

Positive pointers for artists

Using the arts to engage young people at risk

Preparation and partnerships

Preparation for this particular and challenging area of work requires artists and arts organisations to ask and answer many questions of themselves and of their potential working partners.

Preparation

There are many questions that you can ask yourself as an artist when requested to undertake this type of work, but the following three questions may help you be clearer about your involvement:

- is this really an area of work you want to be engaged in?
- do you have experience of working with targeted young people?
- do you have the time and personnel to plan and prepare for this project?

There are publications to support you: *Providing the Best: guidance for artists and arts organisations on assessing the quality of activities provided for children and young people*, published by Arts Council England (2006), covers key areas, questions and provides checklists.

Partnerships

Most work with young people at risk can be framed within what is known as multi agency provision, and stems from cross-cutting programmes and strategies to deal with the needs of young people at risk and the needs of society. These cross-cutting initiatives will involve more than one government department or agency, typically covering the key areas of education (Department for Education and Skills), health (Department of Health), crime (Home Office) and regeneration (Department for Communities and Local Government).

The contracting for the delivery of programmes targeting young people at risk may be equally complex, involving for example: Connexions Service, Police, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and large voluntary and community sector organisations (VCS).

It is important to understand the contracting and delivery arrangements of the key agencies involved, as your art project will be sitting within these structures. You will need to be clear about your roles and responsibilities in the delivery structure and be able to identify key staff who will be directly supporting and working with the young people.

Projects and participants

Project planning and delivery

During project planning, careful consideration needs to be given to all aspects of the project that could contribute to the participants' success and sense of achievement including:

- clear workshop structures and delivery styles – accessible and understandable
- time management – times that relate to the young people's lifestyles
- location – needs to be practical for you as practitioners and ideally a neutral space for the young people
- availability of refreshments – many arts projects for young people at risk have found that food and fuel are vital before a project session even begins
- host organisation co-workers – are they able to work with you and alongside the young people
- lead-in times and follow up activities – meeting up informally before a project begins and, crucially, having time for celebration, reflection and planning of realistic follow up activities, are very important

Working with and understanding your participants

Engaging young people who have been targeted as at risk or hard-to-reach is an art and, some would say a craft. There are experienced arts organisations who have charted some of this territory and have mapped the journeys and stages that young people go through when participating in arts programmes.

A key example is *Breaking the cycle of failure* by Doncaster Community Arts (darts), who have examined the impact of the arts on pupils excluded from mainstream school as a result of emotional, behavioural, psychological and social problems. The Engagement Matrix, which emerged out of this work, clearly charts the layers and stages of engagement, and identifies the journeys made by participants from disengagement, to curiosity, involvement and acceptance, through to success.

(See Resources and support)

Evaluation and evidence

The need for working within evaluation and monitoring structures is increasingly part and parcel of this area of work. The need to build appropriate and rigorous evidence for the role of the arts is relevant to, and welcomed by, both the arts and the social policy sectors.

Evaluation

You are very likely to need to take part in monitoring and evaluation

procedures and structures provided by your commissioning and delivery agencies. It is important to understand the criteria and the methodologies required and to allocate realistic time for these activities.

You may also want to evaluate for your own purposes. *Partnerships for learning* by Felicity Woolf (2004) provides guidance for everyone involved in arts education projects in understanding evaluation clearly and to evaluate effectively, according to their particular needs. It covers the key areas of evaluation planning, collecting evidence, assembling and interpreting, reflecting and reporting and sharing.

Evidence

There is a need to provide hard evidence of the effectiveness of any programme or intervention with young people at risk. Current priorities include the development of evidence based practice and rigorous evidence, and the arts traditionally have been seen as providing mainly soft evidence, using only qualitative data, rather than quantitative studies.

A key example of providing both types of evidence is the work of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation with Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). *Creating Chances* gives a clear and practical insight into the reality of developing and delivering arts projects, whereas the accompanying report *Serious Play* provides the rigour and analysis of seven projects and was conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).

(See Resources and support for further useful and practical publications)

Resources and support

There are people and publications to support the projects you are delivering in challenging and demanding situations.

Resources

Here are some useful and practical publications, many of them available as free downloads.

Keeping arts safe, second edition, Arts Council England, 2005 offers guidance for artists and arts organisations on safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults, produced with assistance from the NSPCC

Providing the Best: guidance for artists and arts organisations on assessing the quality of activities provided for children and young people, Arts Council England, 2006

Hirst, E, & Robertshaw, D, *Breaking the cycle of failure – examining the impact of arts activity on young people attending Pupil Referral Units in*

Doncaster, darts, 2003 (available as PDF via email request to: inclusion@thepoint.org.uk)

Hughes, J, Ed: Miles, A, and McLewin, A, *Doing the Arts Justice: A review of research literature, practice and theory*, Arts Council England, 2004

Johnston, C, *House of Games: making theatre from everyday life*, Nick Herne Books, 1998

Ings, R, *Creating Chances: Arts interventions in Pupil Referral Units and Learning Support Units*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2004

Wilkin, A, Gulliver, C, Kinder, K, *Serious Play: an evaluation of arts activities in Pupil Referral Units and Learning Support Units*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2005

Woolf, F, *Partnerships for learning: a guide to evaluating arts education projects*, Arts Council England, 2004

Training

Training and continuing professional development is vital to maintaining and growing professional standards and you may want to consider the following three training areas:

- training of artists in working with challenging young people
- training of key staff in using the arts with their client groups
- training of artists in key competencies of host/partner sectors, for example, education, youth work, youth justice

Supervision

You may have formal supervision structures but it is more common to set up a phone-a-colleague system to give you practical and professional advice during project delivery.

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