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Response to the Arts Council South West Funding Review

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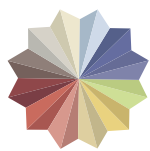
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Kaleido

Executive summary

Kaleido Arts is disappointed and concerned with the recommendation to cease its funding. We are disappointed because we believe Kaleido Arts is now at a point where it is uniquely placed, as the only South West regional arts organisation led by disabled people, to help ACESW deliver its important Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan 2007-10 for the South West region. We are concerned because we believe the review process has been flawed and is based on what we believe has been an unfair review which sadly repeats many of the criticisms of the Arts Council funding approach highlighted by the McIntosh review.

We welcome the commitment that ACESW has made in recognising diversity as one of its six priorities and note that to achieve this priority ACESW states that:

“Disability arts and arts and disability needs to be strengthened in the region... One of the key outcomes will be the development of arts organisations that are led and managed by disabled people.”

As an organisation led by disabled people we had hoped that, given these aspirations, ACESW would want to continue to work with us in implementing these important priorities. We see the establishment of an independent national disability advisory group as a positive development towards achieving the Equality 2025 goals in relation to the arts. We are looking forward to working with any similar ACESW regional advisory group. If Kaleido Arts funding is removed, however, this will destabilise the only South West arts organisation focusing on disabled and Deaf artists and audiences with an 85% Deaf or disabled Board and a 50% Deaf or disabled staff team. For the Deaf community in particular the loss of Kaleido Arts would mean that there is no organisation covering the region focusing on the needs of the Deaf community in relation to a wide range of arts.

Ring-fencing the funding within ACESW will mean that ACESW, an organisation which does not have a majority Deaf and disabled Board, nor a high proportion of the workforce from the Deaf and disabled community, will control this funding rather than an arms length organisation controlled by Deaf and disabled people. This cannot be said to be ownership by Deaf and disabled people and artists of the direction of future plans to improve accessibility in the region. On the contrary this would be a retrograde step. We would ask ACESW to carefully consider its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and in particular the enhanced Disability Equality Duty imposed by government on public bodies in April 2006. It may be helpful for the Regional Council to be made aware of the guidance note published in March 2009 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission about Public Sector Equality Duties and Financial Decisions. See Appendix Seven for further information.

Despite the difficult history, and accepting some shortcomings in our own performance in the past, Kaleido Arts still seeks an effective and positive partnership with ACESW. If this were



achieved we believe that together we could make a significant impact on the barriers that ACESW note that Deaf and disabled artists and audiences continue to face. With the largest and growing database of Deaf and disabled artists in the region, built up over many years, and an effective digital presence, we have a great deal to offer. We also have a full permanent staff team for the first time since relaunch in February 2008 and clear plans for the future owned by the current staff and Board, rather than inherited from previous regimes. This has been achieved despite the difficulties in managing the organisation and recruiting staff, while the organisation is being continuously reviewed by its main funder.

Since 2006 a great deal of Kaleido Arts' Board and staff energy has had to be diverted from service delivery to dealing with ACESW reviews. The organisation has existed since then in a continuous state of review and this has seriously hampered the independent development of the relaunched Kaleido Arts. In May 2008, less than six weeks after the new Director took up post, he had his first meeting with ACESW staff and the first topic raised was 'the disinvestment process'. As an opening meeting this did not foster the development of an open and supportive partnership.

The Director and the Board at Kaleido Arts believe that the review process has been flawed and unfair. We believe the review has been used to justify a predetermined decision made some time ago and that it is based on an 'independent report' that was co-authored by an ex-employee/Director of Equata (Kaleido Arts predecessor). The review process repeats many of the criticisms highlighted by the McIntosh review of 2008.

We ask the Regional Council to consider fairly and thoroughly the evidence put before them in this Response Report. We are confident that as a result Regional Council members will decide to maintain funding for Kaleido Arts as an important partner for ACESW.

This response report will:

1. outline the positive developments made since the relaunch by Kaleido Arts, which have been overlooked by ACESW officers;
2. address directly officers' concerns about Kaleido Arts;
3. present our concerns about the unfairness of the review process;
4. present our plans for the future and how these fit with ACESW plans.