



# **Helium Arts Creative Health Hubs Evaluation**

## **Executive Summary**

**February 2024**



## About S3 Solutions

Established in 2013, S3 Solutions is an independent consultancy company delivering on a mission to “leave a positive and lasting impact on the people, organisations and communities we work with, supporting social change.”

S3 Solutions works specifically with community & voluntary and public sector organisations to deliver meaningful social change. S3 Solutions brings together a multidisciplinary team of experienced researchers, social impact analysts, business and economic consultants to provide applied social research through highly engaging consulting services that produce actionable insights and innovative solutions.

## The Author

Georgia O’Kane is a Senior Consultant (Research and Evaluation Division) at S3 Solutions and led the delivery and formation of this evaluation.

## The Acknowledgements

This evaluation was commissioned by Helium Arts. We would like to thank Helene Hugel, the Helium Arts CEO and Artistic Director, for her commissioning of, and trust in our research efforts. We would also like to extend thanks to Kinga Tihanyi, for her concerted effort in data consolidation and ongoing support. The commitment of Helium Arts to this contract has enabled a comprehensive evaluation report.

We would also like to thank the stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the Creative Health Hubs Programme in 2023, including:

- The children who participated in the various programmes
- The parents, guardians and caregivers of participants
- The medical professionals in the Outpatients Departments in Cork University Hospital, Galway University Hospital, Mayo University Hospital, and University Hospital Limerick
- The representatives of venues which host the programme
- The Helium Arts staff team, artists and volunteers

These stakeholders participated in the consultation process, providing invaluable insight into the operations of the Creative Health Hubs Programme and the impact of the programme for its participants, their families, and all others involved in its delivery.

## Table of Contents

<b>Section 1: Introduction and Context</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 2: The Creative Health Hubs</b> .....	<b>2</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	2
2.2 The Paediatric Outpatient Clinics.....	2
2.3 The Community Programme.....	3
2.4 The Online Programme .....	4
<b>Section 3: Context for the Programme</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 4: Evaluation Methodology</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 5: Paediatric Outpatient Findings</b> .....	<b>9</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	9
5.2 What Worked Well?.....	9
5.3 Impact for Children and Young People .....	10
5.4 Impact for Parents .....	10
5.5 Impact for Medical Professionals.....	11
5.6 Impact for the Wider Health Care Sector .....	11
5.7 Areas for Improvement and Future Development .....	12
5.8 Strategic Positioning of Helium Arts in the OPD Setting.....	12
<b>Section 6: Community Programme Findings</b> .....	<b>13</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	13
6.2 What Worked Well?.....	13
6.3 Impact on Children and Young People.....	14
6.4 Impact on Parents .....	16
6.5 Impact on Family Unit.....	17
6.6 Areas for Improvement and Future Development .....	17
6.7 Future Supports for Parents.....	18
<b>Section 7: Online Programme Findings</b> .....	<b>19</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	19
7.2 What Worked Well?.....	19
7.3 Impact on Children and Young People.....	20
7.4 Impact on Parents .....	22
7.5 Impact on Family Unit.....	22
7.6 Areas for Improvement and Future Development .....	23
7.7 Future Supports for Parents.....	23
<b>Section 8: Personnel and Operations Findings</b> .....	<b>24</b>
8.1 Volunteer Feedback .....	24
8.2 Artist Feedback .....	24
8.3 Venue Feedback.....	27
<b>Section 9: Quotes from Consultation</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Section 10: Key Learning and Discussion</b> .....	<b>30</b>
10.1 Introduction .....	30
10.2 Impact of the Creative Health Hubs Programme.....	30
10.3 Delivery Successes .....	31
10.4 Areas for Improvement and Future Development .....	32
10.5 Strategic Relevance.....	34
<b>Section 11: Recommendations</b> .....	<b>35</b>

## 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 between January-December 2023.

### 1.2 Evaluation Objectives

Following the development of an evaluation report in 2022, Helium Arts recommissioned S3 Solutions to undertake an evaluation of the 2023 Creative Health Hubs Programme in June 2023. The objectives of this evaluation were to examine the extent to which the programme had achieved its aims and objectives; assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the approaches adopted; assess the impact of the programme on target participants and other key stakeholders; and identify key learning and recommendations for future programmes.

### 1.3 Introduction to Helium Arts

Established in 2010, 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 creative programmes in hospital, community, and online settings. Helium Arts seeks to empower children to have agency, connect with their peers, communicate their experiences in creative ways, support their psychosocial needs and enhance their overall health and wellbeing.

Helium Arts’ vision is:

*An Ireland where all children are connected to their creative powers so they can live life to the full.*

Helium Arts’ strategic goals for 2023-2027 are:



## Section 2: The Creative Health Hubs

### 2.1 Introduction

In 2019, with support from Creative Ireland and Rethink Ireland, Helium Arts launched the Creative Health Hubs in Limerick and Cork. In 2021 a hub in Galway was launched. These hubs, now known as the Cork Hub, Hub West, and Mid-West Hub, work in partnership with local hospitals, community and creative partners across Cork, Limerick, Mayo, Galway, Tipperary and Clare. The Creative Health Hubs are based in Paediatric Outpatient Clinics where artists work closely with the medical community to provide children, young people, and their families with 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 and Online Programmes where they can participate in a series of workshops on Saturdays over 6 weeks or during school holidays at 3-day camps.

This section presents an overview of Creative Health Hub Programme delivery during 2023.

### 2.2 The Paediatric Outpatient Clinics

<b>2501</b>	<b>1746</b>	<b>4</b>
Children and young people engaged through OPD Clinics in 2023	Parents engaged through OPD Clinics in 2023	Number of hospitals in which Helium Arts delivered the programme in 2023

- **56%** of children and young people engaged identified as girls and **44%** as boys.
- **89%** of participants were aged 6-12 years and **11%** were aged 13+.
- Whilst many children attended an OPD Clinic in their county of residence, **67** children engaged in OPD Clinics outside of their resident county (3%).
- **90%** of children and young people engaged with Helium Arts in the OPD Clinics for the first time in 2023, whilst **10%** had accessed Helium Arts in a clinic before.
- **344 total clinics were attended** by Helium Arts staff during 2023. The clinics most frequently attended were Diabetes (18%), Endocrinology (15%) and General (13%).
- A total of **50 different creative activities** were facilitated through the OPD Clinics. The most common creative activity delivered was stained glass design, which was delivered 178 times (within 53% of clinics).



**3 Hours**

Artist estimation of average contact time with children during OPD Clinics

**624 Hours**

Total hours of contact time between artists and participants during OPD Clinics

**595**

Total estimated number of interactions between artists and hospital staff in 2023

## 2.3 The Community Programme

**266**

Children and young people engaged through the Community Programme in 2023

**6**

Number of Counties where the Community Programme was delivered in 2023

The Community Programme was available across 6 counties. The spread of participation levels was: Cork (36%); Limerick (27%); Galway (15%); Clare (14%); Mayo (6%); and Tipperary (3%).

Of participants engaged:

- **55%** of participants were female and **45%** were male.
- **88%** of participants were aged 6-12 years old, and **12%** were teenagers (13-16).
- Most commonly, participants had diabetes (25%), epilepsy (14%), and allergies (8%).
- **21%** of participants had more than one medical condition.
- **42%** of participants had a rare disease.
- **53%** of participants had a disability and/or additional needs.
- **8%** of participants were healthy siblings of children with long-term conditions.

**51% of participants resided in rural areas** while **49% resided in urban areas**, demonstrating a relatively even spread in urban/rural classification. There was a greater proportion of participants who resided in rural areas in Clare, Galway Limerick and Nenagh (Tipperary), whilst a greater proportion of participants resided in urban areas in Cork.

**61% of participants resided in areas that were considered affluent** whilst **39% resided in areas that were considered disadvantaged**. There was a greater proportion of participants from an affluent background across all areas except Castlebar (Mayo) and Limerick. There was also a greater proportion of participants from an affluent background attending across all seasons except Autumn.

