

# Culture and health go hand in hand

*"I have no doubt that we must make culture and health merge better. I would also like to see culture take up more space in the health area."* – Søren Brostrøm, Director General of the Danish Health Authority (1)

## Why link culture and health?

Art and culture evoke feelings and reflection, and can move and shape us as human beings. In recent years, research has shown that culture and health initiatives can promote mental, physical and social health. Art and culture can create new paths to health within both health promotion and prevention, and rehabilitation and treatment (2):

### Health promotion and prevention

Art and culture can:

- Develop social cohesion and reduce social inequality
- Support children's development (e.g. improve the mother-infant relation and support speech and language proficiency)
- Provide motivation for health-promoting behaviour (e.g. by promoting a healthy lifestyle or encouraging contact with the health system)
- Contribute to preventing bad health (including improving welfare and reducing the effect of trauma or cognitive debilitation)
- Support nursing and care (including promoting our understanding of health and improving clinical skills)

### Rehabilitation and treatment

Art and culture can:

- Help psychologically vulnerable people in all stages of life (e.g. by supporting recovery after postnatal depression and after trauma and abuse)
- Support nursing of people with acute illnesses (e.g. by improving the experience of and the results from nursing patients and people in intensive care)
- Support people with neurological illnesses (including autism, stroke, and dementia)
- Help with the treatment of non-transmittable diseases (including cancer, lung disease, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases)
- Support nursing and care at the end of life (including palliative nursing and grief)

## Social injustice in culture and health

Promoting mental health is one of the great societal challenges of our time. Overall, we know far less about prevention of dissatisfaction with life and psychological illness than about somatic illnesses. Art and culture offer an opportunity space, in which it has gradually been well documented that participation in arts, cultural and creative activities can promote mental health (4).

### Social inequality in mental health

The proportion of people with poor mental health is highest in the group with basic education as the highest completed educational level (17 %) and lowest in the group with a long higher education (10 %). The proportion is also high among unemployed people (29 %), people on early retirement (33 %), and others outside the labour market (37 %) (5).



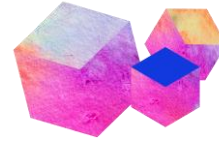
Denmark is one of the countries in the world where most antidepressant medicine is consumed. Approx. 50 % more is prescribed than the average for the OECD countries (8).

One out of 10 adult Danes uses antidepressant medicine. For those aged 80+, it is 1 out of 4 (9).

### Social inequality in cultural consumption

- The Danes are the greatest cultural consumers in Europe.
- People with a high level of education are more than twice as likely to participate in cultural activities as people with a low educational level.
- People with a low income level are most likely to go to the cinema, while people with higher income rates are more likely to visit cultural sites (e.g. historical monuments, museums) (6).

During the Corona lockdown in the spring, the socially strong young families had a far greater increase in digital library loans than socially vulnerable young families (7).



## A framework

*"Culture and health are a generic term for a field that includes a number of practices that take place primarily in social care work, health care, patient associations, and in the local community."* (4).

**Culture and health promotion** can be defined as:

*"Active involvement in a cultural activity that has been framed and is completed with a view to creating of health-promoting effect physically, psychological and socially."* (10).

## Five wide art categories:



### Performing arts

Music, dance, theatre, singing etc.



### Visual arts, design, and craft



### Literature



### Cultural experience

Museum visits, concerts, theatre etc.



### Online, digital, and electronic arts

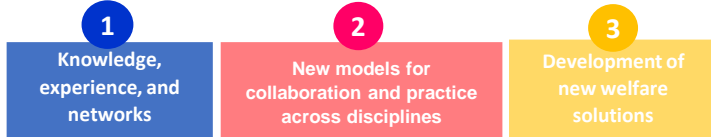
# What are we already doing?

## Aarhus has a Culture & Health Plan

The City of Aarhus has prepared a joint plan for culture and health, which is placed between our Cultural Policy and our Health Policy.

