lived experience in this field.

This document is part of the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance's strategic commitment to sustainability.

Who is this document for?

This document will provide guidance for employers and commissioners considering their support offers and for funders hoping to understand more about what constitutes good practice.

Practical Offers

Below is a summary of the practical offers of support described in the shortlisted projects and programmes.

Personal Development/ Affective Support

- Supervision (1:1 and group)
- Counselling (1:1 and group)
- Coaching (1:1 and group)
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Monthly group reflective practice sessions
- Peer support (formal and informal)
- Retreat model with follow-up group
- Resilience / Self-awareness training: preparation for working in challenging contexts

Professional development

- Shadowing opportunities
- Mentoring opportunities; being mentee and becoming mentors
- Snapshot observations to support professional development
- Specialist training opportunities
- Team development / away days
- Group discussions and book clubs

Support in practice

- Constructed safe places for practice and activities
- Clear boundaries set
- Guidance on ethical frameworks, policies and protocols
- Involvement in project steering groups
- Valued (paid) rehearsal/ preparation and debrief time
- Escorts in clinical or care environments
- Collaborative evaluation processes
- Support with risk assessments (particularly important during Covid)
- Access to shared resources and learning (online and offline)

Covid-Specific Responses

Several nominations had a specific focus on how organisations had shifted to respond to the need of practitioners during the pandemic, providing financial, emotional and meaningful activity through responsive training (working online/ digital skills and safeguarding), paid commissions, and peer support.

Approach

Below is a list of key approaches that nominees describe as characterising positive support experiences:

- *Support built into project design and delivery* – for example, considering breaks to reflect emotional toll
- *Practitioners involved in project design* and initial set up meetings with partners – increasing autonomy, engagement and consideration of practitioner needs
- *Person-centred approaches to support* – one size doesn't fit all. For instance, practitioner working hours determined by health and existing commitments
- *Accessibility of support* – sessions planned for different times of the day/week, or recorded for people to catch up; consideration of caring commitments / life circumstances and long-term conditions of practitioners; financial support to attend sessions
- *Structured and well-planned* – support activities/sessions responding to identified needs
- *Evolving models of support* – responsive, flexible, considerate to needs of the project, practitioners, participants and audiences
- *Early conversations about support* – support offered on application and at recruitment stages, demonstrating a commitment to valuing practitioner wellbeing
- *Effective and clear communication* – appropriate notice given for opportunities, reminders about offer of support, clarity around protocols
- *Open Dialogue* – opportunities for practitioners to feedback, engage and influence future plans and programmes. The creation of a hive-mind approach, recognising everyone's strengths

- *Openness and readiness from partners/organisations* to (for example) seek additional external support and expertise to support wellbeing and specialist learning of practitioners
- *Community Building approach* – whether informal peer support within teams, creating space for practitioners to meet others in trainings / prior to sessions, creation of new networks through programmes or discrete offers such as Thriving Facilitators, Soundcastle Community and the MOT* Programme.
- *Mentees / Practitioners becoming Mentors / Trainers* – scope to share learning and experience to champion and sustain support activities

Money

In most cases the support was free to access for individuals, yet there were varying levels of financial support to cover expenses (travel, childcare) and time. Thriving Facilitators, presented a model with a tiered offer, offering free support to a community of practitioners and an additional layer of more bespoke, individual support for paying members.

A third of the programmes paid practitioners for their time to engage in support activities; all of these were programmes based in organisations with existing and embedded support structures. There was also some evidence of additional payment for consultation on the evaluation of support projects and also increased rates of payments when practitioners became trainers in support activities, valuing expertise and experience.

Many participants shared how their personal investment of time in opportunities outweighed the cost or loss of work to engage in activities. Yet this was also identified as a potential barrier by one nominee. *How can we make it more possible to financially support participation in this critical aspect of practitioners' development? How can it be built into contractual terms? Whose responsibility is it to pay?*

Breakdown of each shortlisted project/programme

Below is a list of the offers each shortlisted project in 2020 and 2021 makes to practitioners.

