



Helium Arts Creative Health Hubs Evaluation

February 2023

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Section 1: Introduction and Context

1.1. Introduction

This report sets out an independent and objective evaluation of the Helium Arts' Creative Health Hubs programme during 2022.

1.2. Evaluation Objectives

S3 Solutions was commissioned by Helium Arts to undertake an evaluation of the 2022 Creative Health Hubs Programme. The objectives of this evaluation are to:

- Examine the extent to which the programme has achieved its aims and objectives.
- Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the approaches adopted to deliver the programme.
- Assess the impact of the programme on target participants and other key stakeholders including parents, volunteers and artists.
- Identify key learning and recommendations for future programmes.

1.3. Introduction to Helium Arts

Helium Arts is a national children's arts and health charity supporting the social and emotional needs of children facing lifelong physical health conditions through arts-based projects in hospital, community, and public settings. Helium Arts seeks to empower children to take back control, connect with their peers, communicate their experiences in creative ways, support their psychosocial needs and enhance their overall health and wellbeing. Since Helium was established in 2010, their projects have benefited over 7,000 children and their families across 22 counties.

Helium Arts' mission is to:

Empower children living with illness through their creativity and the arts, inspiring those who care for them and supporting creative healthy environments.

Helium Arts' Vision is that:

All children living with illness in Ireland are connected to their creative powers so they can live life to the full.

Section 2: The Creative Health Hubs

2.1. Introduction to Creative Health Hub Delivery in 2022

In 2019, with support from Creative Ireland and Rethink Ireland, Helium Arts launched the Creative Health Hubs in Limerick and Cork. A hub in Galway was launched in 2023. These hubs work in partnership with local hospitals, community and creative partners across Cork, Limerick, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Tipperary and Clare. The Creative Health Hubs are primarily based in Paediatric Outpatient Clinics where artists work closely with the medical community to provide children, young people, and their families the opportunity to try out different age-appropriate creative activities. From there, they can be referred by their doctors or parents to Helium Arts' community programme, where they can participate in a series of workshops on Saturdays over 6 weeks or during school holidays at 3-day camps. The online programme launching in 2023 will provide access for those children isolated by their illness at home, admitted to hospital, or living rurally.

2.2. The Paediatric Outpatient Clinics

In 2022, Helium Arts engaged **932** children and young people and **691** parents through the Paediatric Outpatient Clinics. Of the children and young people:

Children and young people demographics:

- 53% of children and young people were female and 47% male.
- 29% of children aged 5 or under, 35% aged 6-8 years, 24% 9-12 years and 12% aged 13+.
- 20% had attended the clinic before; 80% were engaging for the first time.

Children and young people engagement:

- The majority engaged in Paediatric Outpatient Clinics in Galway University Hospital or Cork University Hospital (74%).
- The clinics most attended by staff were Diabetes (16%), Allergy (14%), Endocrine (14%) and Neurology (14%).
- The most common creative activity that children engaged in during the outpatient clinics was stained glass design (27%) following by drawing (19%) and colouring (13%).

On average, staff estimated that:

- They were in contact with children for approximately 2-2.5 hours in each clinic. Contact time with children ranged from 0 hours – 6.5 hours per clinic.

- On average (median) they spent approximately 20 minutes with each child. This ranged from 3 minutes – 2 hours per child.
- They had 169 total interactions with hospital staff across all clinics. This included clerical, nursing, doctors, or front-line staff. On average, there were 2.1 interactions per staff.

2.3. The Community Programme

In 2022, Helium Arts engaged **188** children and young people through the community-based element of the Creative Health Hubs. The community based element was comprised of sets of programmes for 6-8 year olds and sets for 9-12 year-olds delivered once per season.

Children and young people demographics:

- 56% of participants were female and 44% male.
- 65% were aged 9-12 years old, 31% aged 6-8 years old, and 4% were teenagers.
- Most commonly, children had Type 1 diabetes (21%) and epilepsy (14%).
- 19% of participants had more than one medical condition.
- 32% of participants had a rare disease; a life-threatening or chronically debilitating disease affecting no more than 5 people per 10,000.
- 26% of participants had a disability and/or additional needs.

The community-based programmes were available across 7 counties in Ireland. The spread of participation levels per county was as follows: Cork (41%), Limerick (21%), Galway (21%), Clare (9%), Tipperary (4%), Mayo (4%) and Roscommon (1%). 60% of participants resided in rural areas and 40% of participants resided in urban areas.

