

off the street and into the arts

Bring together community artists and young people during school holidays and you'll reduce crime and help young people's personal development. It's not a new idea, but now there's money for it, reports Anita Holford, with a national scheme that saw Arts Council England involvement for the first time last year, and continues this year in more areas, with more money.

Artists and arts organisations have been saying it for years. If you want the arts to help solve society's ills, then some of the funding has to come from outside the arts, and the work has to be based on serious partnerships at all levels of the system. Last year, in a scheme called Splash Extra, the government put its money where its mouth is – and lots of it – to use arts and sports to reduce youth crime. £8.8 million from the New Opportunities Fund was spent on getting young people at risk of committing crimes involved in arts and sports activities. And now there's more money, for more areas, during more holidays – and an expectation of three years of funding.

Splash Extra was a major achievement for Arts Council England – after months of talks with government, it secured £1.5 million of the money, for arts activities in 10 crime hot-spot areas in England as part of the Street Crime Initiative. The initiative was launched by the government in March 2002 to address the continued rise in robbery – despite falls in other types of crime – with a programme of action in the ten police force areas which accounted for 80% of the problem. The idea for Splash Extra was to build on Splash, a holiday scheme that had been delivered by the Youth Justice Board since 2000, and to complement this and other similar schemes run by the Connexions Services (Connexions Summer Plus) and the Home Office (Community Cohesion Initiative).

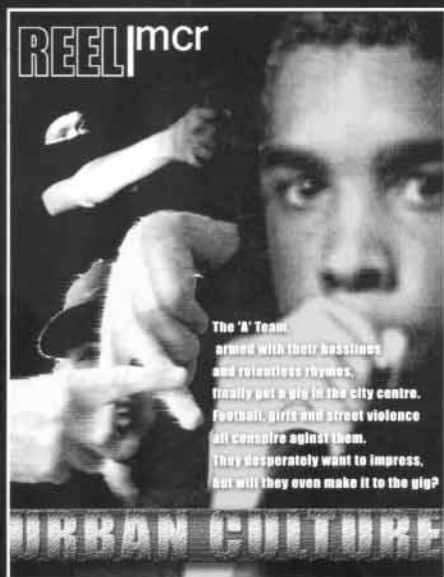


Splash Extra 2002

- 125 arts organisations
- 216 schemes with an arts element
- 1,700 arts activity sessions
- 13,455 participants aged 9–17 in the Arts Council programme
- 7 Arts Council regions – East Midlands, London, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire
- activities included circus skills, puppetry, crafts, dance, drama, writing, multi-media, music, visual arts
- Splash Cymru: 66,000 young people involved in schemes in Wales run by Youth Justice Board partnership-funded with Welsh Assembly.

Partnership working

The scheme raised the profile of the arts in social justice work to a level that had never been experienced before, both locally and within central government. Partnership working was certainly one of the scheme's biggest achievements and opportunities. In each local area the scheme was administered by delivery agents – a voluntary, community or statutory agency – in conjunction with Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), the Connexions service, the Children's Fund and other providers, depending on the area. Nikki Crane, Senior Officer for Social Inclusion at the Arts Council, believes the impact of these partnerships is wider than the programme itself: "Splash Extra and its successor is creating important opportunities above and beyond the programme itself. The partnerships will flourish and continue to create new opportunities for artists – and not just in youth justice."



REELmcr, a film production company based in Manchester, worked with the teenagers in Gorton, East Manchester to produce a film about gangs as part of Splash Extra. The young people were participants of On the Streets, an independent project which works with those who have been failed by youth services and school. There is little tolerance to young people in the area, and the area suffers from gang related violence, street crime and drug use.

Positive Activities for Young People in 2003

This summer New Opportunities Fund (NOF) joins forces with DCMS, Youth Justice Board, Home Office, DFES and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on holiday initiatives for young people, under the 'Impact' umbrella. £25 million will be spent getting young people at risk of offending off the streets and into arts and sports activities during each school holiday over a period of three years. £12m comes from the DFES; £12m from NOF and £1.5m from the Home Office. A support service will be provided by the Youth Justice Board. Funding allocated to regional government offices, who appoint lead agents – mostly Connexions services – who will bring together local stakeholders to develop a delivery plan.

