

Diolch yn fawr am y gwahoddiad I siarad heddiw.

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak here today.

A world without Art

I would like to start by asking you to imagine a world without art.

A world without poetry, painting, music or literature. Without film, dance, opera or creative architecture. "Without art", George Bernard Shaw suggested that "the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable". If people are unwell or find themselves without a clear role in society, what would inspire them to keep going, to believe in themselves or in the future?

It is interesting to note that there is an attempt at a cultural shift now in relation to health and mental well-being in particular in Wales with doctors being encouraged to ask "What matters? Not what is the matter?"

When I was a member of the European Parliament I was at one point responsible for prioritizing which arts areas should benefit from the culture budget of the European Union. In that capacity I was extremely privileged to have met and spent time with one of the most inspiring men I have ever met – the virtuoso violinist and humanitarian Yehudi Menuhin. He contested that:

"Music, amongst all the great arts, is the language which penetrates most deeply into the human spirit, reaching people through every barrier, disability, language and circumstance. "

As we here today know all too well, the arts can truly enhance and transform lives. They are enjoyed and valued as part of our personal wellbeing and development, in communities all across the nation.

Albert Einstein once said, "Creativity is intelligence having fun." Through this medium we can express and fulfil ourselves, and engage with people in ways that other forms of communication cannot offer.

Throughout the UK, many older people live without creativity, inspiration or hope for the future. Reported levels of loneliness, poverty and mental ill-health are spiraling out of control.

The arts could offer us some hope. Nothing brings people together more than arts (and perhaps sport) creating shared understanding and mutual experiences.

Every day there is **more evidence** to suggest that engagement in the arts can have direct and measurable health and social benefits, with resulting economic implications as well.

Engaging with creative activity can have a positive impact. By supplementing medicine and care, cultural and creative activities can improve the health of people

who experience mental or physical health problems. Improving wellbeing, in its widest sense, is a key outcome of arts and cultural activity.

Creativity, culture and the arts can help increase aspiration, confidence, a sense of community and cohesion, and individual and collective well-being. Creative activity can not only promote healthy living and lifestyles, but also bring positive messages around health issues.

There are already a diverse range of individuals and organisations working in this field. These include arts therapists – who use art, drama or music as a therapeutic intervention to help people with physical, mental, social and emotional difficulties - researchers and curators who manage arts and culture programmes in hospitals and many individuals and organisations working in communities to provide cultural opportunities for people experiencing ill health, or who require long term social care. Libraries, choirs, painting clubs and dance groups all play their part. In such ways, the culture sector plays a vital role in improving people's wellbeing.

I am pleased that such outcomes are being celebrated and promoted and that dance, theatre, visual arts and writing are gaining increasing recognition for their potential to support health and wellbeing.

My inspiration from Live Music Now

So, from where does my interest stem....?

For a number of years, prior to becoming an Assembly Member, I chaired Live Music Now, an incredible initiative which has brought the joy of live music to thousands of old people in care homes hospitals and special schools across the country. This charity was established by Yehudi Menuhin- the man I met all those years ago in Strasbourg.

As a Welsh woman, I've always loved singing - in the bath, at the rugby stadium and I have been known to attempt the odd harmony at pub sing-alongs - but I can't, by any account, pretend to have anything but the bare minimum of musical training. Taking on the chairmanship of anything in the musical sphere could have seemed rather presumptuous, but Live Music Now is a charity with a difference.

A charity which works with a diverse range of people that rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to experience live music; delivering programmes to many whose lives are challenged due to disability, illness, poverty or social disadvantage. For the past 40 years, they have helped countless people overcome communication barriers through the quality of their musicianship and delivery of their music.

I have yet to attend an event of theirs which has not made me cry. The effect of music, in particular on older people who rarely leave their homes, people who live with Alzheimer's, or simply those who are frail and infirm, is truly remarkable. I can testify how transformational exposure to the arts can be.

It is impossible not to be touched by the power of music, and the joy it brings us all. I have watched as musicians play familiar tunes, often unheard for decades, and I

have experienced first-hand the atmosphere lifting as the room illuminated and faces animated. Following visits, the mood can improve for days, with both staff and residents humming and singing tunes long after the performance. This is just one example of how music can make a valuable, emotional difference, not just to those living with dementia, but also to their family, friends and those caring for them.

In a country where the population is ageing, where dementia is on an ever increasing upward trajectory, it is important that we focus on the quality of life of people who have contributed to our society. It is important that we reward them, and care for them in their vulnerable situations.

My experience with this incredible charity has driven my desire for as many people as possible to have the opportunity to benefit from the life-enhancing and therapeutic experience of the arts.

It has taught me that music is an art form which can raise people's spirits so that they don't always have to reach for the pills. It was this realisation which drove my aspiration for the arts to be included in the commissioning of future health and social care services.

The use of the arts in this way is an increasingly advocated concept as music, dance, writing and other art forms contribute to integrated, person-centered care across a variety of settings. I recognised, however, that the anecdotal observations by myself and others would not be enough to justify a shift from a hard-pressed health budget into the cultural field.

Establishing the cross party group on Arts and Health

On election to the Assembly, I determined to establish a Cross Party Group for Arts and Health - partly due to my involvement of the cross party group in Westminster.

Comprising AMs from across the political spectrum and representatives from health care, adult social care, charities and special education, the group hopes to persuade the Welsh Government to commission an evidence-based report to support a shift of funding from medical interventions to the arts in health. Highlighting the good work already underway in Wales, members are hoping to quantify how much this approach can not only benefit people therapeutically, but also make sound economic and medical sense.

Whilst public investment in the arts is vital, it must reach everybody in society, not only those who can actively seek it out. Artists and organisations working in this field need training, support and investment, and the care sector needs encouragement and respect.