There was a greater proportion of participants who resided in rural areas across all areas except in Togher (Cork) and Galway. There was also a greater proportion of participants who resided in rural areas across all four seasons of programme delivery.

61%

Of participants resided in areas that were considered marginally above average to very affluent

39%

Of participants resided in areas that are considered marginally below average to extremely disadvantaged

There was a greater proportion of participants from an affluent background across all areas except Galway, Castlebar (Mayo) and Nenagh (Tipperary). There was also a greater proportion of participants from an affluent background attending across all seasons except Autumn.

Section 3: Context for the Programme

3.1 Introduction

To understand the context behind the Creative Health Hubs' development and delivery, this section presents a summary of the challenges for children and young people living with long term health conditions in Ireland and demonstrates the role of the arts in addressing the same.

3.2. Challenge for Children with Lifelong Physical Health Conditions

In Ireland, there are 120,000 children and teenagers living with the long-term effects of illness.¹ These children often experience stigma; social isolation; fewer quality friendships; disengagement from managing their conditions; wanting to be "normal", depression and anxiety.

Research demonstrates that in high income countries such as Ireland, childhood chronic conditions are associated with social disadvantage.² Research highlights that 99% of doctors feel that low income and poverty contribute to ill-health among the children, with two-thirds indicating that the effect is significant.³ The study linked food insecurity, the cost of healthy food, poor quality housing, and financial stress to worsening health in children and highlighted that when a child is sick or disabled, "poverty makes it more difficult for them to get the care and support they need." Children with lifelong physical health conditions also frequently experience poor educational outcomes, social adversity, and low levels of social participation, issues which are already more prevalent for disadvantaged families.²

Evidence also suggests that for those children and young people who are living rurally and managing a lifelong physical health conditions, the challenges can be greater. Geographical inequalities in social mobility caused by isolation, a lack of employment opportunities, and increased travel time to educational institutions lead to worse economic outcomes for young people living in rural areas, and resultingly widen the gap in health inequalities.⁴

3.3. The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The challenges for children and young people living with a lifelong physical health condition were further compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ With widescale disruptions to

¹ [National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth in Ireland](#)

² Spencer N.J., et al. (2015) '[Disabling chronic conditions in childhood and socioeconomic disadvantage: a systematic review and meta-analyses of observational studies.](#)'

³ Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2017) [Poverty and child health: Views from the frontline.](#)

⁴ Smith, S., et al (2019) [Geographic Profile of Healthcare Needs and Non-Acute Healthcare Supply in Ireland.](#)

⁵ Logan, B (2022) [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on paediatric chronic illness groups.](#)

many aspects of individual, family, school and peer functioning, the pandemic contributed to an increased prevalence of depression and anxiety, eating disorders and suicidality among children and young people. A recent study⁶ found that one in four parents reported worsening mental health, and one in 10 parents endure worsening of both their own mental health and their child's mental health during the pandemic.

3.4. The Role of the Arts

The literature demonstrates the valuable role of arts participation in addressing the psychosocial, health and wellbeing needs of children, individuals and communities. Studies show that arts participation can deliver the following outcomes:⁷

- Improved ability to cope
- Reduced anxiety and stress
- Increased social interaction
- Increased self-confidence
- Increased sense of self-worth
- Increased sense of hope
- Improved wellbeing
- Increased ability to connect with valuable parts of oneself

On children's diagnosis of illness or chronic conditions, the primary focus tends to be on physical health. However, research highlights that nurturing creativity through arts can enhance coping skills that are necessary in difficult and stressful times.⁸⁹ The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Inquiry Report¹⁰ found that an improved environment, such as that produced by engagement with the arts, can help to redress the balance of life chances for children with long term health conditions. At all ages, it was found that the arts can have a beneficial part to play in recovery from illness and the management of lifelong physical health conditions. This report contained three key messages:

1. The arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives better lived.
2. The arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care such as ageing, long term conditions, loneliness, and mental health.
3. The arts can help save money in the health service and social care.

⁶ Patrick SW, Henkhaus LE, Zickafoose JS, et al. [Well-being of parents and children during the COVID-19 pandemic: A national survey.](#)

⁷ Jensen, A. and Bonde, L. O. (2018) 'The use of arts interventions for mental health and wellbeing in health settings'

⁸ Reed, K., Kennedy, H. and Wamboldt, M. Z. (2015) 'Art for Life: A community arts mentorship program for chronically ill children'

⁹Rosenblum, M. (2019) *Health Benefits of Creativity for Kids with Chronic Illnesses.*

¹⁰All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (2017) *Creative health: The arts for health and wellbeing*, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing.

