

**Guildford Arts
Pilot Outreach Project 2009**

**Evaluation by
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BACKGROUND SUMMARY

In 2009 Guildford Arts, with support from Guildford Borough Council and Electronic Arts, created a pilot project with the intention of exploring the potential for providing arts activities for young people in Guildford who are socially excluded and/or do not usually participate in the arts.

The project had three elements, planned to take place between May and July 2009, each 5 – 8 weeks long and to be held in youth or community centres.

1) Digital Arts Project

Working with Jelly Tree Productions, participants learn and develop VJ-ing skills, leading to presenting these at an event in Guildford in July.

2) Dance Project

Working with The Dance Movement, a series of hip-hop workshops will lead to a performance at Street Clash on 19th/26th July.

3) Samba Project

A Samba musician will lead workshops, leading to a performance as part of Guildford fiesta on 20th June.

This project was especially creative in its use of peer mentors for each strand of activity. The peer mentors received training and mentoring support from the lead artist on each project, and co-led the activity with the artist.

Project manager Mary Branson was recruited to identify project partners, artists and peer mentors for each piece of work and to work with them to complete the project.

PROJECT AIMS

Guildford Arts instigated the Guildford Outreach Project, with the following aims:

- 1) To provide appropriate arts projects for young people who do not usually access arts organisations and activities
- 2) To support arts organisations working in the Guildford area to work with these groups of young people, feeding in to their core activity long term
- 3) To measure the impact of these arts projects on participants
- 4) To provide an opportunity to train and work with peer tutors to co-lead these projects
- 5) To contribute towards assessing the need for additional arts facilities in Guildford

To what extent have these been achieved?

1) Grafham Grange does not provide any arts lessons and so the drumming workshops clearly brought the arts to some young people who, certainly via their school and rarely at home, do not access arts activities (n.b. two participants do already play other instruments). This is also clear for the young people at the Guildford Short Stay School (previously the PRU), although their recollections of previous arts activities may be somewhat unreliable. A variety of arts activities are available at Park Barn and the Barn Café, but the hip-hop dance was new to 2 of the 3 responders.

It is also clear that the Guildford Arts projects were able to help identify young people with particular aptitude for the arts. George at Grafham Grange who will continue to work with Danny the peer mentor; Ali at the Short Stay School, was one of three boys given the chance to continue working with Craig Hills and peer mentor Josie.

2) These projects supported organisations working with young people, but not, in this instance specifically arts organisations. The projects offered additional activities at the Short Stay School and Grafham Grange, rather than supporting core activity, although both the drumming and VJ-ing projects were able to extend their reach with their partner organisations by continuing to work with the young people after the projects had ended. Unfortunately this offer was not taken up at the Short Stay School due to family problems with the young people and (possibly) a lack of commitment from the staff.

3) Measuring the impact of the projects on the young people has been a particularly problematic process, for several reasons and has resulted in the need to rely heavily on anecdotal evidence.

- **Hip-Hop:** It was not possible for an evaluator to attend sessions and observe the activity. Three evaluation forms were completed by participants after the event, but these cannot give a full picture of the projects' impact, as a total of eight young people took part. However, comments include:

'I feel I have achieved new dance moves and confidence to dance'. participant, hip-hop

Hannah, manager of the Barn Café remarked that the continued attendance of the participants was testament to how much they enjoyed the project: *'they wouldn't have come back if they hadn't liked it'*.

- **VJ-ing:** the responses are mainly verbal via the teaching and support staff, and project team, as the young people were reluctant to talk to an unknown person (the evaluator). The staff seemed reluctant to assist the young people in completing evaluation forms, which may have given a more direct reflection of the project's impact. However, it should be noted that the young peoples' recollections can also be unreliable. Four evaluation forms were returned, but as written by the staff, not the forms sent by the evaluator. Four boys and one girl took part in most of the project.

One participant, Jordan, 'excelled' at this project, according to his support worker, putting in extra time to get the result he wanted. Jordan suffers from low self esteem, and his support worker was hugely impressed by the change she saw in him during this project.

