

What is “Bealtaine” ?



“And then in the evenings, I can paint away for a few hours. It makes life a lot easier to live, I think, if you have interests. I think what kills people is lack of interest...”
(Interview with Bealtaine participant)

What is Bealtaine Festival?

A month-long nationwide celebration of creativity as we age

An Age & Opportunity initiative

The creativity of older people, of us as we age, and artists who explore age

Festivals: Experiment and Promote

“Culture happens at cross-roads, at markets, at festivals, where people rub shoulders - Peter Sellars

What is Bealtaine?

A Collaborative Arts Festival

- Commissions
- Produces
- Promotes
- Partnerships
- Invitations



Where does it happen?

- National and Regional Cultural Institutions
- Public Libraries
- Community groups
- Active Retirement Associations
- Day and Residential Care centre
- Individual artists



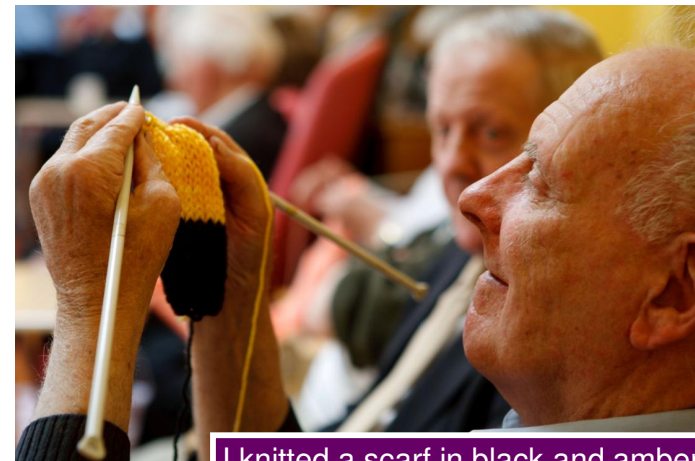
'In Stitches' at Thomastown Day Centre, Bealtaine 2010
 Photo: Jeff Harvey

What happens in Bealtaine?

- Diverse organizations make Diverse art
- A Nationwide festival made Locally
- A place in time for individual and organizational encounter and experiment



'In Stitches' at Thomastown Day Centre, Bealtaine 2010
 Photo: Jeff Harvey



I knitted a scarf in black and amber – though the amber has yet to be added; I will see what happens in September and maybe add it then! I thought the event was great fun when it was happening. I'd been taught to knit in school so picked it up very easily again for Bealtaine.
 John, Thomastown Day Care Centre, Kilkenny

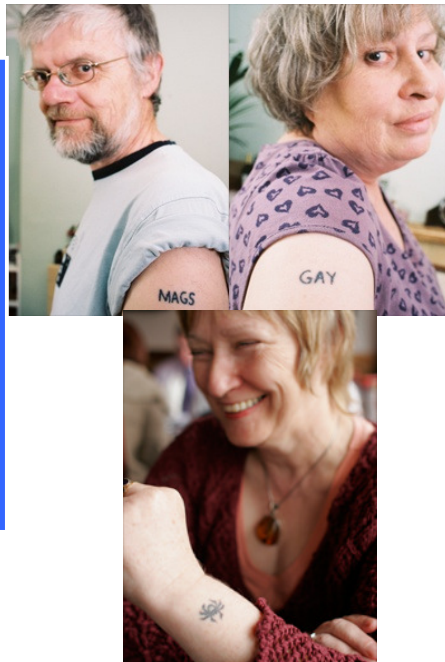
They say life begins at 40; how wrong that is. Mine began the day I heard the ad on local radio for the Blow the Dust off your Trumpet project. I met 23 strangers there who are now all in daily contact with one another. For all of us, our lives are taken up with our orchestra which we are continuing to run. Who needs therapy when you can have an orchestra! Geraldine McKibben, Blow the Dust participant Cork



"Silver Stars" Sean Millar and Brokentalkers

To talk to people who have a completely different story than I do, that might help me when I am older. I'll think where I heard it, as part of a photographic show – a memory set, to arm me with knowledge.

Aidan Kelly, photographer



As a choreographer, where the work is developed with the dancers, by them, through them, each individual's input is very important. To have this luxury of working with such experienced and mature people is great for me because it's giving me something I don't have.