## 2.4 The Online Programme

**114**

Children and young people engaged through the Online Programme in 2023

**4**

Number of camps/programmes delivered through the Online Programme in 2023

Of participants engaged:

- **62%** of participants were female and **38%** were male.
- Most commonly, participants had epilepsy (31%), diabetes (25%), spina bifida (11%), cerebral palsy (6%) and hydrocephalus (6%).
- **26%** of participants had more than one medical condition.
- **30%** of participants had a rare disease.
- **36%** of participants had a disability and/or additional needs.
- Participants were located across **22 counties**. The most common counties of residence were Cork (18%), Dublin (11%) and Galway (9%).
- **72%** of participants were referred to Helium Arts by their parent, guardian or carer whilst **21%** of participants were referred by medical staff. 2% of participants were referred through both avenues.
- Data on how participants and their parents heard about Helium Arts was available for 108 participants. The most common way that people had heard about Helium Arts was via a Creative Health Hubs artist, poster or flyer in the hospital setting (33%). 31% of participants and their parents had learned about Helium Arts through a social care/healthcare professional, 10% through social media, and 9% through friends or family.

**56% of participants resided in rural areas** while **44% resided in urban areas**, demonstrating a relatively even spread in urban/rural classification. A greater proportion of participants resided in urban areas in Autumn (65%) whilst a greater proportion resided in rural areas in Summer (56%) and Winter (61%).

**53% of participants resided in areas that were considered affluent** whilst **47% resided in areas that were considered disadvantaged**. There was a greater proportion of participants from an affluent in Summer (58%) and Autumn (65%). A greater proportion of participants were from an affluent background in the teenager (13+) age groups (61%), whilst the majority of participants aged 12 and under were from deprived backgrounds (52%).

## Section 3: Context for the Programme

### 3.1 Introduction

This section presents an overview of the challenges for children and young people living with lifelong physical health conditions in Ireland and demonstrates the role of the arts and creativity in addressing these challenges.

### 3.2 The Challenge for Children with Lifelong Physical Health Conditions

In Ireland, 156,437 children and teenagers live everyday with the effects of illness or disability (12% of all children and teenagers). 35% of this population experience at least one long-lasting condition or a condition which causes difficulty to a great extent; an estimated 54,409 individuals.<sup>1</sup> Children and young people with long-term or chronic health conditions often experience:<sup>2</sup>

- Stigma associated with their condition
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Fewer quality friendships
- Disengagement from managing their conditions
- Wanting to be "normal"
- Depression and anxiety<sup>3</sup>

Research demonstrates that in high income countries such as Ireland, childhood chronic conditions are associated with social disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> A 2021 update from the Growing Up in Ireland Report found that children's experiences and outcomes were associated with their family circumstances, with nine-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds experiencing poorer health outcomes, more socio-emotional difficulties, and less involvement in structured activities (particularly those which must be paid for).<sup>5</sup> The same research highlighted that children in two-

---

<sup>1</sup> Central Statistics Office (2022) *Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/#:~:text=A%20total%20of%201%2C109%2C557%20people,for%2022%25%20of%20the%20population.>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Brady, A., Deighton, J., & Stansfeld, S. (2021). 'Chronic illness in childhood and early adolescence: A longitudinal exploration of co-occurring mental illness.' *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(3), 885-898.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer N.J., et al. (2015) 'Disabling chronic conditions in childhood and socioeconomic disadvantage: a systematic review and meta-analyses of observational studies.' *BMJ Open* 1(5) [Online] Available at: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/5/9/e007062.full.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> McNamara, E., and O'Mahony, D. (2021) *Growing Up in Ireland: link between health and family circumstances*. Available at: [https://www.tcd.ie/news\\_events/articles/growing-up-in-ireland-link-between-health-and-family-circumstances/](https://www.tcd.ie/news_events/articles/growing-up-in-ireland-link-between-health-and-family-circumstances/)



parent, higher social class, and higher income families were more likely to be consistently healthy and to have better health than their counterparts at ages three, five and nine. These findings were echoed in a 2023 update from the Growing Up in Ireland Report which found that for thirteen-year-olds, those from the lowest income families were significantly more likely to have a long-lasting condition than those from the highest-income families (41% prevalence vs. 28%).<sup>6</sup>

A study from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health highlighted that 99% of doctors feel that low income and poverty contribute to ill health among children, with two-thirds indicating that the effect is significant.<sup>7</sup> 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 has a disability, “poverty makes it more difficult for them to get the care and support they need.” Evidence also suggests that for those children and young people who are living rurally and managing a lifelong physical health condition, 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.<sup>8</sup> This effect is again worsened for children and young people already living in deprivation.

### 3.3 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. Research from the World Health Organisation focused on a scoping review of evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing and found that arts have the potential to impact and benefit both mental and physical health and wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Arts trigger psychological, physiological, social and behavioural responses which are linked with positive health outcomes. As a result of these responses, two main categories of impact for health are identifiable; prevention and promotion, and management and treatment.

---

<sup>6</sup> Growing Up in Ireland (2023) *Key Findings: Cohort '08 at 13 Years Old*. Available at: <https://www.esri.ie/publications/key-findings-cohort-08-at-13-years-old#:~:text=New%20research%20shows%20that%20the,adolescence%20caused%20by%20the%20pandemic>.

<sup>7</sup> Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (2017) *Poverty and child health: Views from the frontline*. Available at: <https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf%20RCPCCH.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Smith, S., et al (2019) *Geographic Profile of Healthcare Needs and Non-Acute Healthcare Supply in Ireland*. <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/RS90.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Fancourt D, Finn S. (2019) *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67). [Online] Available at: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/329834>

In terms of prevention and promotion, findings showed that arts can impact the social determinants of health by promoting pro-social behaviour, conflict resolution and social cohesion, and address social inequalities and inequities. Art can also support child development, encourage health-promoting behaviours and help to prevent ill health by enhancing wellbeing, reducing the impact of trauma and reducing the risk of cognitive decline. For management and treatment, findings showed that arts can help people experiencing/with a history of mental illness, trauma and abuse, support care for people with acute conditions, and help to support people with neurodevelopmental/neurological disorders and noncommunicable diseases.<sup>10</sup>

On children's diagnosis of illness or chronic conditions, the primary focus tends to be on physical health. Whilst caring for children's physical needs is essential, literature argues that without access to creative self-expression, children may not have the tools to develop problem-solving skills or to create healthy emotional responses. It is suggested that nurturing creativity through arts can enhance the coping skills that are necessary in difficult and stressful times.<sup>11/12</sup> Similarly, arts engagement has been found to lead to higher levels of self-esteem<sup>13</sup> and to lower the risk of social and behavioural maladjustment in children entering adolescence.

In terms of the use of the arts for children with long-term health conditions specifically, the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing's Inquiry Report<sup>14</sup> 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 lifelong physical health conditions. At all ages, it was found that the arts can have a beneficial part to play in the 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, lifelong physical health conditions, loneliness, and mental health.
3. The arts can help save money in the health service and for social care.

---

<sup>10</sup> These findings are evidenced through the researcher-constructed logic model, viewable in Appendix 4.

<sup>11</sup> Reed, K., Kennedy, H. and Wamboldt, M. Z. (2015) 'Art for Life: A community arts mentorship program for chronically ill children', *Arts & Health*, 7(1): 14-26.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenblum, M. (2019) Health Benefits of Creativity for Kids with Chronic Illnesses. Available online at: <https://coachart.org/blog/health-benefits-of-creativity-for-kids-with-chronic-illnesses/>

<sup>13</sup> Mak, H.W. & Fancourt, D. (2019) 'Arts engagement and self-esteem in children: results from a propensity score matching analysis.' *Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci.* 1449(1): 36-45.

