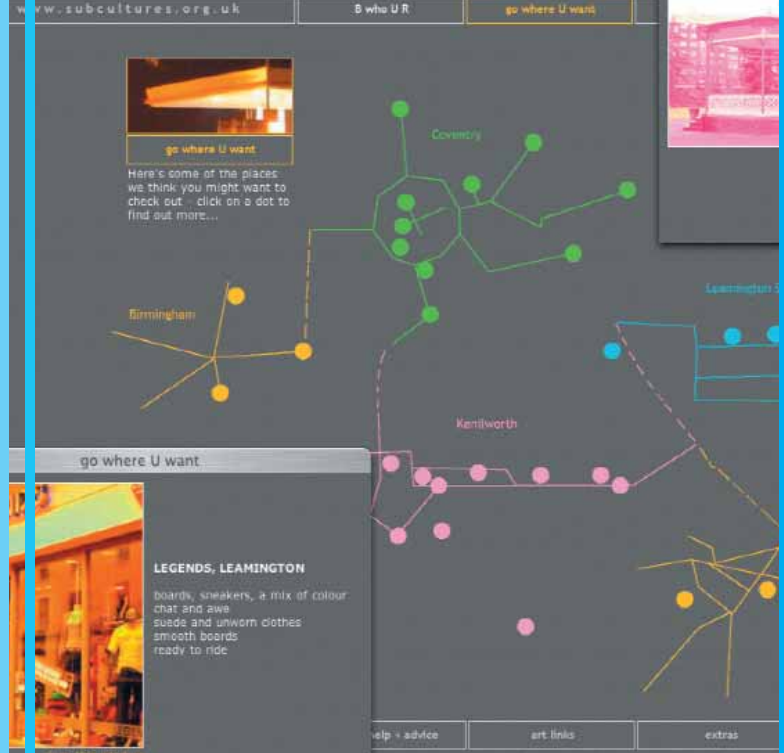


case study

Connect 4 at
The Royal Pump
Rooms,
Leamington Spa



partner organisations:

WYAN (Warwickshire Youth Arts Network)

location:

Leamington Spa

young people:

Kenilworth Skate Boarders Action Group and young people from Kenilworth and Leamington Spa (Westbury Centre)

context:

Local authority Gallery & Museum, run by Warwick District Council. Based in the historic Royal Pump Rooms building, the venue opened in 1814 as a centre for spa treatments and since 1999 after a total refurbishment has been home to the Leamington Library and TIC as well as the Art Gallery & Museum. The project is being developed by the Art Gallery & Museum and Arts Development Team.

en-vision research question:

How can galleries overcome barriers to participation and build long term relationships within rural networks?

project proposal:

Connect 4 will set out to develop a sustainable relationship between the art gallery & museum and rurally excluded young people (14-21yrs). Phase 1 – Introduce young people to the gallery (visits behind the scenes, taster activities, programming policy, establish a focus group). The young people will then be encouraged to curate their own small show which will tour to 3 villages (e.g. curate artwork, collections, whole village) using a 'spare' mobile library bus. Phase 2 – Introduce young people to web design and site maintenance.

project aims:

- To extend young people's awareness and knowledge of the visual arts
- To enable young people to engage with professional artists and gallery staff in ways which will increase their self-confidence and aspirations
- To encourage and build long term relationships between the art gallery & museum and rurally isolated young people

time-scale: Started March 2004, ongoing (promotion of website will continue).

summary of activities:

phase 1:

- Behind the Scenes tour of the Art Gallery & Museum
- Visual art workshops with lead artist
- Curated 'SK8' display at the Art Gallery & Museum
- SK8 tours to Kenilworth Connections
- Artist studio visit and visit to Ikon Gallery
- Displayed banners at opening of new skate park

phase 2:

- Introduction to web design
- Creative discussion and activities to develop content (photography, manipulation of images, poetry, mapping, lifestyle, culture)
- Exhibition design and interpretation, presentation skills
- Accreditation through National Youth Achievement Award

summary of outcomes:

phase 1:

- Worked with approx 25 -30 young people – 6 young people visited the Art Gallery & Museum, 5 Young people visited Ikon Gallery, 4 Young People in the core group were retained
- SK8 display and banner display for Skate park.

phase 2:

- Worked with 6 young people, 4 Young People in the core group were retained
- Subcultures display and website for young people

changes from original proposal:

- Change of staff at the Art Gallery & Museum
- Concentrated the work with one group instead of 3
- Behind schedule due to problems recruiting young people
- County Library service dropped out of the project (along with their mobile bus)
- The WYAN worker went on maternity leave (phase 1)
- Change of venue from Kenilworth to Westbury Centre

success factors / learning outcomes:

- Future projects with young people will focus on short term (phase 2 was completed in 8 weeks) or residential work. Residential work depends on a strong relationship with the young people or partner organisation
- When working with the youth service the timing of the work is key – in the early stages time it to happen alongside existing youth club sessions (eg 7-9pm). Once you have established a relationship with a group this can be more flexible
- Partnership agreements are essential, including expected behaviour, outcomes and regular meetings to review
- Continuity and involvement of staff with the young people is key – for the young people's security / relationship with you, and to benefit your own learning. eg. don't rely purely on freelance delivery
- Increased awareness of the community in Kenilworth

- Website visitors are a valuable source of continual feedback to gallery
- The project needs a status space within the gallery (achieved in phase 2)
- Achieving recognition from Senior Management of quality of phase 2
- Assign a youth worker to assist the lead artist and/or employ 2 artists
- Don't be afraid to risk doing it again even if it went wrong

challenges:

- Eventually recruited a group of young people (in an area where the youth service / provision is in a state of collapse)
- Unable to establish a focus group (there is now potential with the website discussion groups)
- Keeping the momentum of the project going (phase 2 momentum fine)
- Motivating / managing the lead artist for Phase 1 (the artist required constant supervision which we didn't have staff resources to cover). Phase 2 lead artist was excellent
- 3 full time posts vacant at the Art Gallery & Museum mean that staff are having to cover other duties (gallery staff now re structured)

outcomes for young people (phase 1):

- 'Art isn't always just pictures & paintings'
- 'Art is hard to do'
- 'I've learned that art doesn't have to be drawings on a wall to be called art'
- 'fun working with people involved in the project'
- KSAG Art Gallery & Museum trail (their favourite objects)

outcomes for young people (phase 2):

- 'Good fun and you get education from it. Really good fun'
- 'A cool website which I am in and it's just cool'
- 'Loads of my ideas went in on the website so I felt I could make my own choices and decisions'
- More confidence about talking to gallery staff – wouldn't have done before'.
- Post it notes on gallery feedback wall

- Website online survey

outcomes for partners:

- WYAN worker on maternity leave phase 1
- Phase 2 – positive – in discussion about how to continue to jointly develop and promote the website

outcomes for gallery:

- 'Feel as if we are taking part in a virtual project, like knitting fog' (momentum)
- Plan to have an in-house briefing session before phase 2 commences
- Enjoyed meeting and working with KSAG
- Feel we now have strong links with the youth club and KSAG
- Phase 2 – Enjoyed working with young people – finally achieved status space and senior management recognition for work with young people

what next?

- Presentation to all Art Gallery & Museum staff
- Do bulk of practical work with the young people during a residential to help maintain momentum
- Investigate potential existing rural networks for arts info points e.g. Live & Local
- Partner projects should share ideas, experiences and good practice during rather than after completion
- The website and dialogue it encourages will continue to grow. Helping to develop and inform future gallery work

Visit the Subcultures website at
www.subcultures.org.uk

The project team were Vanessa Oakes, WDC Arts Development Officer, Nicky Tibbits, Social History Curator, Kath Cockshaw, Exhibitions and Events Officer, Claire Mitchell, Warwickshire Youth Arts Network, Janet Vaughan, Talking Birds