*Ríónach Ní Néill,
Macushla Dance Group*





Dawn Chorus, Dollymount, Dublin

Oh what a beautiful morning. The scene was idyllic. We were facing the beautiful Lough Eske, with the swans swimming gracefully on the calm waters and the Bluestack Mountains rising majestically in the background. We would gladly have sung for another hour; nobody seemed anxious to leave. The whole experience was magic and plans were being voiced for next year's event.

Lana McNamara, Donegal Regional ARA



Does it Work? The “Why” of Evaluation

- A challenge for cultural projects engaging like Bealtaine across the disciplines of health services, community focused organisations or the growing “age sector” is the ability to evaluate and define. We sometimes think of evaluation as an exercise in translation across specialist language.

The “Why” of Evaluation

- What we repeatedly witness is that artists pursuing their initiatives authentically will produce extraordinary moments in the lives of older people and those who care for them. The reason we engage in evaluation is that we limit this possibility if we fail to articulate benefit in the language of other sectors.

The “Why” of Evaluation

- The art of Bealtaine often involves risk taking. It asks people to try something new; an encounter, an experience, a dance step, or an emotional risk. Living involves calculated risk. When we take away risk do we take away life? Therefore what right have we to remove all risk from older people? Evaluation for Bealtaine is sometimes about making the case for artistic risk.

What do we measure?

- Annually – scale, engagement, delivery.
- Multi-annually – what and how are we achieving?

An Evaluation **The Bealtaine Festival**
A Celebration of Older People in the Arts
Áine Ní Léime & Eamon O'Shea
Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland, Galway



Evaluation of the Bealtaine Festival

Professor Eamon O'Shea
Dr. Áine Ní Léime
Irish Centre for Social Gerontology
National University of Ireland, Galway

Participation in the arts - a Human Right: Article 27 of Universal Declaration.

- Historically arts not a priority in Irish public policy
- Barriers:
 - Economic determinism
 - Low priority – not on policy agenda
 - Harsh economic climate did not encourage participation
 - Unequal opportunity – education, socio-economic background

Health and social benefits; evidence from literature

- Key factor in adaptation to ageing
- Benefits to physical health, well-being and increased morale
- Reduced loneliness
- Increased social engagement
- Maximising capabilities

Aims of evaluation

- Assess impact of Bealtaine on:
 - involvement of older people in the arts – dissemination of festival
 - impact on practice of organisers
 - visibility of older people
 - in national arts programmes
 - in local arts programmes
 - older participants
 - well-being and social gain for older people
 - involvement in the community
 - arts policy, national and local

Methodology

- Documentary analysis
- Literature review
- Postal survey of one active retirement association in each county
 - (253 completed questionnaires from 14 counties)
- Postal survey of all 435 Bealtaine organisers
 - 187 (43% response rate)
- Interviews (individual and group),
 - participants, facilitators, policy-makers, artists, organisers, Age & Opportunity personnel.

Growth and dissemination of Bealtaine

	1996	2007
Number of events	52	1300+
Number of participants	7000+	51,245+
Number of counties involved	8	26
Number of organisers	36	337

Satisfaction with Bealtaine and impact on society (views of organisers)

- Artistic quality of events/programmes
good/very good **85%**
- Satisfaction with operation of Bealtaine
Satisfied/fairly satisfied **88%**
- Is Bealtaine successful in promoting positive attitudes to ageing in society?
Successful **72%**
- Access to Bealtaine for all sectors of older people?
Yes **63%**

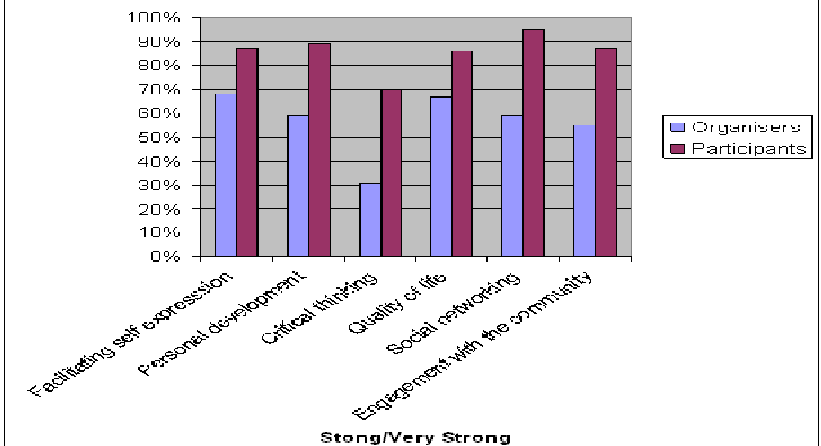
Impact on profile in national/local arts programmes: views of organisers