<sup>14</sup> UK All-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 June 2023 and January 2024.

### 4.2 Data Collection

A mixed method approach was adopted for data collection. Information and data have been derived from the following sources:

#### Surveys

- A retrospective comment card gathering responses from 45 children, 45 parents and 31 medical professionals in Paediatric Outpatients Departments.
- Pre- and post-surveys gathering responses from 11 parents concerning the Community Programme and 13 parents and 2 children concerning the Online Programme.
- Retrospective surveys capturing responses from 144 parents, 14 teens and 31 children concerning the Community Programme and capturing responses from 26 parents and 6 teenagers concerning the Online Programme.
- A web-based survey gathering 10 responses from volunteers.
- A web-based survey gathering 5 responses from Helium Arts staff including the Programme Coordinators, Volunteer Coordinator, and Family Liaison.

#### Interviews and Focus Groups

- 15 one-to-one interviews with parents (Oct 2023-Jan 2024).
- 7 one-to-one interviews with medical professionals/staff (Oct/Nov 2023).
- 4 x one-to-one semi-structured interviews with volunteers (Oct-Dec 2023).
- 4 x one-to-one web-based interviews with venues (Oct-Dec 2023).
- 1 x focus group with 2 employed artists (Jan 2024).
- 1 x focus group with 3 associate artists (Jan 2024).
- 1 x focus group with 3 young people concerning the Community Programme (Jan 2024).
- 1 x Zoom interview with a parent and child (Jan 2024).
- 5 x telephone interviews with Helium Arts Programme Coordinators and the Family Liaison (Nov-Dec 2023).

## Section 5: Paediatric Outpatient Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

Feedback on engagement with the Creative Health Hubs Paediatric Outpatient Department (OPD) component was gathered through survey and consultation. 45 children, 45 parents and 31 medical professionals reflected on their experience of the Creative Health Hubs OPD component through the survey. Further, 1 parent, 7 medical professionals, and the Helium Arts Hospital Coordinator reflected on their engagement and experience through consultation.

### 5.2 What Worked Well?

Children reflected positively on their experience of the Creative Health Hubs in OPD Clinics. The adjacent word cloud illustrates how the children described their experience:



Stakeholders reflected positively on the following elements of delivery:

- **Fun:** Children highlighted the fun nature of the activities and reported that they made waiting times in the clinic more enjoyable and helped pass the time.
- **Participatory Nature of Activities:** Children and medical professionals noted the different options for participation, allowing children to choose which activity they wanted to do.
- **Artists:** Medical professionals highlighted how the artists “approach but aren’t pushy,” and stated that they created an interactive and inclusive experience. The Hospital Coordinator also highlighted the work of the “incredible and sensitive artists that [...] sensitively made their mark on the OPD Clinic space.”
- **Free Activities:** The lack of cost associated with participation was underlined as key to accessibility by the Hospital Coordinator.
- **Lunch and Learn Events:** The Hospital Coordinator hosted lunch events, speaking directly to hospital staff about the rights of children to art and the health benefits resulting from participation. These events were felt to be valuable in underscoring the importance of Helium Art’s presence in the Outpatients Departments and in educating medical professionals about the positive implications of the arts for health and healthcare experience.

**96%**

Of children felt included in the OPD activities

**100%**

Of parents felt that the OPD activities were accessible and inclusive of their child and their health needs

**100%**

Of medical professionals felt their awareness of the positive impact of arts and creativity for wellbeing was increased

### 5.3 Impact for Children and Young People

**84%**

Of children reported that they felt happier when going to hospital

**75%**

Of children indicated that they wanted to do more art in their free time

**100%**

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

**91%**

Of parents reported that their child's enthusiasm for art increased

**91%**

Of parents reported that their child was more likely to participate in art activities in their community

**100%**

Of parents and medical professionals reported that children's healthcare experiences were improved

Reference was made by parents, medical professionals and the Hospital Coordinator to how Helium Arts helped make the experience of attending hospital less stressful and served as a distraction for the children. Medical professionals felt that the reduction in stress created more positive healthcare experiences for children as they were not worrying about their appointment and could spend more time interacting with others and their parents rather than sitting on a tablet or phone. In turn, it was highlighted that children associated the clinic with positive memories and were less worried about returning for follow-up appointments.

### 5.4 Impact for Parents

**100%**

Of parents reported that their awareness of the positive impact of arts and creativity for wellbeing was increased

**83%**

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

**98%**

Of parents reported that their own mood was positively impacted

Medical professionals and the Hospital Coordinator witnessed **improved mental wellbeing and stress reduction** in parents. This was attributed to Helium Arts creating a more positive waiting room environment where children were able to participate in something fun and productive. In turn, the length of the waiting period felt shorter, and children were less agitated. The relaxed environment also provided parents with time for **thinking and reflection** before their child's medical appointment, allowing them space to collect their thoughts and enabling them to have more productive and detailed conversations during medical appointments.

## 5.5 Impact for Medical Professionals

**97%**

Of medical professional reported that their experience of delivering healthcare to children with lifelong physical health conditions was positively impacted

Medical professionals noted that the presence of Helium Arts in the OPD created a **more positive and efficient working environment**, with appointments made "easier," by reductions in child and parent stress levels. Appointments were also sped up as there was a reduction in the amount of time needed to make a child feel comfortable, and parents were less likely to ring with follow-up questions as they were relaxed and able to focus their thoughts during the appointment.

## 5.6 Impact for the Wider Health Care Sector

Medical professionals noted that the presence of Helium Arts in the OPD setting not only had a positive impact on their role, but also for the wider health sector. As noted above, Helium Arts created a less stressful environment and children and parents were more at ease when attending appointments. This in turn reduced the amount of time which the doctors spent with each patient, as they required less support to feel comfortable, and parents were able to ask their questions in a more efficient way. The reduction in appointment time is likely to have a **cost saving impact for the health sector** and may **create a more positive view of the clinics**.

Further, it was highlighted that Helium Arts created positive associations for children about the hospital environment. This in turn reduced fear of returning for follow-up appointments and was felt to **reduce the likelihood of patient absenteeism**. This also has a cost saving implication for the health sector.

## 5.7 Areas for Improvement and Future Development

The following areas for improvement and future development were noted:

- **Information:** Children noted that they would have liked to have known about Helium Arts earlier whilst medical professionals wanted to know more about the organisation.
- **Age-Appropriate Activities:** Children and medical professionals noted that some activities delivered were aimed at younger children, making them less enjoyable for older children. Conversely, 1 parent referenced that some activities were more suitable for older children, suggesting that efforts to diversify activities based on age-range may be welcome.
- **More Frequent Provision:** Medical professionals noted a desire for greater Helium Arts provision in the OPD Clinic setting.
- **Supporting New Communities:** 1 medical professional referenced a potential opportunity for Helium Arts in the area of diversity and inclusion, supporting new communities to engage positively with health care via Inclusion Clinics.
- **Pathways for Recruitment:** The Hospital Coordinator expressed a need for streamlined pathways from OPD engagement to the Community and Online Programmes. It was felt that making this process a “touch of a button,” activity rather than a form would promote onward engagement and make it easier for parents.
- **Impact Measurement:** The Hospital Coordinator noted a need for more inclusive and accessible impact measurement tools within the OPD space, particularly for those with low literacy rates and for whom English is not their first language.

## 5.8 Strategic Positioning of Helium Arts in the OPD Setting

During consultation with medical professionals, reference was made to the strategic positioning of Helium Arts within the OPD setting. This feedback was strongest from professionals in Limerick and Galway. It was felt that Helium Arts was well placed to contribute to top-level discussions and to support the co-design of interventions to more widely embed arts into the environment and the hospital at large, conscious of the specific needs of each location. Firstly, it was noted that Helium Arts should place a greater emphasis on ensuring awareness of their provision amongst medical professionals in their operating areas. Secondly, it was highlighted that Helium Arts could provide data and information relating to the impact of their clinics, and that a dual evaluation process could be undertaken between the organisation and a hospital to track the experience of patients during both the presence and absence of the Creative Health Hubs in the OPD Clinics. As a first step, 1 medical professional in Galway noted their interest in this evaluation report and its findings.