Section 4: Evaluation Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The evaluation has been informed by the following activity, carried out between January 2022 and January 2023.

4.2 Data Collection

A mixed method approach was adopted for data collection, capturing both quantitative and qualitative data via surveys, interviews and focus groups. Information and data have thus been derived from the following sources:

Survey:

- A retrospective comment card gathering responses from 16 children, 21 parents and 16 medical professionals in outpatients' departments.
- A baseline and follow up survey gathering 21 responses from parents and 5 responses from participants.
- A retrospective survey capturing 67 responses from parents and 15 responses from children.
- A web-based survey gathering 8 responses from volunteers (31% response rate).

Interview and Focus Groups:

- 5 one to one semi structured interviews with volunteers carried out between October – December 2022.
- 2 focus groups with 4 children and young people aged between 9-11 carried out in December 2022.
- 2 focus groups and 1 interview gathering feedback from 4 associate artists and 3 employed artists.
- 8 one-to-one interviews with medical professionals/staff carried out in December 2022.
- 12 one-to-one interviews with parents (8 interviews were facilitated in August 2022 and 4 were carried out in November 2022). This comprised eleven mums and one dad, two of whom were in a couple. Their children were aged between 6-13 years and had experiences of Helium Arts in Limerick, Cork and Galway, either in the community or in Paediatric Outpatients' Clinics.

Section 5: Evaluation Findings

5.1. Outpatient Department Feedback

Sixteen children, twenty-one parents and sixteen medical professionals reflected on their experience of Helium Arts in outpatient clinics via survey. Eight medical professionals also provided feedback via interview.

All children reflected positively on Helium Arts and described their experience as fun, cool, kind, happy, creative, entertaining, and a distraction. In summarising what worked well, medical professionals noted the collaborative role of the artist, connecting with people in and outside of the hospital helps to foster connection between community and the hospital; the non-pressurised environment; the inclusive and support approach; and the non-intrusive activity which doesn't interfere with the usual flow of the hospital.

Impact of Helium in Outpatients Department

94%

Of children reported that they felt happier when going to hospital as result of Helium Arts

81%

Of children indicated that they wanted to do more art in their free time because of Helium Arts



100%

Of parents indicated that theirs and their child's healthcare experience was positively impacted



100%

Of parents noted that their child's mood was positively impacted



95%

Of parents reported that their own mood was positively impacted



90%

Of parents indicated increased awareness of the positive impact of the arts for wellbeing

90%

Of parents reported that their children are more likely to participate in other art activities in their community

81%

Of parents reported that their connection and relationship with their child had been positively impacted

81%

Of parents noted their child's interest and enthusiasm for the arts increased

100%

Of medical professional reported that their experience of delivering healthcare to children with long term health conditions had been positively impacted by Helium Arts.

100%

Of medical professionals reported that the healthcare experience for children attending appointments and their parents had been positively impacted by Helium Arts.

94%

Of medical professionals reported that Helium Arts had increased their awareness of the positive impact of arts and creativity for wellbeing.

Medical professionals who responded to the survey and who participated in an interview also described that Helium Arts had the following impacts:

Children	Parents	Hospital Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved healthcare experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More positive healthcare experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved patient/staff relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved mental health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More positive working environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved physical health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased access to support network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved mood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased access to peer support 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased recognition of the value of arts for wellbeing

Areas for Improvement

Two parents suggested possible areas for improvement. These included: additional general activity options where applicable and introduction of paint. Medical Professionals suggested:

- **Availability:** Increasing the frequency of delivery in clinics from 2 days per week to 5 days per week and expanding access to include schools, all clinics and all hospitals.
- **Target Audience:** Expanding provision throughout the hospital to accommodate those children who are in-patients.
- **Expand Art Activities:** Enhancing the activities provided within waiting rooms.
- **Profile:** Increasing awareness of the clinic and the community programmes.
- **Space:** It would be ideal if Helium had their own space within the hospital to facilitate.
- **Family Involvement in Arts Activities**
- **Staff Training:** Providing training to medical professionals on the value of the arts
- **Condition Specific Community Based Workshops**

5.2. Community Programme Feedback

Fifteen participants and sixty-seven parents provided feedback on their experience of Helium Arts via a reflective based survey while twenty-one parents and five participants provided feedback via pre and post survey. Further, four young people (2 girls and 2 boys aged between 10-11) participated in a focus group. This section summarises Community Programme feedback from these participants and parents.