Gloucestershire Archives, Strike A Light & GUST (2020 shortlist)

Practical support

- Guidance on ethical frameworks
- Safe space to hold interviews
- Regular support from project team
- Counselling on offer
- Counsellors at all 10 performances
- Readiness to bring in additional expertise
- Steering group for project

Approach

- Excellent communication about support from both partners
- Support built into project design
- Responsiveness to concerns/flexibility in project design
- All discussions/performances are inclusive/welcoming
- Consideration of audience, partners and practitioners

Money

- No cost to practitioner

Quote from nominating artist

"As an arts practitioner I work with many different people in diverse roles. The Never Better Project taught me to recognize and value my own wellbeing, and understand how important it is to not be afraid to ask 'I don't know, but can we find out together?'"

Plymouth Music Zone (2020 winner)

Practical support

- Support Hub:
 - Shadowing opportunities
 - peer-to-peer support
 - snapshot observations
 - supervision
 - Music leader days (general themes)
- Skills pods (specialist areas)
- Pastoral support - trained counsellor available

Approach

- Responsiveness to needs of practitioner (including access needs/childcare etc)
- Working hours designed to suit practitioners' needs
- People learn about structures as soon as they apply
- Support opportunities shared with good notice

- Training well-planned and aligns with project aims. Delivered by external or internal staff as appropriate

Money

- Paid to attend meetings and training
- When practitioners training others, they are paid at a higher 'trainer' rate than participants, to reflect skills

Quote from nominating artist

"It is extremely helpful and encouraging to know that we are not isolated in our work. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and isolated in the emotional backdrop of what we do. It is also really important that we are 'fed' by interesting, motivational and current thinking that supports our work."

Re-Live (2020 shortlist)

Practical support

- 5-day 'life story' training - reflective practice (inc. group dynamics, boundaries, one to one work, self-awareness, self-care and supervision)
- Monthly group supervision sessions with qualified supervisor

Approach

- Access to supervision upon recruitment
- The organisation values, delivers and makes practitioner support accessible
- Clear boundaries

Money

- Funded supervision sessions
- Supported by bursary to attend training (not paid)

Quotes from nominating artists

"The support has offered opportunities to slow down, reflect and notice my own unique way of delivering arts in health practice creative sessions. This has afforded me space to listen on a deeper level as to how participants are responding to each other compassionately."

"The support offered by Re-Live has enabled me to feel confident about delivering high quality, safe, creative/expressive sessions for a group of people who often present with highly complex issues. It also encourages me to continue to advocate training, supervision and CPD opportunities in my other freelance work contexts."

Britten Pears Arts (formerly Snape Maltings): MOT for Musicians working in challenging settings (2020 shortlist)

Practical support

- 5-day MOT training/ retreat with facilitator
- Reflective practice, self-care and resilience building tools
- Offered to all musicians in socially engaged settings (application process)

Approach

- Person-centred, taken care off in beautiful/restorative setting
- Follow-up meeting to capture learnings

Money

- Free to attend- board and food paid for

Quotes from nominating artists

"This 'MOT for Musicians in Challenging Settings course' deeply affected my work from the minute I left Snape Maltings. Subsequently at the 1st Hospital visit I made I was able to implement significant positive changes that have not only benefitted myself but understandably those that I then come into contact with."

"Having the opportunity to attend this programme has given me a renewed understanding of myself and in turn a profound effect on my creativity, my mental health and the work that I do. It has changed my life."

"The MOT weekend has had a huge impact on my practice and personal wellbeing. I view the MOT weekend as an intervention at a crucial point in my career when I was feeling burned out and run down. It provided me with tools that have helped build my resilience (ranging from self-care to tips on being a freelance musician); a support network; mentorship. I feel connected to other people in my field in a way that is rare."

Wigmore Hall: Music for Life (2020 shortlist)

Practical support

- Artists involved in process: Attend set up meeting with care home, two hours paid rehearsal time with other musicians, 1 hour paid set up time, observation throughout session and facilitated one- hour debrief following each session (individual and groups).
- Informal peer-peer support as needed
- Twice-yearly whole-team development days
- Development days: training & awareness sessions from experts (e.g. dementia care specialists, improvisation specialists)

Approach

- Affective support built into project from outset
- Model evolves in response to practitioner needs

Money

- All rehearsals, meetings, debriefs time is paid for
- Payment to attend & present at conferences

Quote from nominating artist

"The support that I have received as part of the Music for Life team has formed the core of my development as an artist. Not only has it equipped me to work meaningfully with people living with dementia, but it has enabled me to integrate my identity as a musician with being a human being."