## Section 6: Community Programme Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

Feedback on engagement with the Creative Health Hubs Community Programme was gathered through surveys and consultation. 144 parents, 14 teens and 31 children provided feedback on their experience via a reflective survey and 11 parents provided feedback via pre and post survey.

Extensive consultation was also conducted in relation to the Community Programme. 3 children participated in a focus group and 1 child was interviewed alongside their mother. 2 employed artists, 3 associate artists, 4 volunteers, the Helium Arts Family Liaison and the Helium Arts Community Programme Coordinator also reflected on their experience with the programme.

### 6.2 What Worked Well?

Both children and parents reflected positively on the Community Programme. Particular reference was made to:

- **Variety and Choice of Art Activities:** The variety of creative activities matched and peaked children’s interest in the arts.
- **Social Opportunities:** Reference was made to the chance for participants to meet new friends and young people experiencing similar situations to their own.
- **Learning Experience and Chance to Develop New Skills:** Participants referenced learning to “project images to help create something,” and “mix colours using paint.”
- **Onsite Medic:** Parents reported that having the medical professional onsite during the delivery of the programmes was reassuring. It was felt that this factor increased the accessibility of the programme.
- **Quality of Artists and Volunteers:** The staff and volunteers were described as “fantastic.” Parents referenced the high staff-child ratio in the workshops and noted that this factor coupled with the communication from, and approachability of, the artists reassured them about their decision to leave their child for the workshop. Children felt that the artists were easy to talk to, listened to them, and gave them all the help they needed.

**76%**

Of children felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their needs<sup>15</sup>

**100%**

Of children would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts

**94%**

Of children would recommend the Creative Health Hubs to a friend



**50%**

Of teenagers felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their needs<sup>15</sup>

**76%**

Of teenagers would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts

**79%**

Of teenagers would recommend the Creative Health Hubs to a friend

**100%**

Of parents felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their child's needs

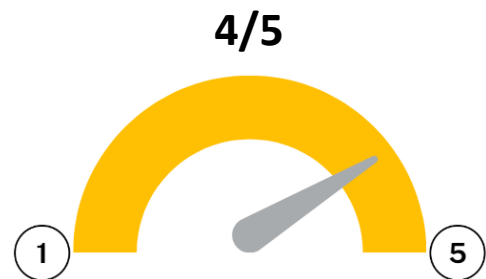
**98%**

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

**99%**

Of parents would recommend Helium Arts to others

Teenagers rated the age suitability of art activities on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented not at all suitable and 5 represented very suitable. The average score provided was 4/5, indicating that activities were age appropriate.



## 6.3 Impact on Children and Young People

### Increased Participation in the Arts

**91%**

Of children felt they were more frequently participating in arts/creative activities

**50%**

Of teenagers felt they were more frequently participating in arts/creative activities

- 82% of parental respondents indicated that their children were participating more frequently in arts and creative activities following engagement with Helium Arts.
- Prior to engagement, 18% of parents stated that their children never participated in arts and creative activities. After engagement, 100% of parents indicated that their children were participating in arts and creative activities.
- Parents reported that their children benefitted from “seeing the creative process around [them]” and the introduction to “multiple mediums,” which allowed children to find the type of art they were interested in.

<sup>15</sup> The remaining children/teenagers responded ‘don’t know’ when asked whether they felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their needs.

## Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing

**64%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's wellbeing

**25.1/30**

Average child wellbeing score post-engagement (high wellbeing)

**20.6/30**

Average teenage wellbeing score post-engagement (moderate-high wellbeing)

For parents and children, increased happiness were the most frequent wellbeing impacts for participants. Teenagers indicated that improved self-esteem and feelings of connectness were the most frequent wellbeing impacts. Overall, a lower proportion of teenagers self-reported wellbeing improvements during the reflective survey than children and the reporting of parents.

## Improved Creativity and Creative Habits

**73%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's creativity

- For parents and children, improved imagination was the most frequent creativity impact for participants.
- Teenagers felt increased inquisitiveness was the most frequent impact. A lower proportion of teenagers self-reported creativity improvements than children and parents.

## Improved Physical Health and Wellbeing

**84%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's physical health and wellbeing

- For most parents, the rationale for improved physical health and wellbeing related to an improvement in their child's overall mood, confidence, independence, and socialisation.
- Parents also referenced how participation in arts activities improved mobility in the hands and fine motor skills.

## Improved Quality of Life

**100%**

Of parents reported that their child had an improved quality of life after engaging with the Community Programme

**30.8%**

Average increase in parent ratings of child quality of life pre- and post-engagement (3.9 to 5.1)

## Improved Sense of Social Inclusion

Parents described that their children were socialising more and felt less alone and more socially included because of the Community Programme. Impacts on social inclusion and interaction were also reported by children. 1 child reported that the Community Programme “gave [them] something to do and allowed [them] to talk to new people, whilst another stated that they “got to meet and talk to new people.” Both the Helium Arts Community Programme Coordinator and the Helium Arts Family Liaison also highlighted how the Community Programme has created connections and created spaces for children and young people with similar experiences. Both the Community Programme Coordinator and the Helium Arts Family Liaison noted that Helium Arts provided one of the few opportunities for children with lifelong conditions to participate in social activities, with the activities described as “transformative,” for this reason.

## 6.4 Impact on Parents

**73%**

Of parents experienced improved wellbeing following their child’s engagement

Parent Pre and Post Survey respondents provided feedback relating to their own wellbeing. The average wellbeing score in the pre-survey was 24.5. The average wellbeing score in the post-survey, after their child’s involvement with the Community Programme, was 28.6; a 16.7% increase. The average score in the post-survey is considered ‘high wellbeing’.

Parents described how the Community Programme positively impacted their mood and wellbeing, noting that seeing their child happy had improved their own general happiness. The programme also provided parents with time for themselves which was reportedly rare. Parents were able to take time to recharge whilst confident that their child was being taken care of.

**34%**

Average increase in parents feeling relaxed

**24%**

Average increase in parents feeling they have access to a support network

**23%**

Average increase in parents feeling close to other people

### Social Connection

The Community Programme allowed parents to meet others in similar situations and to have brief discussions at drop-off and collection times

### Art and Wellbeing

92% of parents agreed that the arts have an important role in improving the wellbeing of children living with long-term health conditions

## 6.5 Impact on Family Unit

**17.1%**

Average increase in how well families solve problems together

**16.2%**

Average increase in families being able to deal with setbacks/problems well

**7.7%**

Average increase in how well families communicate with each other

Parents reported that the Community Programme allowed their children with long-term health conditions to access similar opportunities to those of their healthy siblings. It was felt that this improved the relationship between siblings, giving them a common topic of discussion and interest. Additionally, parents reported that the opportunity for their child to engage in the Community Programme workshops allowed them to spend more time with their other children, who often don't receive as much one-on-one time as a result of their sibling's additional needs.

## 6.6 Areas for Improvement and Future Development

The following areas for improvement and future development were noted:

- **Longer Workshops in Camps:** Workshops could be 30mins to 1 hour longer, allowing for greater participation and facilitating a longer break for parents and siblings.
- **More Frequent Workshops:** There was a desire for more frequent workshops, allowing children to access activities more regularly.
- **More Days per Camp:** Camp length could be extended to promote engagement and friendship development.
- **Marketing:** Parents felt Helium Arts should focus on promoting the Community Programme more widely, with suggestions including better utilisation of social media and the targeting of schools.
- **Workshops by Ability:** Parents suggested that workshops could be divided by ability level. 1 parent noted that children participating alongside their child were "streaks ahead," whilst another noted that their child could have benefited from more one-to-one support.
- **Adult to Child Ratio:** Volunteers and artists noted that workshops which feature children with high levels of need would benefit from additional volunteers, artists or Helium Arts staff to provide these children with the level of attention they require.