Support from the Welsh Arts Council

Phil George, Chair of the Arts Council in Wales believes significant importance should be placed on ensuring that future strategies are fit for purpose and reflect the particular needs of Wales.

More than 50 percent of revenue-funded organisations sponsored by the Welsh Arts Council are involved in arts and health projects.

But Phil wants to go further.

There is scope for the sector to play a significant role in shifting the emphasis of our healthcare system from one focusing on ill-health, to one focusing on wellbeing and prevention.

I do believe that we are pushing at an open door:

Welsh Government enthusiasm

The Welsh Government has, with a unique Law

“The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015” outlined a policy of sustainable development through a ‘process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales’. This amongst other things underpins an ability to intervene and to take multiple issues into consideration when developing policy.

Ken Skates the Economic Secretary who is also responsible for the arts I believe is particularly committed to this idea and has said that he recognizes that *There are a number of areas where spending in my portfolio has the potential to be preventative:*

There is potential for most parts of my portfolio - the arts, libraries, heritage and access to the historic and natural environment – to contribute to the health and wellbeing agenda

Each year the Welsh Government sends a remit letter to the Arts Council of Wales setting out what the Council should prioritise on in the coming year.

The 2017-18 letter contains a section, looking at arts and well-being:

Emphasising how the WG culture strategy ‘*Light springs through the dark*’, *the arts can play a significant part in shifting the emphasis of our health system from ill-health, to wellbeing and prevention.*

The Arts Council is encouraged to explore the potential and evidence for arts in supporting new initiatives such as for example the new Wales Wellbeing Bond, or on widening the scope and contribution of arts to the social prescription schemes across Wales.

The Minister specifically underlines the point that “*Engaging with creative activity can have a positive impact on health and well-being. By supplementing medicine and care, cultural and creative activities can improve the health of people who experience mental or physical health problems. Well-being, in its widest sense, is a key outcome of arts and cultural activity.*

The Welsh Government's *Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013–23* sets out a vision for improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing as key components in building a good quality of life. Advocating lifelong learning and other activities, the strategy makes mention of the arts and creative activities and 'promotes the participation of older people in the arts throughout the year.' The aim is to enhance the 'mental and emotional health and well-being of older people in Wales by enabling engagement with artistic and creative activity'.ⁱ

Convincing the Health Secretary

But we would expect no less from the culture secretary. The big bucks and potential for transformational change that we are looking for means that we need to convince the Health Secretary of the validity of the case of shifting funds from health into the arts and health. In order to make this case however we need some robust and evidence based science. If not it will be extremely difficult for medical practitioners to be convinced by the change. That body of evidence is mounting, and in June the cross party group in Westminster will be publishing a comprehensive report gathering together the information which already exists.
BUT

Action is already underway. Throughout the Welsh NHS, cultural interventions are helping to improve healthcare environments and to provide better quality facilities for patients and staff – many targeted cultural programmes are being delivered in hospitals, and throughout communities.

Creating a therapeutic healthcare environment extends beyond the elimination of boredom. Arts and humanities programmes have shown positive indicators on pain management, mobility, mood and motivation to self-care. Results show enhanced mental health, reduced drug consumption, improved doctor/patient relationships and accelerated recovery of patients on hospital wards.

In Wales, I am proud to say there are many examples of successful arts and health projects. We are fortunate to have a thriving community of visual artists and art therapists, musicians, dancers, filmmakers, writers, poets and dramatists. Their willingness to use their creative vision and skills for the benefit of others is the foundation for arts and health work.

The Welsh Government is also taking positive steps by supporting projects such as Healthy Sounds, a scheme to bring live music into hospitals, and Gwanwyn, a festival to promote and celebrate creativity in older age. They also enjoy a successful, collaborative relationship with the Arts Council.

In Swansea, the University School of Health Science offers a course on medical sciences and humanities, which was the first of its kind in the UK. Many hospitals have engaged artists to improve the healthcare environment, and several NHS Trusts have established arts and health strategies. Pru I know will be addressing you later has done some inspirational work in Abertawe Bro Morgannwg.

The Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013–23 sets out a vision for improving social, economic and environmental well-being as key components in building quality of life. Advocating lifelong learning and other activities, the strategy promotes the participation of older people in the arts with the aim of enhancing their mental and emotional health through engagement with artistic and creative activity.

The new Wales Wellbeing Bond, developed by WCVA, seeks to support interventions that have a strong, long-term, invest-to-save rationale, and the Welsh Government are seeking ways to allow arts and cultural bodies to become integrated with this new model. Similarly, there are ambitions to expand the social prescription scheme, to include scope for more cultural interventions.

The costs of mental illness to the Welsh economy are significant, and the pioneering Book Prescription Wales scheme, enables those suffering from mild to moderate mental health issues to be prescribed with a recommended self-help book, referred to as 'bibliotherapy' - an approach now recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

The Arts have a vibrant and valuable role to play at all levels, and we are fortunate in Wales to have rich resources of creativity, experience and commitment in this field.

And let's not forget the arts' contribution in tackling inactivity, raising aspiration, building confidence and instilling a sense of community cohesion. With 1 in 4 of the population likely to experience mental distress at some point in their lives, the impact of the arts on mood and thought can be a powerful force in the development of improved emotional health and wellbeing.

It goes without saying that it is imperative that we continue to champion and value this medium.

We are all born with an innate desire to express ourselves and everybody in society, regardless of their circumstances, should be free to access and enjoy the benefits of creative participation and development.

After all, as Picasso once stated, "Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life."

ⁱ Welsh Government. 2013. "The Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-2023." Cardiff: Welsh Government, p. 24.