

case study

Sample Arts at Ikon,
Birmingham



partner organisations:

Bayc (Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs), 4 youth workers, 24 young people aged 14-16 from a pre- sixteen unit based at South Birmingham College, and a group of young people from Wayahead youth group.

location:

Birmingham

context:

Ikon is a city centre contemporary art space showing cutting edge work by international artists. Ikon has embarked on a number of arts projects with young people at risk, some of which has not been as successful as anticipated. In addition, the education staff have had no specific training in this area and would benefit from specialised training and skill sharing looking at ways of dealing with the challenges which may arise from working with youth groups.

In Bayc's experience, youth workers have a specific set of skills related to their profession, but have had limited opportunities to access contemporary arts as a resource in their work with young people. This project aims to improve their confidence, and skills in using contemporary art, artists and spaces as a resource.

en-vision research question:

How can partners work together to devise an effective process of working with contemporary visual arts to engage and enhance the lives and skills of young people?

project proposal:

- Action-researching ways of making Ikon gallery and the contemporary visual arts accessible to youth workers and young people
- To facilitate this through a partnership between arts professionals, youth workers and young people, resulting in dialogue and experimentation, joint training and skills sharing, devising and sampling gallery workshops. and the development of a website to be used as a resource and a training tool by youth workers, young people and artists

summary of activities:

Phase 1: Series of 12 training and skills sharing sessions for Ikon staff, education team and visitor assistants, artists, BAYC staff, youth workers and young people enabling everyone to have a voice, communicate on an equal basis, and share skills, ideas and understanding of each others culture and expertise.

Practical gallery workshops and facilitated discussions for staff, youth workers and young people, developing technical, personal and social skills and exploring feedback on the changing exhibition programme and the venue itself, supported by a film maker.

Youth workers devising and eventually lead workshops with young people in the gallery, supported by artists in mentoring relationship. Young people will be helping to plan then sampling these workshops and feeding back responses and ideas.

Phase 2: Interactive website developed through phase 1 activities and targeted at youth workers and young people. The website will act as a practical resource and catalyst for ideas to encourage interest in and access to Ikon and the contemporary arts across the UK. It will also be designed for use as a training tool, enabling youth workers and young people to replicate the project step by step with other groups.

time-scale: March 04 – July 05

summary of outcomes:

- Training event for 15 Ikon staff including 10 visitor assistants, 4 education staff and a member of the facilities team
- Artists, project leaders, young people and youth workers have participated in joint sessions, sharing ideas and skills on an equal level. Everyone – not just young people – took part in practical and discussion based activities
- This approach enabled everyone to have a voice and share ideas about what engages young people in learning about and experiencing contemporary art
- We have worked with a range of different artists and exhibitions providing opportunity to explore colour theory, installations, interventions, photography, sculpture, and issues related to the artists' countries of origin
- The website being developed will be an ongoing tool to disseminate information and findings and share good practice with other young people, cultural organisations and service providers. It will showcase comments, reviews, thoughts and work produced by all involved in the project, and will be updated

changes from original proposal:

- Staff changes in both partner organisations so initial plans were re-devised

success factors / learning outcomes:

- The project has focussed on working with youth workers as well as young people, sharing skills, building confidence and enabling them to disseminate to other youth workers as well as use new skills with young people
- The biggest success from a Bayc perspective was the support of reluctant youth workers who now saw links with youth work and are building it into their daily practice:

'(I) wasn't artistic, in fact all my life I've been told I wasn't but I've found a tried and tested way to hook in YP that are also

scared when art is mentioned and engage them in a language that they wouldn't usually use, and become fluent in that language especially with emotional and issue based subjects' (youth worker)

- South Birmingham College are also using the process in their curriculum this coming year
- The young people (YP) and youth workers (YW) became a critical audience, found a voice using creative processes, and gained an introduction into practical arts and media applications
- Creative evaluation activities which used collages made from colour swatches to help individuals articulate how they felt at different points in the day were very effective:

' I enjoyed using colour to match my moods and how I felt about stuff, it was easier than trying to say it, and then when it was down on paper I could find the words easier' (young person)

challenges:

- Recruitment of young people / youth workers due to time restrictions. Lots of interest from groups but many of them meet during weekends / evenings when the gallery is closed or has skeleton staff
- The number of people involved in the project added to the already impossible task of setting dates and times to deliver, particularly as Bayc are an umbrella organisation linking Ikon with other youth groups
- The partnership – the way in which Ikon and Bayc operate financially has proved problematic. Both organisations are 'partners' however Ikon contributed financial and in kind support whereas Bayc needed to be paid for their involvement, although they were able to offer in kind support. Also there was an uneven split between the two organisations in contributing to meeting, planning and delivery time, although roles and responsibilities were discussed and divided in initial planning meetings. This has been due to workload pressure not commitment

- Fluctuations in the number of young people attending sessions
- Getting image consent forms signed and returned, so that images and documentation can be used for future publicity or on the website
- Capacity and impact on resources has been a problem for staff leading on this project. Bayc feel that the project was achieved within resources and achieved great outcomes. Ikon education staff feel that in future any project which is planned as an addition to core work should include costs to the organisation, for example staff time and on-costs

outcomes for young people:

- The YP have grown confident in using arts provision and now see having access to the arts and to galleries as their statutory right
- The group have found the arts as a voice / a form of communication that they can use, a few with great and positive results
- The group had their first opportunities for youth arts in practice
- Had opportunity to use a high profile space like the Ikon

outcomes for partner organisations:

- Bayc feel they have been capacity built in the process of the project. They feel the website, evaluation and record is a great platform and training strategy to look at with other youth workers and young people and to offer (as a training model) to other arts providers
- Bayc felt the partnership with Ikon was positive and had longevity due to shared interest. Bayc feel comfortable and able to use Ikon as a tool to inspire, make work and explore arts practices
- The website will be used as a valuable tool for future work

outcomes for the gallery:

- 'Realistically the outcomes of the project will not result in major changes in the organisation, but it has enabled us to learn,

develop our skills and will inform the way we plan projects with this target audience.'

- Staff within the education department and beyond (visitor assistants and facilities team) have benefited from professional development and the national aspect of the project 'Sharing experiences with other people involved with en-vision was very useful and inspiring. The residential provided a great deal of advice and some valuable models of good practice for developing our own education work with young people. The event has left me with a new plan of action and plenty of food for thought! This will certainly have an impact on our organisational policy and provisions – I am already working on it!' (Ikon member of staff)

what next?

- The en-vision project is culminating in a website devised by participants. It is our intention, funding permitting, to use this resource fruitfully, not only through future project work with en-vision participants, but with groups of other young people working with Ikon, for example, our Young Curators group

- Ikon staff have now made links with various youth organisations across the city which will inform future project work in that area. Ikon is an educational charity and many strands of our education programme are dedicated to encouraging young people to engage with contemporary art. This is usually through partnerships with schools and colleges. The difference with en-vision was that it enabled us to set up links with the youth sector, outside of those more formal education routes. We now have a member of staff who has gained useful experience working with young people and youth workers, and we aim to make the most of this experience, not only to inform how we deliver core work but also in future projects which may require external funding

- Bayc have already been asked to develop training for a gallery in a neighbouring town

To find out more information contact Simone Chester simone.chester@bayc.org.uk