With the Culture & Health Plan, we will develop the field in close dialogue with partners locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, and continually gather and communicate knowledge and experience from the field.

The Culture & Health Plan includes **ten recommendations** distributed across **three main tracks**:



**The objective is to integrate art and culture through initiatives that promote health and well-being among citizens**

## What will happen?

Aarhus City Council has allocated DKK 6 million for the period 2021-2024 to the Culture & Health Plan. The funds will, among other things, go to a pool that supports culture and health initiatives for citizens, and to culture and health courses targeted at citizens within three welfare areas: children and young people, rehabilitation, and employment.

## Partnerships and networks

Aarhus is a part of several networks and partnerships regionally, nationally, and internationally. These include the regional networks [Network for culture, employment and health](#) and [The Health Alliance for Music and Sound \(SAML\)](#).

*"At the conservatory, we are particularly preoccupied with contributing to the track concerning knowledge and experience, and we are dedicated to and wish to contribute to the track concerning new forms of collaboration, as we feel that this is where we can actually create solutions within the field of culture and health." – The Royal Academy of Music (11)*

## Initiatives in Aarhus

A mapping of the existing initiatives within the culture and health area in Aarhus demonstrates a strong and diverse field. The initiatives have been gathered in a [case collection](#), which serves as inspiration and launchpad for further work in the area. The case collection shows, among other things:

**81 specific projects** aimed at improving citizens' health, welfare, and satisfaction with life in different ways.

**Strong collaboration** across the city's cultural institutions, business community, interest organisations, educational institutions, municipal players, associations, and volunteers.

[See more here](#)



# 0-100 years

## Where can we take action in Aarhus?



Art and culture can pave the way for a more holistic approach to welfare with a particular potential to elevate mental health and well-being.

The Health Promotion Committee wishes to contribute to the specific realisation of the Culture & Health Plan by focusing on three main themes:

**Employment • Communities • Culture in welfare**

## Employment

### The connection between culture, health, and employment

Putting culture in play as part of a wide employment effort has proved successful. In Aarhus, a number of initiatives based on culture production aim to strengthen vulnerable citizens' well-being, self-esteem, and competences, serving as stepping stones onto the labour market. Cultural activities work as good frameworks for practising compulsory attendance, social interactions, and everyday routines. This practice and learning to cope works because it takes place in a space that is separate from the health system's treatments, and those who are experienced as representatives and controllers from the municipality or the job centre (12).

### What are we already doing in Aarhus?

Examples of initiatives and options in the City of Aarhus

- **Youth Centre Skanderborgvej** offers a number of masterclasses with art production for young people as a way to improve well-being and as a first step towards the labour market.
- **The Writing School** is for young people under 30 who meet to focus on literature. Some of the students face social and psychological challenges. The aim is to create better writers and young people who are equipped for life ahead.
- **The Karavana Artists' House** provides an artistic workplace with a theatre and studio for adults with reduced psychological and physical functionality.
- **The Kragelund Culture & Contact Centre** is a culture and activity centre. Here, adults with mental or social issues can participate in creative activities and thereby improve resources for participation in society on a par with everybody else.
- **Cultural Vitamins** is an 8-week course for citizens suffering from stress, depression, or anxiety in job clarification processes. Through a number of cultural activities with the city's cultural institutions, the course promotes mental well-being and brings the citizens closer to the labour market.



### Facts

#### Employment and mental health


A significantly greater proportion is troubled by anxiety and tension among recipients of cash benefits or sick pay (20 %), people on disability pension (19 %), and people with self-assessed poor health (20 %).


Among young people (aged 16-24), a significantly greater proportion is troubled by anxiety and tension among those who are neither in employment nor in education (25 %) (5).


#### Culture and competences

Participation in art and culture initiatives promotes competences such as creative thinking, problem solving, and restoration of faith in own abilities (2).

#### National experience from Culture by Prescription

 Eight out of ten participants gained better well-being.

 The course has contributed to improved rehabilitation and coping skills.

