

The groundbreaking work of the Digital Creations project with young people

Report of Digital Creations Youth Project



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Introduction

Raising the aspirations of children and young people at risk of teenage pregnancy is a key element of a successful teenage pregnancy strategy. In order to reduce teenage conceptions, a package needs to be put in place to target the most at risk young people living within hot spot areas of the city.

City Arts was successful in a tender made to One Nottingham for Neighbourhood Renewal Funds for the Digital Creations project. Using vocational arts training and activities, Digital Creations aimed to increase aspirations of young women living in St Ann's, with the long term aim of reducing teenage conceptions.

Research shows that a mother with low educational aspirations for her daughter at age 10 is an important predictor of teenage motherhood. The Nottingham City Teenage Pregnancy Partnership is pleased to have seen the active engagement of parents whose daughters accessed the project. We hope that other organisations will learn from this to support future and current developments to increase aspirations and improve outcomes for young people at risk.

The Digital Creations project was an excellent programme for young people and engaged young women who have an interest in creative arts, providing additional opportunities for young people to perform in front of others and raise their self esteem.

It is important for young people to have access to a range of enjoyable opportunities that will increase self esteem and raise aspirations. Digital Creations has shown that art is a fantastic tool to engage and actively support young people to enjoy and to achieve.

Irene Kakoullis

Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Manager
Nottingham City Teenage Pregnancy Partnership



Report By Alma Cunliffe

Artists:
Emma Fox, Neil Smith, Nicholas Wright



The Project

In 2006, City Arts attracted £38,000 for a new project working with young people from one of Nottingham's teenage pregnancy hot-spots.

Launched in February 07, 'Digital Creations' offered opportunities for young women aged 14–16 from the St Ann's area to participate in arts projects, using dance, music and digital arts. The aim was to support the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy team in ensuring that Nottingham reduced teenage pregnancy amongst young people.

The project was supported by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and One Nottingham partnership.

Young people were referred from the St Ann's ward of Nottingham. They were offered access to an exciting project involving music, dance, visual arts and film. Formal accreditation was also given to all participants, using the Young People's Art Awards.

**learn to
DJ and VJ
'n' DANCE**

**be
creative
with
Digital
Creations**

TASTER WORKSHOPS START
26TH OF FEB
MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS
6.30pm - 8.30pm
@ college street
arts education centre

**contact Alma
@ City Arts
0115 9782463**

places available for
14 - 16 yrs old females
from the St. Anns area

The project, which ran until March 2008, was collaboratively devised and resulted in a visual/music/dance performance which was showcased at College Street, Nottingham Playhouse, City Arts and at the Love 2 Share – Teenage Pregnancy conference at the Council House in Nottingham. The young people also made a film and a DVD of their experiences.

The Journey

February – March 2007

The project began with taster workshops delivered to a variety of young people at Base 51 and at the Arts Education Centre (College Street, Nottingham). These were open sessions available to young people in order to promote recruitment.

As part of Sexual Health Promotion, Qdos Dance Theatre delivered a performance and workshop forum for discussion on the related issues of alcohol and sexual health, titled *“Under the Influence”*. The group had a chance to learn and share their experiences in a safe environment.

The young people who attended these initial sessions also had the chance to meet and explore the different aspects of dance, VJ and DJ skills.



“I think I am becoming more artistic – a good experience and it gives youngsters a chance to get things off their minds. I have learned different styles of dancing”

Participant

April – June 2007

The project continued with the recruitment of more young women from the St Ann’s area. This was achieved through partnership working with other organisations, such as the Multi Agency Locality Team (South).

Meetings involved several key workers in contact with young people within the St Ann’s area, representatives from Social Services, Educational Psychologists and Behavioural Support Services. Promotion of the project was also focused on the Learning Support Unit at Elliot Durham School and at the Sycamore Centre. Workshops were subsequently held at Base 51, the Sycamore Centre and College Street.

Central to the development of the project was the ongoing evaluation of the young people’s creative and personal interests.

“I have gained new friends and dance buddies. I have also learnt how to sort of DJ & VJ.”

Participant



Participants were also given the opportunity to access three events during the programme. These were the exhibition *Heroes in Transition* at Angel Row Gallery, *Breaking Convention* at the Nottingham Playhouse and a performance by *Urban Angel* at College Street – Art in Education Centre.

The group took part in a community event in St Ann’s called ‘*holding hands*’, where they had a display stand offering creative activities.

The programme incorporated opportunities for the young people to gain accreditation through the Arts Award run by Arts Council England and Trinity Guild Hall. Available throughout England, this scheme supports young people to develop as artists and arts leaders.

The Arts Award is a nationally recognised qualification at three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold. (See <http://www.artsaward.org.uk>).



“It has made me become quite a bit more confident and it has opened my shell. It has been a pleasure to meet new people and make new friends.”

Participant

“I think our project was a huge success, especially the dance, performances and completing their (Bronze) Arts Award.”

