

## Culture, arts and the community

Image by Glenn Williams. E-mail ideas for 'Big picture' to [jon.sutton@bps.org.uk](mailto:jon.sutton@bps.org.uk).

Dancers perform a traditional Malay dance as part of a promotion of Malaysian culture on the streets of Essex. Musicians accompany them, playing the gamelan – a traditional South East Asian orchestra comprising instruments crafted in Indonesia and imported to the UK.

Glenn Williams, a community psychologist and Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University, took the photo. 'I'm heavily involved in studying the impact that community arts programmes can have on people's health and well-being, and here I was trying to capture how such events can help to foster a sense of community and enhanced feelings of well-being for the participants and audience alike.'

Williams says he is fascinated with the dynamic of how cultural norms and values can be transmitted through artistic and creative activities. 'Having lived in South Africa as a youngster and witnessed miners dancing the gumboot dance, and gone to a Greek school that celebrated its

culture with traditional dances passed down the generations, it was a wonderful eye-opener to be part of this street audience in the middle of an Essex town.'

Williams has also been working with Escape, a Community Arts group based in Stratford-upon-Avon who provide participatory arts workshops for people coping with chronic physical and mental health conditions. 'What is particularly telling', notes Williams, 'is that many of the participants in this scheme I've been evaluating have said to me "I'm not a very arty person" and yet I have been struck by the high level of skill they have demonstrated. Given the right facilitation by experienced artists, I have seen these participants really flourish with what they've produced and a subsequent increase in their self-confidence. Through art, people from many different backgrounds can be brought together to enjoy and celebrate an awe-inspiring expression of emotion, thought and community spirit.'