'Better than doing lessons,' 2 participants, VJ-ing

'The children have shown incredible levels of concentration', Chrystal, Guildford Short Stay School

- **Samba drumming:** the responses, received from the four students who completed the project (from a core group of six) have been 100% positive:

'It was awesome', participant, samba drumming

'We will be keen to continue with band / drumming workshops now we've had a good start.' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange

There is no doubt, from discussions with the project leaders, peer mentors and partners that these projects were valuable to the participants. Staff at the short stay school were keen to emphasise how so many other factors can affect the young people, that unwillingness to take part, for example, is more likely to be as a result of outside factors, than the arts activity on offer. The staff were positive that the project had made an impact on the young people and that it had been worthwhile.

4) Peer mentors have been a key part of this project, in the way they have negotiated the relationships and learning between participants and artists, but also in the way they have been given such a rare opportunity to learn about professional arts delivery and working with young people. As a result they have significantly added to their own skills and potential as arts professionals (or indeed in any other industry). Tash (peer mentor, VJ-ing) believes this project has opened the door for future work and is considering working with children's charities.

The peer mentors have been able to reflect on the projects from a different view point, to show the young people how you can choose the arts as a career path, to explore their own practice from a new perspective. Danny, (peer mentor, samba) for example has offered to go back to Grafham Grange and work with George, an especially musical student. Nina (peer mentor, hip-hop) learnt a lot from Rachel Deadman (dance artist), including new ways of keeping participants interested, especially those with a low attention threshold.

'We couldn't have done this project without the peer mentors', Craig Hills, video artist

5) Conversations with the partner agencies and Guildford Borough Council support the belief that there is a need to for these kinds of projects in the Guildford area, especially at a cost effective level as budgets are limited. However questions need to be asked about the target groups – i.e. what 'kind' of young people does Guildford Arts want to work with and how they can be most effectively reached. It is also vital to remember that every potential partner organisation will have a strategy which guides its decision making about the additional activities it can provide and external agencies it can work with. Hannah at the Barn Cafe for example, is considering a healthy-eating project. She will research potential delivery partners, based on her needs for the project, rather than waiting to be approached. Guildford Arts (and other providers) cannot presume that partners are waiting to be offered workshops and are able to respond quickly and efficiently when asked.

There are many influential factors in making a decision to work with a provider, such as child-protection issues which may outweigh the quality of the art provision, for example. For the Short Stay School, child-protection and data-protection appear to be the most important issues, resulting in Judith Lindfield not appearing to comment much on the art after the event, but being more concerned with the operational aspects. Sustainability is also a key concern (see below).

'We get occasional flyers delivered offering workshops, although these are usually drama based, not often visual arts or music. I am not aware of any other scheme that offers arts based workshops locally. I often look into exhibitions to visit and for drama companies but not for music based workshops.' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange

'We have previously been involved with the Guildford processions etc, who have come in and worked with our young people. I am always on the look out for new and varied crafts/activities/workshops we can run at the Cafe, and outside of the Cafe! We are looking to run some cookery workshops in Feb/March using Kings College facilities.' Hannah, manager, Barn Cafe

'Music and dance are fairly easy to find, but the VJ-ing was free, and the only film-based offer, which made it more attractive' Christie Childs, Guildford Short Stay School

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Strategic

This evaluation was not asked to consider whether Guildford Arts should be offering and/or managing arts projects for young people in the Guildford area. However it is vital that the organisation considers this as part of its strategic aims.

Guildford Arts will need to appreciate that its own expectations of outcomes, delivery, partners and participants may vary greatly from those of the partners and participants themselves, and must, therefore, work from the outset with all interested parties to ensure they are working to the same agenda, and anticipate similar outcomes.

It is also evident that whatever Guildford Arts offers to potential partner agencies must fit with the partner's strategic aims if the projects are to succeed. To this end, it may be that Guildford Arts chooses to proceed in a more flexible way, possibly as a project funder, rather than deliverer, or offers funding, plus delivery and management if required by the partner.

