



An assessment of a Greater Manchester Youth Justice Service's Arts Trail programme



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

The Greater Manchester Youth Justice Services (GMYJS) work with young people who have offended or are at risk of offending. This research was conducted to assess the effectiveness of an arts based programme called the 'Arts Trail' run in one GMYJS.

Conclusion

This project was undertaken to follow the Arts Trail programme being conducted by the GMYJS. The research had two aims. The first aim was to identify whether the programme was effective, this would be assessed by the effect that it had on the young people. The second aim was to determine whether any staff members of the GMYJS in question had referred any young people onto the programme.

In order to assess whether the Arts Trail programme was effective, the main goals of the project had to be understood. The interview with the Team Leader at the GMYJS found that the Arts Trail programme was intended to improve the behaviours of the young people, as well as increasing their levels of self-confidence and helping to reintegrate them into the community. From the observations, the Arts Trail programme should be recognised as an effective programme. At the beginning of the programme the young people participating misbehaved, were disruptive, difficult to engage and lacked confidence in their abilities. As the programme progressed, there were clear improvements to these aspects. The behaviour improved, they were less disruptive and behaved a lot better during sessions. There were also clear positive developments to their self-confidence, as the sessions went on they began to realise they were able to produce good pieces of artwork whereas in the first few weeks they had been persistent that they 'could not do it'. Moreover, their attention span did somewhat improve, they were able to concentrate on tasks for longer without getting distracted and they became easier to engage. There were a number of community sessions where the young people were introduced to a variety of local residents. In all situations, the young people were well behaved and respectful towards them. It also seemed as though the young people felt a certain amount of pride that their artwork was going to be displayed in a public space within their community. However, it was not determined how much of an impact the programme had on reintegrating the young people back into their community.

It was found from the focus group with the GMYJS practitioners that none of them had referred a young person to the programme. There were a number of reasons as to why this was. Firstly, the practitioners did not feel they had been given enough information about the programme, as the information they had



received had only been supplied to them via an email, which they did not have the time to read due to their workloads. They also felt that the programme had not been promoted well enough, and not enough excitement had been built up surrounding it.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for the future of the Arts Trail programme. The following section will discuss recommendations that have emerged from the research. Recommendations have emerged from both the practitioners and the young people. They include recommendations regarding promotion of the programme, duration of the programme and activities included in the programme.

Recommendations

Promotion of the Arts Trail Programme

For the duration of the focus group, the practitioners consistently discussed how they did not feel that the most recent Arts Trail programme had been promoted effectively enough, and this is the main reason as to why none of them referred any young people onto the project. The practitioners had an unclear idea of what the programme was about and they were unsure on what it involved. The practitioners commented that the information about the Arts Trail had 'probably' come through on a 'long email', which due to their busy schedules and heavy workloads, they simply did not have enough time to read. It became clear that most of the practitioners present at the focus group did not have clear information on the range of activities the programme included, such as photography and design work, and they did not know that the young people received a Bronze Arts Award for completing the programme. They also remarked that throughout the programme, they had not heard much feedback on how it was going or seen any pictures – despite there being many taken. The practitioners seemed as though if they had received all this information, it would have encouraged them to put more effort into finding referrals.

The practitioners suggested that to make it more likely for them to think about referring young people, they must be interested by the sound of the project. They need someone to come to them with enthusiasm, energy, and a clear organised plan so that they can then pass all that information and excitement onto the young people they work with so that they will be interested in participating.

Structure and Duration of the Programme

This programme was presented to be a 'diversionary programme' by Julie, the team leader of the GMYJS in the one to one interview. However, the practitioners in the focus group challenged this point. In their opinion, the programme did not work as an effective diversionary programme because of when the sessions were held – which was during school time. The practitioners suggested that for it to be a diversionary programme, it should be held at a time when the young people need to be diverted from criminal or antisocial behaviour. When they are in school, they are already being diverted from this behaviour. The practitioners thought that the programme would be best held in the school holidays.

The practitioners also thought that the duration of the programme was too long. They felt it should have been condensed, rather than it being ongoing for several months. Their reasoning behind this was that it



would be difficult to keep the interest of the young people. They also felt the structure of the programme was unfair – the most engaging and interesting part of the programme was the blacksmithing, which was left until the last few weeks of the programme. The practitioners felt it was unfair to make the young people wait so long to do the main part of the programme.

However, in the interview with the young person, they commented that they liked the fact that the programme was during school time and preferred it this way to it being in the school holidays. The young people on this programme were not at their mainstream schools, they had been excluded and were currently attending alternative education. The young people had a points system at their alternative school, where if they behaved well they were rewarded. The Arts Trail programme accommodated this, and would feedback good behaviour to their teachers. This was effective as it meant the young people behaved much better as they knew the programme was linking to their school lives. Additionally, the duration of the programme did not seem to be a problem to the young people. For most of the project, it was not hard to keep the interest of the young people, as there were various things going on such as trips out and design work. Towards the last few weeks however, just before the blacksmithing sessions and after the young people had finalised their manhole covers, there was some unrest as to when they were going to be able to go to the blacksmithing, so this part of the Arts Trail could have been brought forward a couple of weeks.

Activities on the Programme

In the interview with the young person, and from observations, it was clear to understand which aspects of the programme did and did not engage the interests of the participants. Firstly, the programme began with a series of library sessions and a museum visit, the purpose of these sessions was to do research around Needhams foundry, located in the region. In the interview, the young person commented that this was their least favourite part of the programme. They also said if they could change anything about the programme, they would remove the library sessions. However, this part of the programme was important, as that is what is trying to give the young people a connection to the history of their community. A recommendation would be not to remove this section, but perhaps try a different and more engaging approach that just having the young people sit in the library. The library sessions meant it was difficult to capture the interest of the young people, and this led to disruptive behaviour. The fact that these sessions were at the very beginning of the programme was also an issue, this perhaps gave the young people a negative idea of the programme that it was something they wouldn't be interested in – a recommendation would be to open the programme with something more exciting.

The activity that most engaged all the participants was the blacksmithing. Throughout the programme, the young people were eager to start the blacksmithing work, and would consistently ask when it would begin. It was clear from the observations that the young people enjoyed the blacksmithing, once there they were eager to get involved, they seemed interested in the process and asked many questions, they also got very involved in participating with the blacksmithing work, they were confident to try everything they were taught and seemed to enjoy it. A recommendation for this programme would be to have the blacksmithing sessions earlier on in the timetable, as the young people did get slightly restless towards the end of the programme. In addition, the programme should include more blacksmithing sessions – the young



people only participated in four sessions each. As they enjoyed this activity, the most it would be much more engaging to offer more sessions.