 Almost half consider that participation has made them better able to handle a job (12).

### Where can we take particular action in Aarhus?

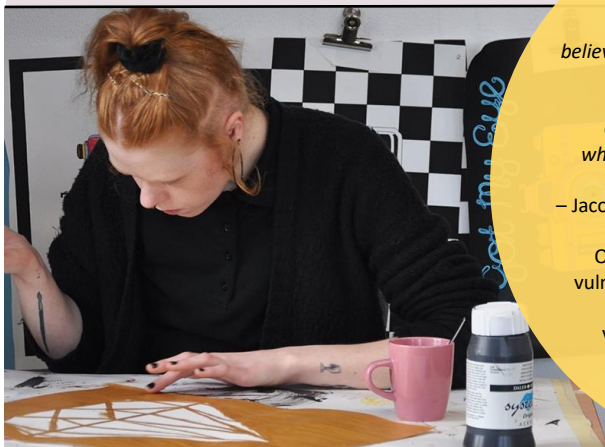
#### Citizens with an ethnic minority background

A large proportion of citizens with a non-western background are on public income support in the City of Aarhus, corresponding to 32.4 % (21).

**Men** are harder hit by mental health issues during unemployment. They are also not likely to seek out cultural options of their own accord (17).

*"The XL course was a step into the industry, with someone backing me, believing in me, and supporting me in that process. It was huge. For vulnerable people, if you can put it that way, Opgang2 is a safe place to land, from which you can later take a step into real life with the XL course."*  
– Jacob, former participant in Opgang2-XL.

Opgang2-XL is a training course where vulnerable young people meet and work in workshops with drama, music and visual arts. The learning course builds bridges to traineeships, education and jobs.





# Communities

## Sustainability and communities via culture

Culture has a uniting force that can create positive communities and mental health. Cultural activities help people develop friendships and get involved in the local community – also in rural districts (18).

As citizens, we have access to arenas, such as libraries, local community centres, and evening school activities, where we can meet for cultural activities, regardless of our qualifications and social background. Even so, citizens still have unequal access to culture due to physical, mental, and social barriers.

## What are we already doing in Aarhus?

*Examples of initiatives and options in the City of Aarhus.*

- **Aarhus Jazz Orchestra** is one of several cultural players who give concerts for the elderly at a number of the city's local community centres.
- **The Reading Association** establishes reading groups around Aarhus, gathering elderly or vulnerable citizens around literature and reading together.
- The annual literature festival, **LiteratureXchange**, focuses on literature dissemination aimed at young and elderly people in Aarhus, partly through collaboration with Student House Aarhus and many local community centres.
- **Culture Mates** support social meetings between newcomers in Aarhus in order to introduce the city's rich culture and leisure life and create a sense of community.
- Season after season, the **evening schools** provide cultural communities aimed at learning something new and creating something together.
- At the **Youth Culture House**, young people can express themselves creatively together with other young people. In connection with the Youth Culture House, youth residences have been established for students and vulnerable young people.



### Facts

People who work with art and culture are more likely to live a **healthier life**, including in terms of diet and physical activity, regardless of their socioeconomic status and social capital (2).

**Participation in activities** such as arts and crafts can improve self-assessed health and aspects of mental health and well-being (2).

An increasing number of people feel **lonely**. A total of 6.3 % of the population often or sometimes find themselves alone when they would rather be with others. This tendency is on the rise (5).

## Where can we take particular action in Aarhus?

Older men are often more challenged by extensive loneliness and poor mental well-being as compared to other sections of the population.

From a course in the City of Aarhus, we know that citizens who experience physical, psychological, or social barriers, such as dementia, social anxiety, or physical disability, miss options that are adapted and locally based.



*"With the Covid-19 challenges, not least the lockdown period, 2020 has shown conclusively how life-giving cultural activities are for everybody. Not least when you are together, but apart."*  
– Folkeoplysnings-samvirket (11)

## Culture in welfare

### Culture as a natural part of the institutions

By thinking culture into the welfare tasks, we can create new paths to health and welfare. Focusing on the entire person, culture can be integrated as part of the expertise and the approach in the city's services and institutions.