What Worked Well

- The **Creative Activities** matched children’s interest, providing a chance to engage in something they like whilst enabling self-expression. The range and variety of art activities was also highlighted by children.
- Parents indicated that there was not much else available for their child and the **Local Offering** filled a gap in services for them.
- The **Onsite Medic** was reassuring for parents and helped to make their children feel safe.
- The **Quality of Staff and Volunteers** helped to create a safe environment. Staff and volunteers were described as friendly, understanding, respectful, friendly, and nice.
- The **Group Setting** provided social opportunities, enabling children to meet with peers who also had a lifelong physical health condition enabling them to feel included.
- The **Workshop Environment** was highlighted as fun, chill, and relaxing by parents
- The **Child-Led Approach** provided the opportunity for their child to engage in activities suitable to their needs and with no pressure.
- The **Regularity of Provision** in terms of weekly provision and frequency throughout the year was well received.
- Participants highlighted the provision of a **Learning Experience** and chance to develop **New Skills**.

98%

Of parents would recommend Helium Arts to others.

96%

Of parents would sign their child up to a Helium Arts programme again.

87%

Of participants would recommend the Creative Health Hubs to their friend.

93%

Of participants would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts.

10/10

Young People’s Focus Group
Rating of Helium Arts

Impact on Participants

Increased Participation in the Arts:

67%

Of parents reported that the frequency of their child's participation in creative activities did not change after attending the Hubs suggesting people who are already engaging in art-based activities are being targeted.

- Parents involved in interviews described how the Creative Health Hubs helped to stimulate interest in the arts, encouraged greater participation in creative activities and helped their child to develop more 'creative habits'.
- Young people felt encouraged to do more art activities as a result of Helium Arts.

Improved Creativity and Creative Habits:

On average, 66% of participants and 58% of parents indicated an improvement in their child's creative habits

- 87% of participants and 78% of parents who responded to the reflective based survey agreed that they/ their child was doing more creative activities.
- Parents who responded to the pre and post survey reported a **6% increase** in their child's creativity overall and a **3% increase** in their levels of creativity.

Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing:

57%

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's wellbeing

3%

Average increase in wellbeing following involvement in the Helium Arts workshop

- On average, 64.5% of parents and 65.4% of participants reported an improvement in their child's/their mental health and wellbeing.
- On average, parents reported an 8% increase in their child's wellbeing from less than average pre-programme to above average

Improved Physical Health and Wellbeing:

93%

Of parents indicated that Helium Arts had improved their child's physical health and wellbeing.

- The rationale for improved physical health related to an improvement in their child's overall mood, confidence, independence, socialisation, and interest in the arts.
- Several parents described specific improvements to physical wellbeing caused by the structure of the programme leading to a regular routine in diet and lifestyle which was beneficial to their child's physical health.

Overall Wellbeing:

On average, parents who responded to the pre and post survey reported an **11% increase** in their child's overall wellbeing between pre and post involvement.

Improved Quality of Life:

On average, parents who responded to the pre and post survey reported a **17% increase** in their child's quality of life.

Improved Sense of Inclusion:

Parents described children were socialising more and felt less left out. Participants highlighted that the programme provided a chance to meet others and make friends.

Improved Relationships with Family

Parents described how Helium Arts created a space for siblings to 'have a break', interact positively over a shared interest, and for children with long term health conditions to make friendships independently.

Improved Personal Development:

Parents highlighted that their children have increased confidence, independence, self-esteem and communication skills as a result of the Creative Health Hubs.

Impact on Parents

On average, parents who responded to the pre and post survey reported a wellbeing score of **23.4** prior to the programme whilst after their child's involvement, they scored **26.5**, a **13%** improvement and just 1 point off being defined as having 'high wellbeing'. Prior to the programme, wellbeing scores ranged from 18-29 while after they had a range of 19-35.

12%

Average increase in feeling optimistic about the future (3.4 to 3.8)

8%

Average increase in feeling useful (3.6 to 3.9)

21%

Average increase in feeling relaxed (2.9 to 3.5)

12%

Average increase in dealing with problems well (3.3 to 3.7)

9%

Average increase in feeling close to other people (3.5 to 3.8)

14%

Average increase in feelings of ease when talking about child's health (3.5 to 4.0)

19%

Average increase in access to a good support network (3.2 to 3.8)

During interviews, parents reported **improved wellbeing** resulting from the Creative Health Hubs offering respite, a chance to 'have a breather' and to participate in other activities without worry. Parents also reported **improved familial relationships** as the Hubs enabled them to spend quality

time with other members of their family and **reduced loneliness** and improved connectedness through the opportunity to meet other parents going through a similar situation.