Objectives:

- to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- to support children and young people back into education
- to provide sustained access to quality arts, sports and cultural activities
- to bring together different communities to provide opportunities for personal development
- to encourage volunteering and active citizenship

Arts Council England and the Unit for Arts and Offenders urge artists with appropriate experience to keep in touch with youth agencies in their area, particularly Connexions, as well as Arts Council regional offices, to be kept up-to-date with developments.

Building on success

The evaluation report for the Arts Council element identifies the strengths of the arts programme as: addressing the social problems that were affecting young people, changing group dynamics, motivating participants, allowing them to explore personal issues, and giving them a sense of pride and achievement. The arts activities were also effective in dealing with specific issues such as graffiti vandalism, and providing access to high quality facilities.

Government must have considered the scheme a success too. £25 million is being put towards a similar initiative for the next three years – provisionally called PAYP – Positive Activities for Young People – in a huge effort to co-ordinate the activities of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills, the Youth Justice Board and the Home Office – and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is taking a leading role. The scheme will be extended to all regions, and all school holidays, meaning PAYP activities will be taking place for 13 weeks of the year. The initial commitment is for a year, but with the expectation that it will be extended for a further two years.

Miracle working

So far, it seems, so good. A government that's thinking in joined up ways, artists that are involved in serious cross-sectoral, cross-departmental partnerships, and the money to deliver the work. Yet the fact that the arts part of the scheme got underway and managed to deliver around 1,700 activity sessions, involving 13,500 young people across seven Arts Council regions is little short of a miracle when many arts organisations had as few as three weeks notice.

The Arts Council only knew the funding would be available eight weeks before the scheme was due to start, and it's clear this affected what could be achieved. The evaluation report for the Arts Council activities says the short lead-in affected the ability of arts organisations to consult with young people; to produce new activities tailored to the target groups; to build strong relationships with partners and agree roles and responsibilities; to secure slots in the Splash Extra timetables for their activities and to publicise them properly.

In addition, many artists simply weren't available at such short notice.

Jane Beardsworth, Head of Development at Arts Council England North West says that, despite this, the scheme was an opportunity they couldn't afford to miss: "We didn't find out that the funding was available until three to five weeks before the scheme started, but it was never a question of whether we do it or not. People were very positive – there was £270,000 waiting to be spent in our area, and it was an opportunity for experienced people to make new partnerships and develop their work."

The funding was distributed through the seven Arts Council offices covering the target areas and two regional co-ordinating agencies (Theatre in Prisons and on Probation, in the North West, and the Writers in Prison Network, in the West Midlands). Together with the Unit for Arts and Offenders, which co-ordinated and distributed information, these organisations contacted the artists and arts organisations. In most cases, the artists then contacted the YOTs and scheme co-ordinators directly to offer their services.

Quality first

Those who took part had experience of working with young offenders or those at risk of offending, as Angus McLewin, Executive Director of the Unit for Arts and Offenders explains: "In order to be effective, to recruit and retain the young people, the main criterion had to be quality. Artists had to be able to deliver, so we advised people only to enter into the programme if they had experience of this type of work."

Jane Beardsworth agrees: "If you're going to work with young people at risk, you must be fully aware of what you're doing. This isn't just an opportunity to get some funding."

Damn statistics

There are plenty of statistics to suggest that the overall scheme succeeded in reducing crime. In South Yorkshire, for example, there was a 17% reduction in street crime in the Splash Extra areas, compared with a 62% rise in other areas. Overall there was a 5.2% reduction in local crime rates between July and September 2002 in the areas where Splash Extra operated.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)

The YJB oversees the YOTs, and is responsible for promoting the most effective ways of preventing offending by children and young people. Each local authority in England and Wales has a YOT, made up of representatives from the police, Probation Service, social services, health, education, drugs and alcohol misuse agencies, and housing officers. Each YOT has a manager, responsible for co-ordinating the work of these agencies. It identifies the needs of each young offender and the problems making him or her a risk to others, and identifies programmes to address these.