Credibility

Prior to this project, Guildford Arts was unknown as a provider of arts activities for this target group. This may have resulted in a lack of credibility with potential partners who may, perhaps be more likely to respond to those they already have relationships with. Mary Branson found getting to meet agencies difficult, but this was key if the agencies were to refer young people to take part.

However, thanks to this pilot project, especially Mary's work in creating relationships, re-configuring the projects when necessary, ensuring that the projects were completed, and, in some cases adding extra sessions, Guildford Arts will have gained a level of credibility which will be beneficial in the future.

Content

In future this should be negotiated with the partner agencies, and, ideally, include the artist who will deliver the project. In this case, the hip-hop proved to be highly popular, selling out quickly. This may be due to some participants having already tried hip-hop or other dance forms; it may also be related to the influence of TV programmes such as Britain's Got Talent, and the success of dance groups Diversity and Flawless. VJ-ing and samba mean a lot less to most people, of all ages, which may, possibly, have made the recruitment more difficult.

It should also be remembered that while it is presumed all young people are computer literate, for example, the Short Stay School reported that their students are generally only interested in computers as a gaming tool – the VJ-ing helped them to try out software and explore computers from a different point of view.

Sustainability

Many of these young people are used to being let down, and the partner organisations may see 'pilot projects' come and go. Future activities should consider issues of sustainability from the outset.

SPECIFIC PROJECT-RELATED

Issues of performance

Working towards a finale performance for the projects became an issue. The hip-hop participants failed to attend the final workshop session, which may have been due to its timing, as schools had broken up, but it is likely that the idea of the performance may have frightened them away.

'After they did one performance I'm sure they would be happy to do more, but the fear of the unknown got the better of them this time round.' Rachel Burn, peer mentor hip-hop

For the project at the Short Stay School, the performance was initially to be as part of an U18s *Assembly* event at the Boiler Room, Guildford, but became a viewing of the finished videos as part of a broader mid-term presentation to parents. At Grafham Grange, the performance element evolved from the original concept of playing as part of Guildford Fiesta to a presentation to parents, as part of an 'in-house' event at the end of term.

'The boys really enjoyed playing in front of an audience and as you could see they really did progress and are now keen to develop those skills.' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange

'Perhaps if there was a 6 week course run, without a performance, and then the following term another 6 week course taking them on a bit further and helping them to feel confident in their dancing and then a performance, they would feel better prepared and more likely to commit to the performance. After they did one performance I'm sure they would be happy to do more, but the fear of the unknown got the better of them this time round.' Rachel Burn, peer mentor, hip-hop

Timescale

The original timescale and expectations for the entire project proved to be unachievable very early in the process. Originally, delivery was intended to take place in May, June and July. However as Mary began work in April it became clear that this was not a feasible timescale. May, for example has two bank holidays and a half-term, which limited the days available to run the workshops, also this is a peak time for exams which affects the participation of some young people.

Duration of projects

The duration of projects and length of sessions must be considered with partners when a project is being developed in order to make the activities as accessible as possible. Young people often live in the 'now' and without effective parental or agency support they easily forget things. This is compounded when additional pressures such as exams are taking place at the same time.

'Quite long sessions – 2 hours, quite hard to concentrate' participant, hip-hop

'maybe 8 weeks was quite a long time for the young people to commit to - the first 6 weeks were very productive and energetic, everyone came and it felt very positive, but the last two weeks were either very or completely empty.'
Rachel Burn, peer mentor, hip-hop.

There are mixed views at Guildford Short Stay School on whether the intensive week was more or less successful than, perhaps, the same number of workshops on a weekly basis. However, the technical requirements of this activity meant that a longer term approach was impractical.