[Soundcastle \(2021 shortlist\)](#)**Practical support**

- Online training course and peer sharing (6 sessions over 6 months)

Approach

- Developing practice with regional and cross-regional peer-groups; particularly re online working
- Open to new ideas for the course

Money

- Free course
- Paid to provide feedback (the course was an R&D project)

Quote from nominating practitioner

"...feel inspired to do more of this work in the real world and feel so much more confident in being able to call myself a facilitator (rather than a teacher)."

[Thriving Facilitators \(2021 shortlist\)](#)**Practical support**

- Structured mentoring/coaching space for facilitators
- Group work and individual supervision
- Group discussions and book club sessions
- Different levels of accessibility: Free support group and paid membership community

Approach

- Works across different online formats (Facebook, zoom etc.) and different times of day
- Sessions documented for catchup for people who can't attend
- Builds a peer-support community

Money

- Paid membership community (monthly fee of £28 for up to 8 hours of sessions in group setting as well as the online materials)

Quote from nominating practitioner

"Dilemmas that emerge out of practice are so rarely a shared burden: Thriving Facilitators is an enormous source of high-quality support in re-evaluating motivations, barriers and personal development. Sheila is an outstanding practitioner of care, heart-centred reflexive practice and supports her members to thrive."

Kazzum Arts (2021 winner)**Practical support**

- Independent coaching sessions
- Individual and group supervision
- Monthly group reflective practice sessions
- Employee Assistance Programme with optional free counselling sessions
- In-house training for all freelancers

Approach

- Excellent communication and clear protocols
- Trauma-informed organisation

Money

- Paid to attend training with other organisations
- Paid professional development (working on games/improv) during covid

Quote from nominating practitioner

"Participatory work is about connecting with others but as a freelance arts facilitator, it can sometimes be isolating. Kazzum has supported my practice and development by giving me a real sense of community. I feel listened to, valued, trusted and excited that I work here."

Fresh Arts, North Bristol NHS Trust (2021 shortlist)**Practical support**

- Training: work in hospitals and complex care, mental health first aid
- Escorted during time in hospital
- Debrief sessions
- Evaluations of sessions
- Risk assessments during covid
- Fresh Arts commissioned performances to keep artists going during covid, including dedicated work with artists with underrepresented heritages

Approach

- Musician wellbeing is integral to project design, building in adequate breaks in response to emotional toll of working in this environment
- Communication is always clear and thorough
- Adapted the programme, showing a clear understanding of the capacity, needs and concerns of our musicians in Covid 19 context
- Support is flexible and responsive to the needs of our musicians as well as hospital staff and patients

Money

- Paid to attend training (plus expenses, including free parking)

Quote from nominating practitioner

"Because Fresh Arts take care of all practicalities, musicians feel safe (including during the pandemic), supported and freed to focus on performance. Regular sessions, training and sensitive feedback build skills and confidence."

Opus Music CIC (2021 shortlist)**Practical support**

- Projects designed during covid to create meaningful paid work for musicians
- Facilitated online meetings, storage of shared audio and video files, and constant feedback

Approach

- Supportive ongoing dialogue regarding possible team direction and personal goals
- A hive-mind approach to applying for funding for rewarding, beneficial and achievable projects

Money

- Free emotional and professional support

Quote from nominating practitioner

"The work generated during this COVID lockdown time by OPUS Music CIC has been crucial to my financial buoyancy, emotional stability, creative sense of worth and mental health. My skills have developed, confidence increased in technical areas, and emotional connection with regular audiences maintained throughout."

GEM: One to One Mentoring Programme (2021 shortlist)**Practical support**

- A programme of virtual personalized mentoring sessions
- Museums professional matched with a mentor based on personal experience, goals and challenges

- Mentees move on to become mentors, with training and access to a range of resources including a mentor's peer support network and a designated mentoring champion

Approach

- Programme introduced rapidly in response to pandemic
- Proactive, supportive, non-judgmental network

Money

- Free to participate

Quote from nominating practitioner

"Making connections, being part of a supportive network and building positive new relationships has been invaluable for my wellbeing, identity, self-worth and professional confidence during a difficult period. I have gained new skills and feel prepared to now tackle the challenges and changes that are ahead."