Here, the potential within children and young people, rehabilitation, and care are emphasised. With children, the art-related practice can strengthen social communities, relational competences, and professional development. Within nursing, music therapy can provide security and calm, and prevent an increase in medicine (14).

We also know that the positive gains rub off on the staff who are involved in the cultural activities. In addition to this, cultural initiatives can improve communication, relations and empathy between employee and citizen.



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*Times are crying out for opportunities to be human in some systems, which we feel control our lives."*

- Joy Mogensen, Minister for Culture

### What are we already doing in Aarhus?

Examples of initiatives and options in the City of Aarhus:



**Dance, language and well-being** is a course at Filuren Theatre for reception classes for refugee children and newly arrived children at schools in Aarhus.



**Hjortshøj Care Home** is collaborating with Aalborg University to test the targeted use of music and singing as a way to prevent and reduce citizens' outwardly reacting behaviour.



At the **Neuro Centre**, a new approach is being tested for rehabilitation **via music, rhythm, and movement** (the Ronnie Gardiner method) along with Aarhus School of Music.



With **Children of Music**, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra brings classical music to young families in Aarhus to study music's positive effect on children from their birth to their first day at school.



**AudioMove Explorer** is a digital tool at Katapult Theatre, which uses audio drama to help nursing staff and care assistants achieve better understanding, empathy, and communication with citizens and relatives.



**The Old Town** has courses for children with special needs in special classes and special schools. Participating in role playing, among other things, the children can move beyond their own limitations and inhibitions.

### Facts

**Children and young people** benefit greatly from participating in creative subjects. This provides coping and success experiences that increase self-esteem, just as the joint involvement counters isolation (10).

**Music therapy in dementia care** reduces unsettled behaviour and prevents an increase in medicine in people with dementia (14).

Experience from a **care home in Aarhus** shows that the targeted use of music in dementia care gives an increased sense of security, intimacy, and calm for residents in nursing situations, as well as increased memory through music, social activation, and better mood (15).

**8 out of 10**

think that art and cultural experiences in childhood strengthen children's learning (13).

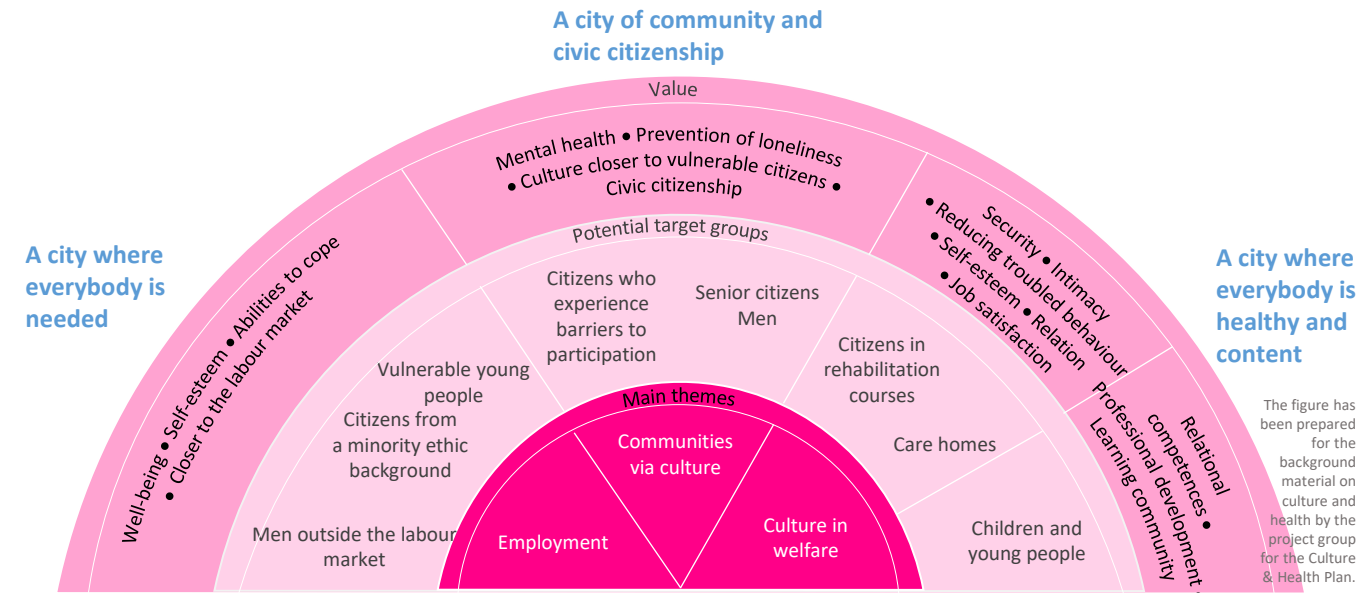
*"...we consider increased collaboration between the culture and health areas very positively. The courses created by The Old Town for elderly people with dementia, which many local community centres in Aarhus make use of, have become so useful precisely because they are created in collaboration between qualified staff from the care sector and the museum's experts in pedagogics, history and communication."*