'The children like to see instant results; they have difficulty seeing the bigger picture, even 5 days is a long time to them.' Chrystal, support worker, Guildford Short Stay School

Perception of Value

'Value' has several meanings in this context: it is both financial and a measure of how the projects will enhance the experience of the young people. At the Short Stay School, it may be that the offer of a free project caused the partner agency to be less committed for example. Perhaps in future, the notion of how much the projects cost to create should be explained to the partner organisations, to help them appreciate exactly what they are being given. It is important to understand, from the outset, what constitutes 'value' for the partners and participants.

Value for money, in terms of quality of delivery, in this instance, is judged at very high by all partners.

'The drumming being free did make a very big difference to us at GGS. We could manage a small contribution; however, it wouldn't be anywhere near enough to fund such workshops ourselves.' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange

Commitment of partner organisations

Working closely with partner organisations to fit their strategic aims from the outset should result in their ownership of the project, and, therefore, the support necessary for the provider, the leader and team and the evaluation.

At the Short Stay School it appeared very much as if there was little commitment to the project. Staff came and went, but no-one stayed with the participants throughout the week or attempted to learn with them. Receiving feedback proved almost impossible and, as a result, the success can only be judged by the feelings of the staff.

In contrast, at Grafham Grange, Claire Manson embraced the project wholeheartedly and, with her colleague Lloyd, they learned how to drum with the boys and took part in the final performance. Without their commitment it may be that they boys would have drifted away.

The artists

The selection of artists proved to be vital. Not only was it important to choose artists who are experts in their area of work, but they also needed to be constantly flexible, spontaneous and resourceful. At the Short Stay School Craig needed to frequently re-think the plans for VJ-ing sessions, depending on the attention span and interests of the highly demanding young people, not just in general, but on a daily basis.

'You really did wonders with our boys and they'll never forget it!' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange, to Andrew Walker

'Rachel (Deadman) led them so well in a way that was a slow enough pace to learn from scratch but also engaging enough to be presenting a challenge to the guys who were there.' Rachel Burn, peer mentor, hip-hop

'Craig took on board the needs of the young people and kept them involved.' Christie Childs, Guildford Short Stay School

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

At the Short Stay School Mary was able to find funding for additional sessions. It was hoped that three students would begin to work towards an Open College Network unit, giving them a valuable accreditation. Sadly this did not come to fruition.

'During the sequential non-group sessions only Jordan came to more than 1 session. No-one competed enough sessions to get a certified award.' Craig Hills

The projects also had non arts-related outcomes, in terms of participants working in groups with students who were not their friends, or in the same year groups. At Grafham Grange particularly, the empathy between the group was commented upon.

'The workshops are going well and the boys are improving (although I'm struggling!) The best bit for me is watching them work together as a group.' Claire Manson, Grafham Grange

MOVING FORWARD: IN ORDER TO SUCCEED

Any future projects must have complete buy in from the partner organisations, ideally in designing the project, and certainly in ownership of project. Projects must fit with the needs of the participants in terms of content, presentation and access, for example.

Guildford Arts should work with the partner agencies and the participants; be guided by their strategies, issues and timescales. However, if they clash too much with Guildford Arts' aims, then find partners with more closely aligned interests.

These can't necessarily be big number impact projects unless there are many support workers. Some young people almost need 1 to 1 help. This raises costs and may make projects impossible to fund.

It cannot be presumed that Guildford Arts' needs, interests and timescales are also those of the partners' and/or participants. If relationships and expectations are managed effectively on all sides, projects will have an even higher likelihood of success.

Put the young people at the centre of the project; explain the project to them at the start of the process; give them the space to 'fail' or change as the project progresses. Don't presume that having special needs or attending a special school will mean that the children do not have artistic ability or understanding. At Grafham Grange Andrew Walker (samba artist) needed to keep a very musical child interested in the project while making it accessible for the others.

Be aware of and value the broader successes of the projects, for the artists, peer mentors and project manager, for example.

Be positive. Welcome and learn from projects, even if they don't match original expectations.

Guildford Arts should be pleased to have explored arts provision for young people in this way and, based on this project, should certainly find future projects much easier to instigate and manage.