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#ALittleBitOfGood

How can creativity help us to do a little bit of good where we are and with what we've got?

Claire Murphy-Morgan, Artistic Director of Newcastle based arts charity Monkfish Productions and Northumbria University MSc Psychology Postgraduate, talks about *A Little Bit of Good in The World*: an arts project helping to unlock the creative potential of us all as active citizens by sharing *good* news for a change!

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Desmond Tutu says: “Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

As an arts organisation working with communities in the North East of England, Monkfish feels the urgency of these words of wisdom now more than ever.

We are a small charity with big ideas on co-making work with artists and communities in empty shops, village halls and community centres across Tyne & Wear. Over the last 4 years in particular a bleak picture has been emerging: one of disproportionate poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, exacerbated by the current political climate of polarisation, inequality and indifference. A diet of constant bad news on social media and mainstream news has compounded a sense of powerlessness for both individuals and communities we work with. As artists and creative practitioners, we began to realise we were also feeling the same sense of powerlessness ourselves. But amongst all of this despair there are shining examples of hope, kindness, and positivity from these same communities and neighbourhoods: the volunteers making soup for the elderly people up the street, the lady who brought in a whole new sewing kit for another lady at one of our craft sessions in Gateshead, volunteers organising family lunch clubs in a former pit village and even simply sharing a smile or a cheery good morning.

We felt it was time to share the good news as a force for positive change, and to be creative about it!

What’s good about ‘good?’

Good deeds in the context of positive psychology is well founded, with previous studies finding correlations between sharing good news and positive experiences with an enhanced sense of wellbeing, happiness and life satisfaction (Lambert et.al, 2012) and research findings demonstrating that acts of kindness have wellbeing benefits to both the person doing the good deed as well as the recipient (Pressman etl.al, 2014; Nelson et.al, 2016). Kindness and sharing good news need not be time consuming or expensive and, most importantly, a positive act can be force for enabling agency for both parties. Sharing little bits of good also normalises acts of positivity, encouraging others to share their stories of kindness and compassion.

The story so far: hope and collaboration

At the very beginning of this year, Monkfish hosted *A Little Bit of Good in The World* as a group workshop free and open to all as part of Newcastle City Council’s Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) programme for January 2020. Using this year’s HMD theme of Standing Together as the focus, the workshop used some drama-based activities and creative discussions to explore what we mean by ‘good.’ Most of the Ideas that workshop participants came with were; acts of kindness, practising compassion in thinking about our place in the world, confronting discrimination and living more in tune with the environment.

With the support of Arts Council England, Monkfish is currently collaborating with Projects4Change: a young people's organisation in Newcastle upon Tyne to run an artists' residency in Cowgate and Blakelaw in the Outer West of the city. Young people are working with local textile artist Melanie Kyles to make a collective quilt of all that is good about their local community, and creative sessions with illustrator Josie Brookes have given the young people the opportunity to reflect on what good they can continue to focus on, including what good they can take forward in learning from lockdown, and how positive lessons going forward and how to share their journey online.

The project has a strong social media focus and the plan is to continue to take this forward: how in the mire of negativity and misinformation we can at least provide a platform for people to hear good news stories and to share creative ideas to generate discussions in our communities. Following on from Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January 2020, we have subsequently been using the 27th of each month as our #LittleBitOfGood thunderclap day, where we share the good across a number of social media platforms and invite people to share their examples of good news, hope and kindness.

The 4 C'S Framework

A Little Bit of Good in The World uses the following 4 C's as a project framework:

#Creativity - How can creativity help us to express how we feel about ourselves, our world and our place in it? Arts and cultural activities, apart from the obvious benefits of self-expression, give us the opportunity to reimagine our world in new and different ways – be that through painting, dance, music or creative writing as examples.

#Connection - How can we use one or more of the above creative methodologies to connect with each other, perhaps in ways that we did not know were possible? How can this process allow us to become more empathic, and to understand or even just hear each other better?

#CriticalThinking - How can the creative and artistic processes allow us to think deeply and more objectively about the world? In a world full of constant 24-hour feeds populated by 'fake news' and conspiracy theories, how can we interrogate the information we are being given: is it accurate and fair? How does the information we are viewing help us to create a world based on social justice, equality and inclusion?

#Citizenship - How can all of the above 3 C's processes support us to be active citizens: individual moral agents with a sense of being able to make a difference and to share that positive differences with each other? Returning to the creative process, what imaginative ways can we work together to make the world we live in just that little bit better, and how can we do this together?

A Little Bit in The Future...

The project is in its very early stages, but we are looking forward to continuing to spread the good in order to build a bigger picture of positivity, continuing to make a creative space whereby individuals and communities can retain or reclaim a sense of positive agency over their lives, and to be reminded that we can all make a difference, however small.

A Little Bit of Good in The World is the opportunity to put positive psychology approach to creative practice. What makes life living? Gratitude, Joy, resilience, compassion, hope, self-esteem: these are just as important to communities and to neighbourhoods as they are to individuals. As Desmond Tutu says: *"We are each made for goodness, love and compassion. Our lives are transformed as much as the world is when we live with these truths."*

www.monkfishproductions.org

<https://www.facebook.com/littlebitofgoodintheworld>

Twitter: @Monkfish_Good

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