For information and contact details of your local YOT, see: www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk or tel: 020 72713033.

Connexions

Connexions is the government's support service for 13–19s in England, providing guidance including practical help with choosing courses and careers, and access to personal development through activities like sport, performing arts and volunteering. It also provides help with issues like drug abuse, sexual health and homelessness. Connexions joins up the work of six government departments and their agencies and organisations on the ground, with private and voluntary sector groups and youth and careers services. For information, and contact details for your local Connexions service, see: www.connexions.gov.uk or telephone your local authority youth service team.

As you'd expect, there's qualitative and anecdotal evidence to show the impact of the arts activities, not only on young people, but also on cross-sectoral working relationships, and on the artists themselves. As yet there's no hard evidence which correlates arts activities with a reduction in crime, although it is expected that over time, further analysis will reveal more of a causal link.

Certainly few arts practitioners are going to kick up a fuss about the lack of statistics – particularly those who have been arguing hard for many years that traditional evaluation methods aren't sensitive enough to capture the full impact of their approaches. Of course, it may not be easy to separate out the effects of each of the different elements, as many young people experienced the whole range of activities. And given the short lead-in time and the related difficulties, it would hardly have been fair, or helpful, to evaluate against such hard outcomes. But if, as an early press release states, the aim was to 'contribute to reducing robbery and theft in its areas, as part of the street crime and robbery initiative', then it's a little surprising that a civil servant somewhere hasn't been wanting to join up the dots.

Whatever the difficulties of last year's scheme, it's certainly a triumph over adversity and a testament to the commitment and creativity of all those involved. A full evaluation report conducted by Cap Gemini Ernst and Young concludes that "the Arts Council England's involvement in Splash Extra has been a great success and it has much to bring to any future Splash programmes. Given more planning time and a greater degree of involvement in the national programme set up, more high quality activities can be deployed and targeted to add to the impact on young people and crime reduction delivered in 2002."

Hard Lessons

That's not to say that some hard lessons weren't learned. The report also gives some clear challenges for the future, including: a longer lead-in time for arts organisations; joint national training for all those involved; a national network to share best practice and new information; maintenance of local relationships in preparation for future programmes; clear agreements on roles and responsibilities; the development of more sustainable, ongoing programmes and more robust targeting, monitoring and evaluation.

This year will present its own challenges, with a completely different means of distributing the funding and high expectations about what it will deliver. Funding will be devolved to local government offices for the regions – none of it will go directly to the Arts

Council – and it is expected that Connexions services, rather than YOTs, will be the main channel for local funding. The aim will be for sustained impact over time, particularly through Connexions' one-to-one key worker approach to working with young people. So there will be new friends to make, and a new marketing job to be done. Says Nikki Crane: "You could argue we have even greater potential this year. Last year we had ring-fenced money, but this time the onus is on us to sell ourselves to the agencies involved – and that's a strength. In the long term it's the integration of the arts within these wider programmes that will bring the benefits. So it's down to every individual to be proactive and make those connections. If they do, this is going to be a massive opportunity for artists and the arts as a whole."

Arts at the heart

The Arts Council will be involved in strategic decision making – along with the other partners in the scheme, and central government – and through its regional offices, in liaising with regional government offices and Connexions. Con Keegan, Development Manager for Greater Manchester Connexions will be managing the programme on behalf of the authorities in Greater Manchester next year, and is convinced that arts activities have an important role to play: "Where there's been a Summer Splash scheme there's been a subsequent decrease in crime amongst the target group. The arts is an important part of that – it's proved a powerful tool for re-engaging young people with learning."

At the time of going to press there are eight weeks to go before some programmes begin, and artists are not yet contracted. It's going to be another challenging year for all those involved, but the rewards are potentially huge. "We've had joined up thinking, joined up policy, and now we're right in the thick of joined up practice", says Angus McLewin. "And artists and arts organisations are at the heart of it."

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