- Stimulated arts events that wouldn't otherwise have happened
Yes **79%**
- Impact on national arts programmes
Strong/very strong **30%**
- Impact on local arts programmes
Strong/very strong **55%**

Most important aspects of Bealtaine (views of organisers)

- Stimulates participation of older people in the arts 74%
- Encourages social/community networking 74%
- Opportunity for celebration 46%
- Incentive to organise events 29%
- Showcases artistic achievements 28%

Impact on older people from perspective of organisers and participants



Impact on older participants

- Personal development (89%):
 “You learn a lot....when I started I knew practically nothing about modern art...it gives you an open mind, that you take a thing in....you look and examine” (Visual arts programme participant)
- Self-expression (87%):
 “I have to say I have found my voice since joining in this group” – (member of writer’s group)”

Impact on older participants

- Social networking (95%):
 “I have formed a big circle of friends who are interested in similar activities” (member of writer’s group)
- Quality of life (86%):
 “It gave me a new lease of life. I’m a widow and I live alone. It’s marvellous to have something to get out for – to get involved in and then to forget your pains and aches and get completely immersed in the whole thing”

Impact on participants

- engagement with the community (87%)
“I’m out and about more and meeting people. I’m also becoming more aware of people and their needs”
(Member of Active Retirement Association)

“It has broken down the walls of the hospital and it has involved everyone, especially the community.. If we ask them they always come up trumps..”
(Bealtaine organiser in a hospital)

Impact on arts policy

- No official national policy on older people and the arts
- Local authorities – no policy but 60% mention “older people” in their arts plan.
– many have extensive programmes
- Most national cultural institutions have programmes for older people, but not written policies

Main findings

- Sustained growth and development of festival
- Bealtaine has fostered:
 - New participation in the arts – enhanced creativity
 - Awareness and engagement with the arts
 - Enhanced profile of older people in national and local arts programmes
 - Personal development, self-esteem, QoL
 - Social connectedness
 - Co-operation among NGO’s, state agencies and services and older people

Remaining challenges

- Ageism in Irish society and within public policy
- Functional approach to care of older people
- Uneven spread of Bealtaine geographically-
- Low involvement of some groups – e.g. men , the very old and those who lack transport
- Lack of dedicated policy at national level
- Need for more funding to encourage spread of Bealtaine and to ensure high artistic quality

Recommendations

- An explicit written arts policy for older people as part of Positive Ageing strategy – role of aesthetic in ageing well
- Increased funding for staffing and programming to make Bealtaine sustainable into the future
- Equality of access to creative programmes for all older people

Growth and Scale

	1996	2012
Events	52	3756
Participants	7000	115724
Organisers	36	675



Founded International Conference.
Mentored Festivals in Wales and Scotland.

Why Does it Work?

- Individual transformation comes first
- Ground Up.
- Broker across.
- Scale brings mainstreaming
- Evaluation toward Policy

Why Does it Work?

- Participation: “momentum” leading to “quality”
- Caretaking not Controlling
- Scheduled redundancy
- We take risks
- People talk for themselves



Underlying Considerations:

We are all experts in our own lives

We celebrate older artists and those bringing to the arts a lifetime of experience regardless of circumstance

Hiking the horizon

How? By Inspiration!



Organising the events brought me and my team into contact with new people and organisations and those contacts will be maintained. I felt emotional and privileged to be involved in something so immensely positive. Bealtaine makes me believe that people are good.

*Sandra Adams
Director Mill Theatre*

“Ireland is fortunate to have the Bealtaine festival, celebrating creativity in older age. Developed by Age & Opportunity, and operating nationally, it celebrates ageing in all its diversity. It fosters meaningful arts experiences at a grassroots level using a vast collaborative network involving partners locally and nationally. Bealtaine changes the way organisations interact with older people as well as challenging attitudes about what it means to age in Ireland. **The Bealtaine festival is truly inspirational.**”

John Beard, Director, Department of Ageing and Life Course, World Health Organization

What kind of old do you want to be?





www.bealtaine.com

What kind of old do you want to be?

What kind of World are you going to
make as you grow older?

bea(taine)festival
celebrating creativity as we age
Brought to you by Age & Opportunity