Impact on Family Unit

Findings show a slight regression in three areas:

- The family solves family problems together.
- The family communicates well with each other.
- The family is able to deal with setbacks/problems well.

Impact on Siblings

The following impacts on siblings were also reported by parents during interviews:

- **Increased independence/personal space** when their siblings attend the Creative Health Hubs granting personal space at home and enabling them to bring friends over, socialise uninterrupted, and to have time alone.
- **Improved mood:** Parents described how the positive effect of the Creative Health Hubs on the mood of their child with long term health conditions had a knock on effect on their siblings mood, expressing 'when he is positive, everyone is positive'.

Areas for Improvement

Key areas for improvement identified by parents included:

- Increasing the length of sessions
- More frequent delivery
- More therapeutic arts activities
- Involvement of wider family
- Rooms should be larger and include a space for parents to wait.
- More classes/longer camp duration
- Improved promotion to teenagers
- Increased group size
- Easier access i.e., not 1 hour travel
- Improved communication with parents

Key areas for improvement identified by participants included:

- Outside activities
- More sessions & increase availability
- More time to complete activities.
- Encourage participants to interact with one another.
- Increased group size
- Sport for wheelchair users
- Prizes
- Continue to be age appropriate yet challenging.

5.3. Volunteer Feedback

8.5/10

Average rating of volunteers training provided by Helium Arts

100%

Volunteers who would recommend Helium Arts to others.

Helium Arts delivered the following impact for its volunteers:

75%

Improved sense of purpose and something to look forward to

75%

Improved self-confidence and willingness to try new things

63%

Improved sense of social connectedness, ability to communicate with others and mental wellbeing

88%

Improved creative skills and skills to work with children

100%

Volunteers have an improved sense of making a useful contribution.

100%

Have improved skills to work with children with long term health conditions.

50%

Volunteers have improved career prospects.

25%

Improved organizational skills.

In summarising the impact of Helium Arts on children and their families, volunteers noted:

- Increased Social Connection/Reduced Isolation
- Improved Self-Expression
- Enhanced Personal Development Skills
- Improved Access to Arts Activities

Volunteers highlighted the following areas for improvement:

- More communication about workshops / chance for volunteers to ask questions
- Increased training in terms of working with children and managing challenging behaviour
- Increase awareness of the programme through advertising

5.4. Artists Feedback

Seven artists provided feedback as part of the evaluation. This included a mix of artists who were employed by Helium Arts and those who worked as associates as well as representation from those who worked the community-based programmes and paediatric outpatients' clinics.

What Works Well For Artists?

Peer Support	Helium Approach	Budget	Artist Experience
<p>Artists noted that help was available from others and that all artists working across the Creative Health Hubs are 'kind' and 'open minded', enabling support to be availed of as required.</p>	<p>Artists described that they were provided with 'autonomy', 'respect' and 'trust' and that they had access to the required resources needed to fulfil their role.</p>	<p>The flexibility and freedom to use the budget to purchase a range of different materials was noted as beneficial for enabling artists to test new ideas.</p>	<p>Artists bring their own 'practice', 'skills', or 'expertise' to the workshops which is productive for shared learning and creates a positive experience for children.</p>

What Works Well For Children and Young People?

Creative Social Space	The children crave the social aspect thus fostering their social expression and providing the space for children to develop relationships works well
Comfortability	This relates to efforts by artists to ensure that children feel comfortable in the space in which they are taking part in creative activities.
Artist Experience	Access to equipped, experienced, and expert artists was deemed a vital aspect of the Creative Health Hubs.
Playfulness	The playfulness at the heart of the Creative Health Hubs created a positive atmosphere for engagement and encouraged self-expression.