## 6.7 Future Supports for Parents

During consultation, parents were also specifically asked about programmes, activities, and resources which Helium Arts could provide in future to support them in their care of a child with a long-term condition. Whilst 2 parents did not feel they required any additional support from Helium Arts, 8 provided suggestions. The most common suggestions included:



- **Support Groups:** Parents felt that support groups may prove beneficial (N=4). 1 parent highlighted that the impact of such groups could be extended by incorporating siblings without long-term health conditions, allowing them to socialise with others from family circumstances such as their own.



- **Coffee Mornings:** Parents felt that coffee mornings would provide a specific opportunity to meet with others in similar situations and would be easy to replicate outside of the context of Helium Arts in future (N=2). Opinions differed on the timing of coffee mornings, with 1 parent expressing a preference for the coffee mornings to occur on a separate day to the Community Programme workshops so as not to impact on their child's independence, and another suggesting they coincide with workshops for ease of scheduling.



- **Art Programme:** Parents felt that art programmes for parents would be beneficial, with the dual impact of promoting socialisation between parents and also enabling them to learn new skills (N=2). 1 parent referenced an interest in this concept as they would like to learn to make puppets as their child had particularly enjoyed this element of the Community Programme.



- **Cross-Training Events:** 1 parent referenced the potential for Helium Arts to host training events which would teach parents how to care for other children attending Helium Arts along with their child. It was felt that this would promote opportunities for friendship between children and parents, enabling children to have sleepovers and visits to each other's houses, with their parent's confident they would be cared for. This would extend the experience of respite for parents, potentially providing them with a day or night's rest.

## Section 7: Online Programme Findings

### 7.1 Introduction

Feedback on engagement with the Creative Health Hubs Online Programme was gathered through surveys and consultation. 26 parents and 6 teenagers provided feedback on their experience via reflective survey whilst 13 parents and 2 children provided feedback via pre and post surveys. In terms of consultation, 7 parents, 1 associate artist, the Helium Arts Family Liaison and the Helium Arts Online Programme Coordinator reflected on their experience and engagement with the Online Programme.

### 7.2 What Worked Well?

Both participants and parents reflected positively on the Community Programme. Particular reference was made to:

- **Remote Delivery:** Parents were positive about the remote and online delivery. Remote delivery was felt to remove the “pressure to get out of the house,” and it was felt delivery was at a “nice and calm pace.” 1 parent described the Online Programme as a “godsend,” as they had previously signed enrolled their child in a Community Programme camp, but the child’s health did not permit attendance.
- **Art Activities:** Participants expressed enjoyment in making arts and crafts and “trying new ideas, cutting and making things.”
- **Helium Team:** Parents reflected positively on the support they had received from the team at Helium Arts. Helium Arts staff were described as “really, really helpful,” with reference to a high level of communication.
- **Artists:** Parents referenced that artists were “validating,” of their child and allowed them to interpret the art activities in their own way.
- **Art Box:** The receipt of the art box in the post was reportedly met by excitement from the children participating. It was stated that “everything you needed was in the box.”

**100%**

Of children felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their needs

**50%**

Of children would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts<sup>16</sup>

**100%**

Of children would recommend the Creative Health Hubs to a friend

<sup>16</sup> The remaining children responded ‘don’t know’ when asked whether they would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts.

**83%**

Of teenagers felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their needs

**50%**

Of teenagers would like to continue doing art workshops with Helium Arts<sup>17</sup>

**83%**

Of teenagers would recommend the Creative Health Hubs to their friends

**90%**

Of parents felt workshops were accessible and inclusive of their child’s needs

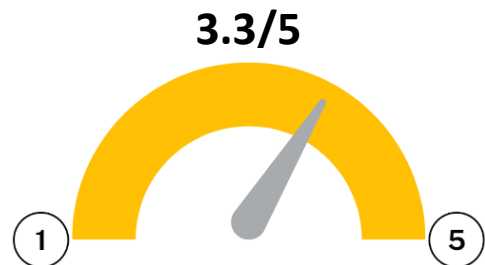
**91%**

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

**96%**

Of parents would recommend Helium Arts to others

Teenagers rated the age suitability of art activities on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represented not at all suitable and 5 represented very suitable. The average score provided was 3.3/5, indicating that activities were somewhat appropriate but could be improved for the age group. This was underlined by 1 participant providing a score of 1, and 2 participants providing scores of 2.



## 7.3 Impact on Children and Young People

### Increased Participation in the Arts

**46%**

Of parents stated that their children were participating more frequently in arts and creative activities

- 8% of parents stated that their children never participated in arts and creative activities prior to engagement. After engagement, 100% of parents indicated that their children were participating.

**17%**

Of teenagers felt they were more frequently participating in arts/creative activities

- 69% of participants took part in arts and creative activities weekly prior to engagement. This rose to 84% following engagement, with 15% engaging daily.

- Parents noted that children were trying new mediums, including painting, digital art, and drawing after engagement.

- Parents reported that children had reduced screen time in favour of art activities and 1 parent noted that their child had just chosen to study art at secondary school as the Online Programme had “stoked an interest.”

<sup>17</sup> 1 did not wish to take part again, describing the programme as “babyish,” and unsuitable for teenagers; 1 did not enjoy the style of art and 1 would prefer community programmes in future.

## Improved Mental Health and Wellbeing

**62%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's wellbeing

**50%**

Of children reported an improvement in their wellbeing

**19.5/30**

Average teenage wellbeing score post-engagement (moderate wellbeing)

Parents and teenagers both reported that increased happiness and improved mood were the most frequent wellbeing impacts. A lower proportion of teenagers self-reported improvements for wellbeing across all wellbeing components than parental respondents did. Further, the Online Programme Coordinator observed that participants experienced positive impacts for wellbeing, with the online delivery eliciting similar benefits to the Community Programme in terms of mental health, confidence, independence and social connection.

## Improved Creativity and Creative Habits

**77%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's creativity

- For parents, improved persistence was the most frequent creativity impact for children and young people (58%).
- Teenagers indicated that increased imagination was the most frequent creativity impact (42%). A lower proportion of teenagers self-reported improved creativity scores than parental respondents.

## Improved Physical Health and Wellbeing

**54%**

Of parents reported an improvement in their child's physical health and wellbeing

- For most parents, the rationale for improved physical health and wellbeing related to an improvement in their child's overall mood.
- 1 parent reported that access to art activities enabled their child to "use their body more."

## Improved Quality of Life

**77%**

Of parents reported that their child had an improved quality of life after engaging with the Online Programme

**23.7%**

Average increase in parent ratings of child quality of life pre- and post-engagement (3.92 to 4.85)



## Improved Sense of Social Inclusion

Parents noted that their child’s participation in the Online Programme had a positive impact on their sense of social inclusion. 1 parent noted that their child made “friends and connections on the calls,” whilst another stated that their child “did not feel so alone,” as a result of engaging with the programme. 1 parent noted that the social impacts of the programme were the most important for his child, stating that the Online Programme “made him feel more included in society,” but noting “if they just met and chatted, he’d probably enjoy it just as much.” Finally, 1 parent referenced that their child enjoyed the opportunity to engage with another participant via a pen pal activity, stating that “it’s lovely to have an envelope with your name on it coming through the door.”

## 7.4 Impact on Parents

**54%**

Of parents experienced improved wellbeing following their child’s engagement

Parent Pre and Post Survey respondents provided feedback relating to their own wellbeing. The average wellbeing score in the pre-survey was 21.7. The average wellbeing score in the post-survey, after their child’s involvement with the Online Programme, was 24; a 10.6% impact.

