

# The Social Impact of the Arts Study

How arts impact King County communities



## SUMMARY

# ARTS: CHANGING LIVES. CHANGING COMMUNITIES.

The ArtsFund Social Impact Study frames a new way of understanding the public value of the arts in King County. How are arts advancing community priorities and positive outcomes for participants and non-participants alike?

With primary focus on youth development & education, health & wellness, and neighborhood vitality, the study probes the potential for arts to influence more equitable outcomes. The report combines a county-wide public poll; a landscape scan of King County arts, cultural, and heritage nonprofits; a substantive review of 150+ national research resources; and case studies of ten regional arts organizations. Visit [www.artsfund.org/socialimpact](http://www.artsfund.org/socialimpact) for the complete findings.

People intrinsically value the arts in their lives—arts entertain, inspire, inform, and provoke us. The Puget Sound region is host to hundreds of arts nonprofits and tens of thousands of artists which have helped shape the vibrant region we are today, and which are integral to our identity as a region built on innovation. However, our research uncovers a disconnect between public perception of the value of the arts and their impact. This disconnect not only threatens the sustainability of the sector, but the future of our community.

Cities throughout the world are implementing arts-based strategies to deal with economic, community, and social development. If King County is to meet our most pressing challenges, we will need to find a way to leverage and expand the powerful impacts of the arts so more people and communities can benefit. Join us.



## THEME 1

# Youth & Education

Involvement in arts can improve academic and social outcomes for youth across socioeconomic status. Arts provide opportunities to learn critical thinking skills and build technical capacity for expression. This suggests that **arts education plays a key role in the development of local talent and a 21st century workforce**. While research indicates all students benefit from arts involvement, studies show that arts' effect on academic achievement and positive outcomes is strongest for lowest-income students. They have better academic outcomes, such as increased high school graduation rates, and social-emotional outcomes, including fewer behavioral challenges.

**See case studies:** *Jet City Improv, Urban ArtWorks, Seattle Arts and Lectures' Writers in the Schools, and Arts Corps*

# 23%

**"At-risk" students involved in arts are 23 percentage points more likely to attend college than peers with low arts involvement.**

Source: The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth, 2012

**Low-income students with access to cultural resources score higher in English and Math. Low-income students with a high level of arts experience in school are more likely to attend college, vote, and volunteer in their community.**

Source: The Social Wellbeing of New York City's Neighborhoods: The Contribution of Culture and the Arts, 2017



## THEME 2

# Health & Wellness

In both primary care and behavioral health, music and art therapy are widely recognized strategies to reduce stress and anxiety, and cope with symptoms of disease. Evidence of arts' direct impact on human health and wellness is strongest for aging adults and people diagnosed with Alzheimer's or other disorders that cause dementia. **Older adults involved in the arts have fewer visits to the doctor, require less medication, and experience less depression** than older adults not involved in participatory arts programming. There is growing interest in the community-level benefits of art, especially with respect to mental health awareness. Many communities use public art and cultural assets as a tool for health promotion. Community-wide artistic interventions are opportunities to advance a 'culture of health,' and address inequities in the social determinants of health.

**See case studies:** *Path with Art, STG Dance for Parkinson's, and Seattle Arts and Lectures' Writers in the Schools*

# 67%

**67% of music therapy participants with dementia felt less anxious and reduced their use of medication**

Source: Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, 2017

**45% of medical institutions nationwide offer some sort of arts program, with 8 out of 10 of these stating they do so to benefit patient recovery**

Source: Participatory Arts for Older Adults: A Review of Benefits and Challenges. Gerontologist, 2018





### THEME 3

## Neighborhood Vitality

The presence of arts is linked to increased neighborhood livability, community cohesion, and social wellbeing. Research ties the benefits of arts and cultural participation to the informal education and empowerment of the community, and to a sense of pride and shared sense of belonging. In neighborhoods with limited economic resources, engagement with arts and culture can create social capital that exerts a strong, positive effect on wellbeing. Arts also play an important role in fostering social connection and inclusion. **Arts participants are more than twice as likely to volunteer in their communities, independent of education, age, gender, or ethnicity.**

**See case studies:** *Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association, Washington Hall, Urban ArtWorks, Anandamela/Vedic Cultural Center, and Duwamish Alive! Coalition*

# 18%

Low-income neighborhoods with cultural resources have 14% fewer cases of child abuse and neglect, and 18% less serious crime than low-income neighborhoods without cultural resources

Source: Culture and Social Wellbeing in New York City, 2017

Concentrated cultural districts are associated with reduced poverty without neighborhood displacement, improved child welfare, and lower morbidity

Source: CultureBlocks Philadelphia, 2013

**“Arts provide an experience where people of all backgrounds can come together and enjoy something.”**

—2018 GMA Survey Respondent

## STATE OF THE REGION

### The (Mis)perceived Value of Arts & Culture

79%

of people believe arts benefit their personal wellbeing,

*and*

60%

cite the arts as a key factor in their decision to locate in the area

*but only*

28%

think arts and culture promote social change at a community-level.

According to a 2018 survey of King County residents.

This finding **does not align** with a growing body of national and international research and data on arts impact, or with our inventory of examples of arts advancing social change in King County.

Our work identifies where arts intersect with timely social issues such as:

- positive civic and educational outcomes for **vulnerable youth**;
- **social cohesion** in an increasingly diverse and disconnected population;
- an **aging population** living longer with disease;
- a state of emergency on **homelessness**;
- **workforce readiness** and the future of work;
- **safe, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhoods**;
- and **inequitable access to opportunity**.

## STATE OF THE REGION

### Our landscape scan of nearly 200 arts, cultural, and heritage organizations revealed

OVER

140

arts programs for youth and education, with 70% of those running for over eight years.

ABOUT

50%

of programs offered in health & wellness and neighborhood vitality have track records of over 8 years.

MORE THAN

4<sup>OUT OF</sup> 5

arts organizations report partnership outside the arts sector, including with

- schools,
- refugee and immigrant organizations,
- hospitals and clinics,
- senior centers,
- environmental organizations,
- city departments,

and many more.





## WHAT'S NEXT

What comes next is bringing the social impact of the arts to its full potential to advance community priorities. That can happen in at least three ways:

- 1 Invest in arts organizations, supporting both “on” and “off-stage” programming.**
- 2 Seek out ways to support, scale, and grow partnerships that cut across sectors to create interdisciplinary solutions.**
- 3 Add your voice and amplify this conversation. Accelerate the impact by integrating these ideas into your work and advancing awareness of arts’ social impact.**

For complete findings from ArtsFund’s Social Impact of the Arts study visit [www.artsfund.org/socialimpact](http://www.artsfund.org/socialimpact)

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