Impact on Artists

- Skill development
- Feeling fulfilled/rewarded

Impact on Medical Staff

- Reduce time needed to relax children at the beginning of appointments

Impact on Parents

- Offered respite & reduced stress
- Opportunity to meet other parents

Impact on Children and Young People

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Mood • Improved Social Interaction/Social Skills • Improved Self Expression | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Interest in the Arts • Improved Creative Habits • Improved Access to the Arts |
|--|---|

Areas for Improvement

Artists identified a range of challenges/areas for improvement within the Creative Health Hubs:

- **Community Based Venues:** In some instances, the spaces used to facilitate the community-based element were too small, did not allow for 'breaks' or were inaccessible for children who used a wheelchair.
- **Expertise/Qualifications to Meet Needs:** When working with children who have a diverse range of lifelong physical health conditions and needs, artists reported feeling somewhat 'under qualified'. To counter this, the artists suggested the use of co-facilitation with health experts; opportunities to learn from specialists; and the use of 'tried and tested models'.
- **Time:** Given the diverse range of needs presenting at workshops, artists reported feeling that they did not have enough time to provide adequate attention to all children.
- **Internal Communication:** Artists reported a desire to be 'professional and prepared' but that in some instances, they have received information that has either been incomplete or arrived late, thereby creating 'stress'.
- **Feeling Part of a Team:** The distance between the team and prevalence of remote working was noted as a challenge in establishing trust, relationships and navigating the team structure for support/learning.
- **Workshop Frequency:** The back-to-back nature of workshops was noted as being 'intense' and 'exhausting' for artists and there was a desire to have workshops split across two days to avoid artist burnout.
- **Participant Recruitment:** Artists reported that the recruitment aspect of the pediatric outpatient's clinic for the community programme created feelings of 'discomfort' and 'pressure'. They likened the experience to that of a 'salesperson'.
- **Hospital Presence:** Feelings of 'invisibility' within the pediatric outpatients' clinics was compounded by space limitations and a lack of awareness among some hospital staff.
- **Understanding Children's Interests:** The medical profile of participants could be expanded to include their interests, likes and dislikes to support artists in planning.
- **Sign Up Time:** It was reported that the time to sign up to a workshop in the community should be longer than 1 week.
- **Family Involvement:** This included offering tea or coffee at the start of workshop for parents to talk or providing family day opportunities once or twice per year.
- **Artists' Role in Decision Making:** There was desire to be included in discussions to provide their feedback or make informed choices about their role/remit.
- **Increase Hospital Clinics:** Due to demand, artists reported that there is scope to increase the number of clinics attended e.g., from 2 clinics per staff member to 10.
- **Strengthening Inclusivity:** Review systems and processes to improve engagement with those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from neurodiverse backgrounds.

5.5. Quotes from Consultation

“It is just wonderful to have the artist in our area - she is gentle, and kind and the children really enjoy having their picture going home. She has reduced waiting anxiety in both children and parents. It is just fantastic for the children to be occupied and doing something they enjoy giving them a positive hospital experience.”- (Medical Professional Feedback)



“On Thursday mornings there is a neurodevelopmental clinic with a lot of autistic children. They get very stressed when waiting. Taking part in art one-on-one or in a group makes the experience much more enjoyable. They are really relaxed going into the consultant and I definitely think it improves their health and clinical outcomes.” - (Medical Professional Feedback)



“For parents, I can really see that they are really to have this offering. With Helium Arts staff in the waiting room there’s a chance for a parent to get some respite or relaxation, or if they have multiple children, they have time to provide to siblings also.” - (Medical Professional Feedback)

“There would have previously been children that were snuggled into their parents and who wouldn’t engage with the nurse. The nurse would have had to go out and get a carton of juice to bring them around to talking. Now with Helium they don’t have to leave the room to get the carton of juice and open it for them. The art gives a way in immediately, and this saves time.” - (Medical Professional Feedback)

“Young people are slow to leave creative stations as they enjoy it so much. They’re more relaxed when they go into the clinic. The hospital staff don’t have time to distract children or sit with them to comfort them between appointments. This helps provide a patient centered health care approach – if you give patients the opportunity, I’m sure they would want Helium included in it.” - (Medical Professional Feedback)



“When the staff see what Helium Arts do, it brings a smile and nearly a tear to their face to see the impact on the children and the families. If you were to look in the background at the art, it’s so lovely. We are all in there to try and improve the experience for the families and make the hospital a positive setting and not such a negative all the time.” - (Medical Professional Feedback)



“It gives him the dream that he can be a painter. From a child that couldn’t go near paint, never mind looking at it, exposure has made him realise that he can do these things without anyone. He can be creative and make a picture that people can enjoy” - (Parent Feedback)

“Since Helium, my daughter has joined a drumming class and other things by herself. Quite inspiring to see how well she adapted with Helium.” - (Parent Feedback)

“My son loved it. He was happy, excited and enthusiastic about going. This is from a child that doesn’t tend to display too much positive emotion and would tend to look on the negative side that life is against him. Helium made him happier and gave him a sense of achievement.” - (Parent Feedback)