**30%**

Average increase in parents feeling relaxed

**21%**

Average increase in parents feeling they have access to a support network

**9%**

Average increase in parents feeling optimistic about the future

**100%** of parents agreed that the arts have an important role in improving the wellbeing of children living with long-term health conditions.

## 7.5 Impact on Family Unit

Parent Pre and Post Survey respondents provided feedback relating to their family’s wellbeing across 3 statements. There was a 2% average increase reported in how well families communicate with each other. There was a slight regression in how well families solve problems together and in families being able to deal with setbacks/problems well. 31% of parents reported an average increase across the three statements. During consultation, 1 parent referenced that the Online Programme had led to greater family collaboration on arts activities, noting that the workshops “make you do more things together.”

## 7.6 Areas for Improvement and Future Development

The following areas for improvement and future development were noted:

- **Hybrid Delivery:** Whilst parents felt that the Online Programme was beneficial for their children and illustrated a range of impacts resulting from participation, it was referenced that the online format did not promote social interaction between participants. As a result of this, comments suggested a mix of in-person and online provision in future.
- **More Frequent Sessions:** There was a desire for more frequent workshops, allowing children to access activities more regularly.
- **Longer Sessions:** Parents noted that their children would benefit from longer workshops with more interaction between the children and the artists.
- **Age Appropriate Activities:** Whilst 2 parents noted that they would like more age-appropriate activities for teenagers, 1 parent would prefer less complex activities for their child as they have learning difficulties.
- **Marketing:** Parents felt that Helium Arts could place a greater focus on advertising and marketing to reach a greater number of children.
- **Adult to Child Ratio:** Comments related to a reduction in the number of adults on the Zoom calls, children expressing that there were too many adults on the calls.
- **Year-Long Schedule:** Receiving the programme schedule at the start of the year would be beneficial in supporting parents to register their child and to plot out their engagements.
- **Engagement Locations:** The Online Programme Coordinator noted that participants in the Online Programme were still largely based around population centres where the Community Programme was delivered, suggesting that there are areas of the country which require focused, targeted advertising to attract participants.

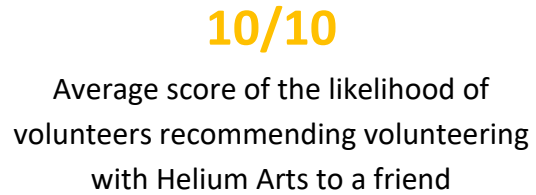
## 7.7 Future Supports for Parents

During consultation, parents were also specifically asked about programmes, activities, and resources which Helium Arts could provide in future to support them in their care of a child with a long-term condition. The most common suggestions included:

- **Support Groups:** Parents felt that support groups may prove beneficial. Additionally, parents suggested that a support service for siblings would be valuable and help them to understand “why their house is so different from others.”
- **Art and Mental Health Workshops:** 1 parent was not interested in the concept of direct support but was open to workshops or lectures which would support parenting. Suggestions included workshops discussing the link between art and mental health and how this could be incorporated at home.

## Section 8: Personnel and Operations Findings

### 8.1 Volunteer Feedback



Helium Arts delivered the following impact for its volunteers:



### 8.2 Artist Feedback

5 artists provided feedback as part of this evaluation. This included 2 artists who were employed by Helium Arts and 3 who worked as associates. The employed artists worked within Paediatric Outpatients Departments and also had experience of the Community Programme. Each of the associate artists had worked on the Community Programme, with one also having worked on the Online Programme.

## What Worked Well for Artists?

- **Communication from Helium Arts:** Employed and associate artists were in agreement about the ease of communication with Helium Arts. It was noted that Helium Arts staff were “friendly and will help you find the right person to talk to.”
- **Time for Reflection and Feedback:** The employed artists highlighted that the opportunities for reflection and to receive feedback throughout the year were “extremely beneficial,” as they allowed artists to “compare notes, share experiences and make changes in real time.”
- **Training:** The artists reflected positively on their experience of the training provided, noting that it was informative, supportive, and created a “sense of community,” among the artists, creating a team-like feel.
- **Shadowing:** Alongside training, 2 associate artists noted that shadowing other artists before facilitating was beneficial in helping to prepare for workshops.
- **On-site Medic:** 1 associate artist highlighted the benefit of having an on-site medical professional during the Community Programme.

## Impact for Artists

- **Networking and Relationship Development:** Both employed and associate artists reported having made connections through their work with Helium Arts. 1 employed artist noted that they had “met some great people,” stating, “Helium Arts operate on kindness as an organisation, and that’s very clear in our interactions.” Employed artists referenced relationship development with interns on their programmes, and associate artists referenced the connections they had made with other artists.
- **Skill Development:** Artists reported that both the experience of working with Helium Arts and accessing training provided a number of learning opportunities. Diversity and Inclusion training was highlighted as being beneficial not only within Helium Arts workshops but also in the artists’ external projects. 1 employed artist specifically noted that they had “learned how to adapt and plan on [their] feet,” and “to be flexible.” 1 associate artist highlighted that they “learned a lot,” through the opportunity to work with different mediums, which in turn had fed into their own practice.
- **Feeling Fulfilled and Rewarded:** The associate artists noted the feelings of fulfillment and felt they were “making a difference,” as a result of engaging with children with long-term health conditions. The associate artists referenced “seeing children happy and feeling excited and empowered;” feedback from families that “children are having such a lovely time;” and “a sense of joy,” at being able to showcase children’s voices.

## Areas for Improvement and Future Development

Artists identified the following areas for improvement and future development within the Creative Health Hubs Programme:

- **Human Resources within Workshops:** The employed artists discussed the need for a higher staff to child ratio within the workshops. The complex needs of some participants necessitated one-to-one support which was not always possible given available personnel, impacting delivery for all participants and minimising the impact for children with complex needs. The employed artists also referenced that in some cases, carers or family members stay with their child as there are not sufficient staff members to accommodate the child, removing the “down time,” which many families enjoy.
- **Understanding of Artist Role:** Both the employed and associate artists commented on the time commitment required to work with Helium Arts. This created conflicting priorities and challenges surrounding scheduling due to other commitments. It was felt that Helium Arts staff had an expectation that artists would have greater flexibility, and artists suggested that their exact role and responsibilities be underlined to ensure understanding moving forward and to ensure boundaries are established to protect their other priorities.
- **Artist Meet-Ups:** The associate artists suggested regular meet-ups with other artists, both employed and associate, to further build connections and to access peer support and learning.
- **Awareness of Participant Needs:** The employed artists noted that they would like to receive information about the needs of participant cohorts with sufficient time for planning. It was noted that preparing for children with complex needs can take longer and can be complicated when little is known about the child’s specific needs.
- **Preparation Time for Online Programme:** 1 associate artist noted that whilst there was a planned 3-month preparation period for the Online Programme but in practice this amounted to 3 weeks. Given the short turn around, the artist noted the pressure to construct art boxes, and stated that if given more time, art packs could have been adapted to the individual needs of participants.
- **Art Box Underutilisation:** 1 associate artist noted that only half of the art boxes created for the Online Programme were disseminated. The remaining boxes and materials were unused. It was felt these boxes could have been redeployed in another format.

### 8.3 Venue Feedback

4 venue representatives participated in consultations regarding their interaction and relationship with Helium Arts. Each of the venues represented provided spaces for the Community Programme. The venues included a primary school, a community-arts organisation, and two community centres focused on family support.

#### What Worked Well for Venues?

- **Notice of Scheduling:** Each venue representative noted that Helium Arts booked spaces with advanced notice and provided enough time for scheduling and set up. 1 venue representative also highlighted that should there have been a change or an issue, Helium Arts would communicate at the earliest opportunity.
- **Communication and Information:** 3 venue representatives noted the ease of communication with Helium Arts and the sharing of key information linked to venue set up and use. The representatives noted that in-person meetings with artists had been conducted prior to workshops, allowing both the venue representatives and artists to become familiar with each other, and for the artist to familiarise with the space.
- **Respect for the Space:** 2 venue representatives highlighted that the Helium Arts artists, volunteers and participants were respectful of the spaces that they accessed and ensured that rooms were left how they were found.

