

Silo working and community engagement

So when I first started
in Belfast Exposed, 21 years ago,
it was, the heart of it was the photography
and the community photography.
We then moved to this building
and what happened in this building
was the community photography was left to the side
and the work of other photographers
would have been shown
and the focus was put on it.

So, as we grew we had lots more activity,
but weren't joining it up
and we developed what would be
the silo mentality within the organisation.

So the focus, at this stage, was on the gallery.
That's where the main focus of the organisation was.

The community partners who I worked with
felt as if the gallery was off limits
and some of the community partners and, actually,
people coming in to the organisation
would often refer to the people
in the front office completely separate to me
not realising they're actually my work colleagues,
so we are one organisation.

So the silo mentality almost had gone beyond
the four walls of Belfast Exposed
into the community partners
and general public as well.

The aspect of that was
that you just continued on with
the work and developing that work.

You sort of got lost within yourself in doing that
and you were aware of the gallery
and others outside of Belfast Exposed
seeing only the gallery.

There were two catalysts for change.
There was funding from Paul Hamlyn,
for organisational change programme
and we got a new director in Belfast Exposed.
The front office had become
a very vibrant place.
There was a mindset change,
with people showing interest
in other people's work.
People who gradually started
showing an interest
in the community engagement
that I had undertaken,
not just for a financial reason,
but for artistic quality as well.
Previously, it hadn't worried me
that I was down the back,
but now I wanted to be part of that vibrant team
that was brought and built by our new director.
I realised that I needed
to be in the main office now,
to be part of that conversation,
and what I could bring
to that conversation within Belfast Exposed.
With the new mindset at work,
my colleagues were showing an interest
in planning with me,
interest in what I was actually doing
and then, after it was done,
reflecting with me to see what went well,
how did something go
and how can they help in future,
how can we integrate it
into the rest of the organisation.
The organisation was starting
to promote the community engagement

equally with the gallery downstairs.

A community engagement exhibition
was created the same as a gallery exhibition.

What really helped me to change
was the organisational appreciation
of the archive and the community work.

This meant a lot to me.

It was now valued within the organisation at a very high level.

My role also changed and I became
part of the senior management team.

So the key ingredient for me is communication,
where we're now actually talking to each other.

But everybody's now shown
an interest and a passion
for what each other is doing
and this shared way of working is really reflecting
in how Belfast Exposed now is moving forward.

I think before I started working there,
even volunteering here,
it was very much separated,
but definitely, since I've started working
at Belfast Exposed, the community and the gallery
have very much been one.

And so the gallery has a lot of community
and engagement programmes come here.

A lot of schools come here for tours and things.

So I definitely see the gallery
and the community side being as one.

I've noticed over the past couple of years
that the gallery role that we were putting on
is more resonant with the communities
who I would work with.

They themselves feel that they can come now to the gallery.

So the things that have brought us
together as a team are physically working together
in the same room, communication with each other,

the work that I do becoming valued
and myself being a valued member of the team.