It helped to overcome sibling rivalry for attention, promotes independence and chance to talk with friends himself without his brother listening.” - (Parent Feedback)



“Her older sister is really creative and a really good artist. She now has something to talk to her sister about. - (Parent Feedback)

“She is giving more time to her condition and looking at it in a more positive light. Previously she had so much fear about needles and injections. I used to have to give it to her in her sleep and now she is giving it to herself. Helium provided positive ownership of her condition.” - (Parent Feedback)

“She was starting to verbalise when she was nervous about going. The nervousness reduced as the weeks went on in Helium Arts 6-week programme.” - (Parent Feedback)



Section 6: Key Learning and Discussion

6.1. Introduction

This section of the report synthesises the learning gathered from the evaluation findings.

6.2. Impact of the Creative Health Hubs

The evaluation findings demonstrate that the Creative Health Hubs are working well and delivering impact. There is a clear causal relationship between the issues the Creative Health Hubs sought to address, the service it delivered, and the outcomes achieved.

For children and young people living with long term health conditions, there has been reduced stress, fear and anxiety when attending healthcare settings and an overall more positive healthcare experience provided. There has been improved sense of self-worth and esteem, better emotional regulation and improved familial relationships leading to improved overall mental health and wellbeing. Further, some children and young people have experienced an improved ability to look after their condition, improved treatment adherence and subsequently improved overall physical wellbeing. In addition, the Hubs have provided a mechanism for children to meet others experiencing a similar set of circumstances, promoted access to friendships and subsequently reduced social exclusion. The programme has also fostered creative habits and stimulated and promoted ongoing participation in the arts.

For parents, there is evidence that the Creative Health Hubs have reduced anxiety and stress, improving mood, mental health and wellbeing and creating a more positive healthcare experience. There is also evidence that parents have experienced reduction isolation through increased access to a support network and that they are more aware of the positive impacts of arts for wellbeing. There is also evidence that the programme improved child-parent, child-sibling, parent-spouse, and parent-sibling relationships.

For siblings, there is evidence that they have benefitted from improved mood and gained a level of independence from their brother/sister because of the programme.

For volunteers, the programme has contributed to a sense of purpose and feeling that they are making a positive contribution, improved professional and personal development skills, improved capabilities to work with children, and those with long term health conditions as well as improved social connectedness and sense of inclusion while for artists there has also been improved skills and sense of fulfilment.

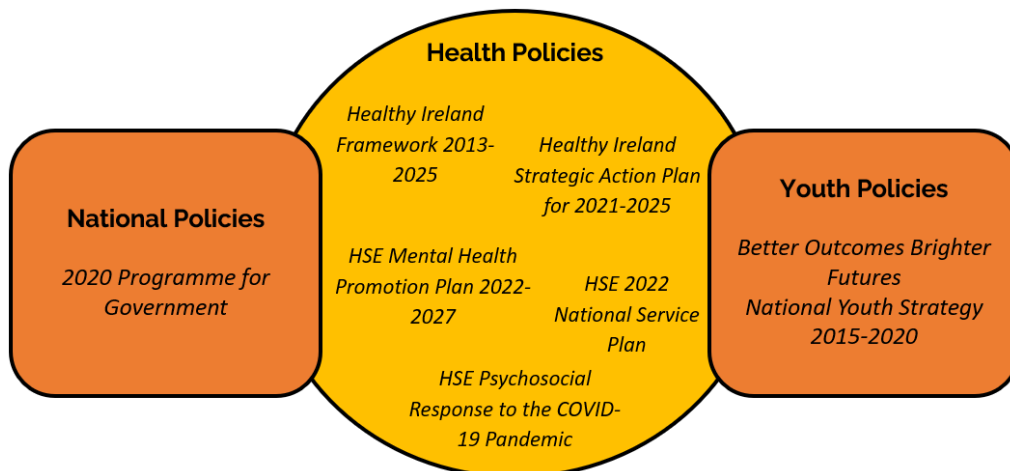
For medical professionals, the Creative Health Hubs have contributed to improved patient/staff relationship, created an easier working environment and promoted a more positive experience of delivering healthcare to children with long term health conditions. It has also improved mood among professionals at work and enhanced their recognition of the value of arts for wellbeing.

Thus, there is evidence that the programme has delivered positively against the key outcomes for children and their families which had been identified in its theory of change (see Appendix 1). There is also evidence that it delivers impact for volunteers, artists and medical professionals, the outcomes for these stakeholders should be added to the programme’s theory of change.