Digital Creations Staff Member

Over the course of several months, four professional artists ran workshops in dance, DJ, VJ and costume design. This resulted in a collaborative, choreographed performance that was showcased at College Street in June 07 before an audience of friends and family. This was filmed and edited by an artist for the young people to evaluate their progress.

July – September 2007

During Summer 07, animation and music production were introduced into the programme. Workshops took place at City Arts, College Street, Dance 4 and Quantum Matrix Dance Studio. The young people attended 'Pirates of the Karaoke – *Curse of the Singing Girl*' at the Sandfield Theatre, performed by young people from the Nottingham Youth Theatre.

Dance sessions continued, with high profile dance director Joseph Hall and additional sessions with Emma Fox. The group also visited the national agency in Nottingham, Dance 4, accessing professional dance space and obtaining information about dance in the East Midlands.

“In my opinion, the arts have an enormous positive effect on personal wellbeing and help to encourage high self esteem and desire to achieve more.”

Digital Creations Staff Member



Cultural outings and community events included involvement in the Nottingham Carnival. The group were invited to design costumes at The Chase Community Centre and had the opportunity to take part in the Carnival Parade, which was viewed by thousands of spectators.

“The young people responded well to all the creative ideas from the artist.”

Digital Creations Staff Member

'Samanya', a dynamic and innovative service for young people offering training and support, was invited to facilitate a series of workshops relating to teenage pregnancy at The Sycamore Centre in St Ann's. Samanya used drama and arts based workshops to explore the issues that young people faced. The programme included an open session for participants to explore different aspects of teenage pregnancy as part of the "Feeling Your Way" programme (linked with the Nottingham City Council Teenage Pregnancy Strategy). "The workshops have been designed to allow the views and feelings expressed in each session to be fed back into the drama process. The programme has been thoroughly researched and provides a unique learning experience that can raise awareness of an issue and help raise confidence and self esteem." Samanya



“(My daughter) has developed self confidence, being able to express herself and interact with others – works better in a group. She was referred because she had some issues and (the project) brought her out.”

Participant's Parent



Mixed sessions at The Sycamore Centre allowed young men and women to share their knowledge and experiences relating to sexual health, including contraception, emotions and feelings surrounding pregnancy.

During the summer, the group was invited by the St Ann's Youth Groups to join in another cultural experience. The group were amongst 40 young people who were taken to London for an overnight stay. They took part in a dance session at the prestigious Pineapple Studios with a professional dancer and then watched the West End show "Fame – The Musical".

“Routine, kindness and encouragement. Access to cultural events that were not previously known to them...they definitely enjoyed participating.”

Digital Creations team member

October – December 2007

Referrals for the 'Digital Creations' project continued and more young people attended the sessions held at College Street and City Arts. The group further explored ideas on how to develop their performance skills.

Cultural visits continued including to Broadway Cinema, where they saw a documentary film about St Ann's and attended Episodes – a Dance Youth Platform organised by Dance 4, to showcase young people's dance achievements.

The group was invited to perform at an Art Awards event at Nottingham Playhouse, organised by the Nottingham Regional Co-ordinator. They showcased part of the 'Digital Creations' performance and discussed taking part in the Bronze Arts Award to an audience of over 50.

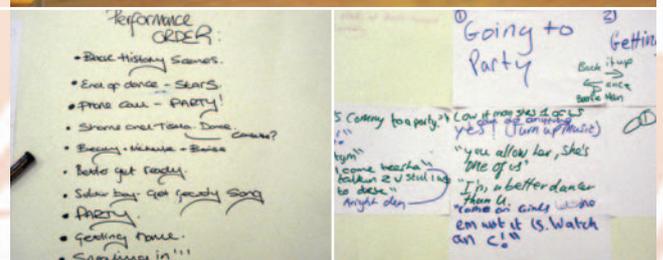
“I like to think that the projects link young people and it is ongoing. Young people do not see it as support they are getting, rather something they are doing”

Project Referrer

“(The performances were) fantastic. I videoed one of them – the effort that was put in by all was brilliant”

Participant's Parent

Workshops to develop and rehearse the 'Digital Creations Performance' continued, as the group geared up to perform at City Arts' 30th birthday celebration event (17th December). To complement the performance, the girls had created a set for the show which highlighted the life of a teenage girl living in St Ann's. The City Arts performance was a huge success, with a over a hundred people attending, including the Mayor of Nottingham, Mohammed Munir, who presented Arts Award certificates to young people from previous projects.



CASE STUDIES

January – March 2008



The last Phase of 'Digital Creations' included a thorough evaluation of the project and worked towards an exit strategy. The main focus was to ensure that each participant evaluated the

project in a way that reflected individual needs. Final workshops included designing a DVD cover, assisting and recording young people singing, creating a short dance piece and finishing their Arts Awards. As part of the programme a member of staff from Base 51 came to tell participants how they could access their service and get information about sexual health and other information or assistance for young people.