#### How Could Partnerships Be Improved?

Whilst each of the venue representatives felt their relationship with Helium Arts was productive and successful, two representatives provided suggestions on how to improve this relationship in future. These suggestions included:

- **Mutual Advertising and Awareness Raising:** Venue representatives noted that Helium Arts did not provide participants and their families with information about the venues being utilised. Venue representatives expressed openness to discussions about how the venues and Helium Arts could support each other. 1 suggestion centred on the use of logos and links on social media, with both Helium Arts and the venues tagging each other in posts about the Community Programme.
- **Meetings with Artists:** Whilst 3 venues had received visits from the artist prior to the workshops, 1 venue had not. The representative of this venue noted that they would have liked the opportunity for this introduction as it would have provided them with “more familiarity,” with the artist.

## Section 9: Quotes from Consultation

*“I think it completely defines the nature of a hospital visit for a child. [...] That engagement with the artist colours all subsequent visits. I had one particular family come up to me who said their daughter didn’t want to come into the Outpatients Department because she had surgery before the appointment, but when she heard the artist would be there, she said ‘okay, I’ll go.’ It colours the child’s experience in a really positive way.”* – **Helium Arts Hospital Coordinator**



*“It’s a very rewarding experience. They’re brilliant kids and the facilitators know so much so you’re learning from their experience and how they can navigate things too.”* – **Volunteer Feedback**

*“She’s doing more art at home. She asks me to go and get her art or go and get her colouring books now, whereas before she would have had few outlets other than TV and her iPad.”* – **Parent Feedback**



*“My daughter really benefited from interacting with such a lovely group of children and she has taken out her arts and crafts supplies countless times, making story books for us all.”* – **Parent Feedback**

*“I think it made him very happy; he has a positive association with it. When I tell him he’s going to it he’s happy to hear that and he looks forward to it. You can see it in his face and his expression and the gestures he makes that he’s happy about it. He is verbal but he won’t always communicate but he’ll say, ‘when am I going again?’ I know that means it’s a positive experience.”* – **Parent Feedback**



*“When he goes to the workshops, I don’t have to stay with him. I can go and bring my other child somewhere and do something nice with him and it gives you extra time with the other child to do another activity.”* – **Parent Feedback**

*“There was one participant who was a wheelchair user. She was selectively verbal due to a complex speech issue which is common with autism. She would come to the workshops upset and emotional; she didn’t want to be there without her mum and didn’t want to be left alone [but] she became more verbal and engaged more; she was testing boundaries, trying new things, and getting to know people.” – Artist Feedback*



*“It was what she needed at the time. I’ve found that she is more aware now and doesn’t feel alone. She’s meeting other children who might not have the same condition as her but have health conditions and she feels less alone.” – Parent Feedback*

*“The last programme Lauren was at, she turned to me five minutes in and said, ‘you can leave now.’ For a child who is so dependent on her parents at home that is a big thing; she knows she’s comfortable.” – Parent Feedback*



*“When I know he’s safe and content, it creates a space for me to spend some time with his siblings. There are few camps that I could leave him at so it’s rare I’d get the chance to give the time to his siblings.” – Parent Feedback*

*“Even during his sessions you’re in the background helping out and you can chat to him about it. It’s nice from a family point of view; we could work on it together and work on stuff outside of the programme.” – Parent Feedback*



*“There are seven or eight hundred children in my son’s school, and he is just one of two boys with diabetes. That is quite isolating, and he thinks he stands out in that environment. Helium Arts however was standardised and normalised his condition for him.” – Parent Feedback*

*“She looked forward to both the art and social interaction at the group. She even brought one of the art books she made to school; she was so happy with it.” – Parent Feedback*





## Section 10: Key Learning and Discussion

### 10.1 Introduction

This section presents an analysis and discussion of the key learning for the Helium Arts Creative Health Hubs Programme in 2023.

### 10.2 Impact of the Creative Health Hubs Programme

There is a clear causal relationship between the issues that the Creative Health Hubs Programme sought to address, the activities it delivered, and the outcomes achieved.

For children and young people living with long-term physical health conditions, the Creative Health Hubs Programme improved emotional and social wellbeing, with participants feeling happier when going to hospital, experiencing improved mood and increased wellbeing in the areas of happiness, mood, self-esteem, coping and connectedness. Improvements in mental wellbeing were also linked to improvements in physical health. Children and young people's creativity was also positively impacted, with creative habits stimulated, ongoing participation in the arts promoted, and enthusiasm for the arts increased. In addition, the programme provided a mechanism for children to meet others experiencing a similar set of circumstances, promoted access to friendships and subsequently increased feelings of social inclusion.

For parents, there is evidence that the Creative Health Hubs Programme has reduced anxiety and stress, improved mood and mental wellbeing, and positively impacted connections and relationships between parents and children. Parents also reported increased awareness of the positive affect of arts and creativity for wellbeing and the creation of more positive healthcare experiences. There is also evidence that parents have experienced reduction isolation through increased access to a support network and the opportunity to meet others in similar situations.

For volunteers, the Creative Health Hubs Programme contributed to a sense of purpose and the feeling that they were making a positive contribution to their community. Respondents to the volunteer survey noted developments in their professional and personal skills, including improved employability.

For medical professionals and the health sector, the Creative Health Hubs Programme has increased awareness of the positive impact of arts and creativity for wellbeing and created more efficient medical appointments. The programme improved patient/staff relationships, created an easier working environment and promoted a more positive experience of delivering healthcare to children with lifelong physical health conditions.

## **10.3 Delivery Successes**

### **Impact Across Online and In-Person Delivery**

Positive feedback was received in regard to both the Community and the Online Programmes. Whilst the social interaction between children and young people was valued during the Community Programme, stakeholder comments noted that in-person attendance was not a possibility for all children. Parents were supportive of online delivery.

### **Bringing Children with Similar Experiences Together**

The Creative Health Hubs Programme created environments where children with similar life experiences could meet and interact. This was felt to have normalised the experience of health challenges and created a sense of inclusion which underpinned a number of positive impacts delivered for children, namely in the areas of emotional, social and physical wellbeing.

### **Variety of Arts Activities**

Children and teenagers across the OPD Clinic setting, the Community Programme and the Online Programme noted that activities were “fun,” and underlined the value of the variety of activities available, ensuring children could engage in something which interested them.

### **Artists**

Stakeholder feedback frequently referenced the importance of the artists in the Creative Health Hubs Programme. Children and young people highlighted the role which artists played in making workshops fun, with artists described as easy to talk to and helpful. Parents also highlighted that artist communication and approachability was reassuring, validating and encouraging for children, ensuring they were supported with challenging activities.

### **Helium Arts Staff**

Reference was also made to the role of Helium Arts support staff in ensuring successful delivery. Parents found Helium Arts staff to be helpful, with reference to a high level of communication. Volunteers and artists noted that they were aware of the support structure available to them and agreed on the ease of communication with the organisation.

### **On-Site Medical Professional**

Data from the Community Programme specifically noted the importance of the on-site medical professional. Parents and artists were reassured by the medic’s presence.

## **Maintenance of Impact in a Time of Growth**

2023 has been a year of growth for the Creative Health Hubs Programme. The Online Programme was delivered in parallel to the Community Programme for the first time and significant increases in the number of children engaged through the OPD and Community Programme were achieved. Despite this, the impact of the programme was not diminished. Consistent proportions of parents reported positive impacts for healthcare experiences, and greater improvements were evidenced in the areas of participant wellbeing and creativity.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Helium Arts recognises that children engaged by the Creative Health Hubs Programme come from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences. As such, efforts have been made to create equality of access and inclusive provision. A comparison of data with the evaluation of the Creative Health Hubs 2022 Programme Evaluation demonstrates that a greater number of children and young people had rare diseases and disabilities/additional needs in 2023. Additionally, the proportion of children engaged from rural/urban areas became more even in 2023, with the engagement of participants from deprived and disadvantaged areas remaining consistent. This evidences that positive steps are being taken to promote inclusive access.