More comprehensive evaluation would be required to assess the extent to which system level outcomes such as, increased cost savings and improved healthcare efficiency have been achieved however the data from this evaluation is promising whereby there is increased recognition of the value of arts for wellbeing among health and social care community and families, and a desire among some medical professionals to learn how to embed learning from artistic approaches in their work. There is also increased demand to roll out the Creative Health Hubs across all hospitals, more regularly and within both outpatients and inpatient departments, and the data shows that families and children are benefitting from a more positive healthcare experience.

6.3. Strategic Alignment

The evaluation findings demonstrate that during 2022, the Creative Health Hubs has delivered a wide-range of positive impact for children and young people, their parents, volunteers, and artists. In achieving this impact, the Creative Health Hubs have contributed to key priorities and actions set out in national strategies. This synergy highlights that the programme is an important investment for addressing the mental, physical and social wellbeing needs of children living with long term health conditions.



6.4. Delivery Considerations

The evaluation demonstrates that the Creative Health Hubs are working well and that there is increasing demand, and potential for the programme to be expanded. However, the evaluation also points to opportunities for future development and improvement, which should be addressed in advance of any expansion. These are summarised below:

Recruitment Processes: There is scope to enhance representation within the programme from those considered 'disadvantaged' to 'very disadvantaged'.

Better Communication: Existing communication systems could be enhanced so that parents are better informed about the workshops in advance and can better prepare for their child's attendance and so volunteers and artists can better plan for delivery.

Connection with Health Conditions: Increased alignment of artistic activity to children's conditions coupled with encouraging condition-based conversations between peers could support engagement with health services and treatment adherence.

Learning and Development: There is a need to better support staff and volunteers to respond to a diversity of presenting needs and scope to share learning with medical professionals so they can better incorporate artistic approaches in their work.

Staffing Model: Within the current model, there is limited time for artists to prepare for workshop facilitation or to respond to the wide range of diverse needs. Thus, there is a need to consider alternative days for provision and greater staffing resource per workshops.

Space: In the absence of adequate, suitable and accessible spaces, participant and parental engagement is hindered and project delivery can be challenging. Future delivery should only proceed with access to suitable facilities/venues.

Family Involvement: Although a suggested area for improvement to the programme includes promoting family involvement, this needs to be considered in the context of the existing outcomes delivered for families within the current model. Future delivery that involves the wider family should not negate the reprieve offered to parents through the programme nor the independence offered to siblings.

Section 7: Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Model Optimisation

The evaluation demonstrates that the Creative Health Hubs are working well, that participants and their families have had an overall positive experience and benefited from a range of impact from wellbeing to creativity. However, the evidence suggests that the existing model could be more effective. It is therefore recommended that Helium Arts use the findings and learning from this evaluation to refine, adjust and improve the existing delivery model, to create both a better working experience for artists but also to maximise the quality of experience and subsequent impact delivered to children, young people and their families.

Recommendation 2: Diversify and Increase Income

Given the strategic alignment of the programme to national policy priorities and the wide-spread impact of the programme for participants, their families, volunteers, artists and medical professionals, the Creative Health Hubs programme has addressed a gap in health and wellbeing support for children and young people living with long term health conditions in Ireland. However, to ensure the model can be optimised, and the programme sustained, there will be a need for continued and additional resources. It is therefore recommended that Helium Arts use the findings of this evaluation to demonstrate and raise awareness of the positive impact of the programme among potential funders.

Recommendation 3: National Expansion

The evaluation also highlights that there is increasing demand for the Creative Health Hubs, and that there is potential for it to be expanded to include delivery in all hospital outpatient clinics, in-patient departments and for the community-based element to be delivered more frequently. It is therefore recommended that once the model has been optimised, Helium Arts should consider the roll out of the Creative Health Hubs across the country.

Recommendation 4: Future Data Collection, Monitoring and Evaluation

Helium Arts has undertaken significant work to develop data collection and evaluation processes. This has enabled the measurement of outcomes delivered by the Creative Health Hubs against the organisation's Theory of Change and has also shone a light on key learning and development for the programme. This insight is vital for securing ongoing investment but also ensuring the offering remains relevant, effective and of maximum quality. To ensure a continued responsive approach to delivery, in line with the needs of children living with long term health conditions and their families, it is recommended that Helium Arts continue to embed evaluative practice during 2023 delivery.

Appendix 1: Creative Health Hubs Theory of Change