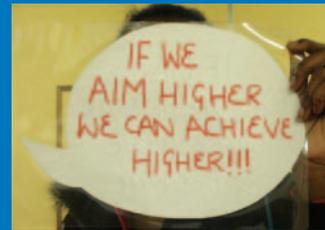
The participants attended a health event for 13 – 19 year olds called the 'Valentines' MOTWOT (Men Only Time, Women Only Time). It was organised by Nacro and held at Nottingham Forest Football ground. This event included arts activities, performances by other creative young people from the city, health information and guidance.



The final event for participants was a showcase at the *Love 2 Share* event. Two young women talked to an invited audience about their experiences on the project and what they

had learnt. They also showed the previously created DVD about 'Digital Creations'.

Evaluation was central to 'Digital Creations'. Throughout the project there was constant evaluation with the group, exploring the progress of the project and how to improve it. Ideas and feedback were gathered at the end of most sessions. This peer-led evaluation shaped the way the project developed to suit the expressed learning needs. An overall evaluation of the project was done at the end, so that City Arts could identify what the young people had learnt and achieved during the whole process. The response of participants was good; they had a great deal of enthusiasm for learning new skills, as well as working as part of a team. The final evaluations included visual representations, spoken and written individual comments and group discussions.



CASE STUDY – YOUNG PERSON

A young woman attending the 'Digital Creations' project felt that she had learnt new skills, not only DJ-ing and VJ-ing but also supporting others by teaching her peers new dance moves or how to work equipment. She felt her major success was being able to perform to an audience and meet new people. She enjoyed the whole experience, "I enjoy it lots", but felt that the project could possibly be improved if there were young people involved from other Nottingham areas. She said some of the issues that she was interested in were listened to and discussed. She also believed that topics covered during the whole of the project were of benefit and increased some of her knowledge in a creative manner.

"Experiencing different things, listening to other people's ideas and at the end we get a good outcome."

CASE STUDY – REFERRER

The referrer of one participant felt that the youth arts programme at City Arts as a whole was very valuable "I like to think that the projects link young people and it's ongoing. Young people do not see it as support they are getting, rather something they are doing". This fits in well with the work and support that the MALT (Multi Agency Locality Team) does. "It helps with the development of social skills, especially those young people who are isolated, whose parents are on low incomes and have no other recreational activities. I think it is brilliant." The referrer believed that art could have a positive effect on health and well being. She felt art was a good medium to engage young people in personal topics such as sexual health:

"It's not a traditional route so you can do more – actively involve and engage (young people) creatively"



CASE STUDY – PARENT

A parent of one of the young women who participated in the project commented that her daughter had "developed self confidence, is able to express herself and interact with others – work better in a group". The benefits that the project had given her made a difference in school. At parents evening, the parent had discussed her daughter's participation in the 'Digital Creations' project and the teacher had noted an improvement in behaviour "interaction with teachers improved – communication has been noted at school especially".

"The issues that were raised during the project such as sexual health linked in well with the performances – (the young women) realising what information was out there for them, (giving them) confidence in dealing with the situation."



Questionnaire Results

Evaluation was central to the Digital Creations Project. City Arts created a questionnaire for young people to complete at the end of the project, to find out what they thought about art, health and further opportunities. Key issues included discovering what they were doing socially and what they were interested in, places they were attending, issues that were important to them, opinions of activities available and whether they had enough information about activities in their area.

The questionnaire revealed that the majority of young people felt that the activities on offer to them around their area were good enough and many of the young people attended several activities in their spare time. These included going to the cinema and concerts and attending activities at youth centres. Issues that were important included being bullied, exams, girlfriends/boyfriends/sex, being healthy, money, parents/family with 'my future' coming top of the list. Young people were interested in varied art activities, with music being the most important.

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Team in Nottingham had been concentrating on the hotspot areas and Digital Creations formed part of new approaches to decrease Nottingham's teenage pregnancy. By using other activities, courses and strategies to increase sexual health information, young people could become better informed about their choices and so have increased aspirations, particularly those teenagers at risk of becoming pregnant at a young age.

The general response from young people indicated that there was a majority who would like to have children in their twenties, with 83% believing that a career is just as important as having children. Young people felt that art could be a good medium to facilitate discussions on sexual health. They felt it was a platform that could help raise awareness or open discussions with young people about issues in a non confrontational and engaging way. One young person said: *"I'm sure that they could make otherwise boring issues appeal to young people"*.

The last part of the questionnaire concentrated on young people's future plans and creative choices. A high percentage of young people opted for employment, with 67% wanting a career in the arts. After completing the questionnaire, they were asked to reflect what would help them make better choices in the future. Most young people felt that they needed more help to plan their future, more ways in which they could volunteer or help others and more organised art activities and things to do.

The arts sector has a great array of career choices for young people, including music, dance, drama, graphic design and photography. The choices are varied, but not all young people know about these options.

City Arts is proud to assist in helping young people – especially vulnerable young people – to access art opportunities, extend their knowledge and experiences within the arts and support and guide future creative choices.

The full report of DIGITAL CREATIONS can be downloaded from www.city-arts.org.uk
Or please email Alma Cunliffe Creative Project Coordinator on: alma@city-arts.org.uk



Supported by:



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