## **10.4 Areas for Improvement and Future Development**

### **Advertising, Promotion and Marketing**

A need for greater advertising and promotion was highlighted by stakeholders. Suggestions included targeting schools and maximising social media utilisation. Venues expressed an interest in cross-advertising opportunities with Helium Arts.

### **Recruitment and Registration**

Three separate issues relating to recruitment and participant registration were identified. Firstly, there is scope to enhance the representation of participants from disadvantaged communities. Secondly, there is a need for streamlined pathways from OPD engagement to the Community and Online Programmes. Finally, there is scope to use recruitment mechanisms and registration forms to learn more about participant needs and health conditions.

### **Adult/Child Ratio**

Both volunteers and artists referenced that workshops which feature children with complex needs or support requirements would benefit from the increased presence of volunteers or

trained staff. Gathering more information relating to participant conditions and need via registration forms could support the assignment of sufficient numbers of volunteers.

### **Increased Provision**

Across all three elements of the Creative Health Hubs Programme, a desire for greater provision was evidenced. Whilst it is evident that appetite for further provision exists, consideration should be given to available resources to ensure that growth is maintained at a manageable pace.

### **Age-Appropriate Activities**

Feedback relating to the age-appropriateness of art activities revealed a challenge for future delivery; ensuring age-appropriate activities despite a range of ability levels. Given the range of long-term health conditions and disabilities participants present with, assigning art activity complexity on the basis of age is not straightforward.

### **Social Connectedness on Online Programme**

Feedback referenced that the social element of the Online Programme could be developed. Comments noted that hybrid delivery may be favourable for some families, but equally feedback was positive on online delivery. Investigation into how best to promote social connectedness on the Online Programme would be welcomed by stakeholders.

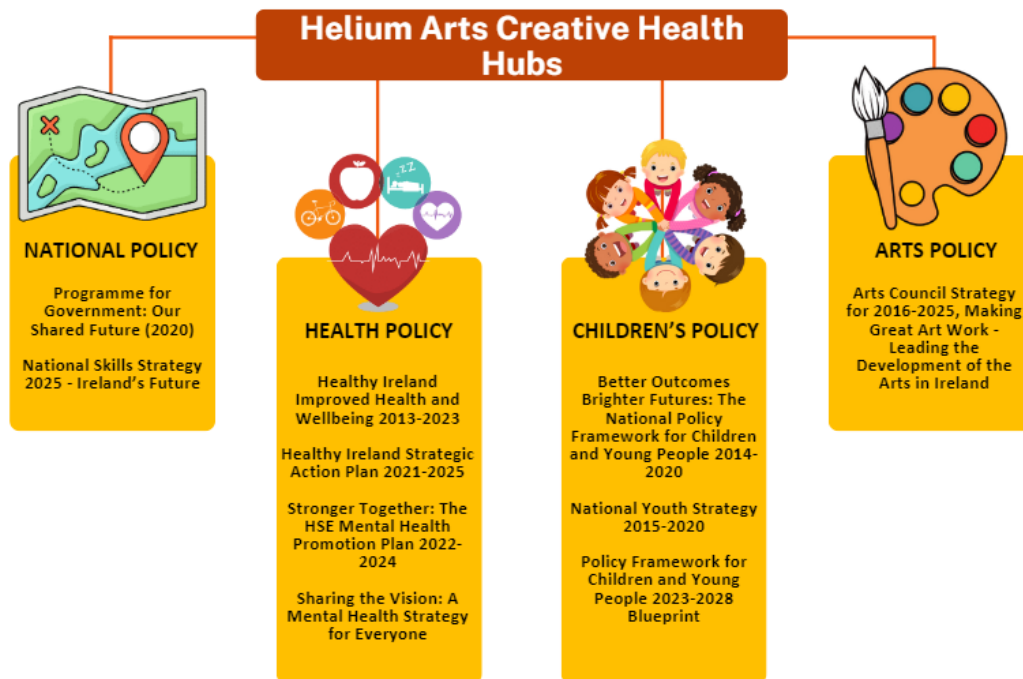
### **Strategic Role of Helium Arts**

Feedback from the OPD setting highlighted an opportunity for Helium Arts to develop further strategic partnerships with medical professionals and managers of hospitals around the country. It was felt that Helium Arts was well placed to contribute to top-level discussions and to support the co-design of interventions to embed arts into the environment and the hospital at large, conscious of the specific needs of each location.

### **Support for Parents**

Parents reflected on their support needs and the activities or programmes which Helium Arts could facilitate for them. Reference was made to support groups and coffee mornings. Parents felt that incorporating siblings into these sessions or providing sibling-only sessions would be beneficial in supporting the whole family.

## 10.5 Strategic Relevance



The outcomes of the Helium Arts Creative Health Hubs Programme are strategically relevant and linked to national policy priorities. Given the context within which Helium Arts delivers, the Creative Health Hubs Programme is innately synergised with Irish health policy. By delivering positive impact on mental health and wellbeing for children with lifelong physical health conditions and their families, the programme contribute to goals set out in the **Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2025**, **Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Strategy for Everyone** and **Stronger Together: The HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan 2022-2024**.

The Creative Health Hubs Programme also delivers against key outcomes set out in national children's policy. The **Young Ireland: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028** aims to create an Ireland which fully respects and realises the rights of children and young people with a focus on five national outcomes.

Finally, the Creative Health Hubs Programme also delivered against the priorities of the **Arts Council Strategy for 2016-2025, Making Great Art Work - Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland**. Integrated into this strategy is an objective to plan and provide for children including the provision of excellent arts experiences for young people. The delivery of the Creative Health Hubs Programme in the OPD setting, via the Community Programme and the Online Programme has supported the outcomes set out in this strategy.

## **Section 11: Recommendations**

### **11.1 Recommendation 1: Model Optimisation**

The Creative Health Hubs Programme is working well and has also undergone considerable growth in 2023. It is recommended that Helium Arts focus on optimising the existing model of delivery to create a better working experience for artists and volunteers and to maximise the quality of experience and subsequent impact delivered to participants and their families.

### **11.2 Recommendation 2: Support for Parents**

The Creative Health Hubs Programme has delivered a wealth of positive impacts for the parents and families of children and young people with long-term physical health conditions. In line with Helium Arts' commitment to this support, it is recommended that Helium Arts utilise the evidence gathered in this evaluation report to investigate the viability of parental and sibling support groups to compliment the Community and Online Programmes.

### **11.3 Recommendation 3: Strategic Collaboration**

The evaluation revealed stakeholder interested in the development of strategic partnerships with Helium Arts. It is recommended that Helium Arts share the findings of this evaluation report with relevant contacts and maximise the opportunities discussed throughout this report, raising awareness of past successes and discussing future ventures.

### **11.4 Recommendation 4: Income Diversification and Development**

Helium Arts Creative Health Hubs Programme is addressing a gap in health and wellbeing support for children and young people living with lifelong physical health conditions and is in strategic alignment with multiple national policy priorities. It is recommended that Helium Arts utilise the findings of this evaluation to demonstrate and raise awareness of the impact of the programme, seeking additional and future funding to ensure model optimisation and sustained delivery.

### **11.5 Recommendation 5: Data Collection, Monitoring and Evaluation**

To develop the efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation processes for the future, it is recommended that Helium Arts continue to embed evaluative practice whilst placing a greater focus on simplistic and accessible impact measurement tools. Helium Arts should ensure the synergised application of impact measurement tools across all areas within the same programme, and simplified or translated tools should be created to promote accessibility.