- The Old Town (11)



## Summary

The culture and health field represents several potentials for creating value for the citizens. Using the build-up of culture as a driver for positive communities, and applying targeted use of art and culture in welfare, the individual citizen can experience value in the form of the ability to cope, self-esteem, quality of life, and relations. Further to operating with a direct cause and effect connection, the values are indicators for people in a culture and health initiative to *move towards* the desired targets by building up personal, existential, or professional elements.



## Opportunity spaces

When it comes to promoting the use and spread of art and culture in our welfare areas, experience in the field shows the following opportunity spaces that could serve as useful inspiration for us in Aarhus.

### The connection between culture, health, and employment

#### Targeted use of culture

It would be an advantage for us to work more deliberately with art and culture to strengthen vulnerable citizens' well-being, self-esteem, and coping abilities as prerequisites for moving closer to the labour market.

#### Cultural bridge-building

We know that if citizens in time-limited cultural courses do not move on to another community, this may have a negative health effect (22). Consequently, we need to rethink the bridge-building function, so that we work with targeted bridge-building from completed courses to other cultural options in the city – just as we have bridge-builders to, among other things, sports and leisure activities.

#### A natural part of the palette

At the strategic level, we know that bridge-building between contacts, such as job consultants and health consultants, and cultural workers, is crucial in the recruitment of citizens (12, 20). Can we integrate referral to cultural courses as a part of the employment effort?

### Sustainability and communities via culture

#### Equal participation

We know from the work with vulnerable citizens, including citizens with disabilities and support needs, that there are inequalities in health and in the accessibility of cultural options. It would therefore be an advantage to bring culture closer to vulnerable citizens so that they can participate on their own, equal terms. This could be achieved, for instance, by building bridges between local players and existing meeting places in the local communities – e.g. in connection with social housing initiatives.

#### Enterprise

The youth area has good experience with offering creative environments where young people can express their creative urges and build positive communities. This experience could ideally be spread out to include other citizen groups, for instance lonely elderly people.

### Culture as a natural part of the institutions

#### Learning communities

We know that collaboration with professional artistic practice can create settings for inclusion and a stronger learning community. Can participation and teaching in art courses be given greater weight in day care offers, schools, and clubs?

#### Culture and health competences

In the other Nordic countries, common supplementary training has been introduced for artists, health and social workers. Can we in Aarhus also work to build practice competences between culture and welfare?



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## Photo credits

The photos in the paper have been submitted to the Culture and Health Plan's Case Collection, except for page 3: Cultural vitamins in Aalborg / page 4: Martin Dam Kristensen / page 5: The Old Town and Læseforeningen.

