

# case study

## Creative Consultants at Manchester Art Gallery



### partner organisations:

Cornerhouse and Zion Arts, Manchester

### location:

Manchester

### young people:

11 young people aged 15-16 drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds

### context:

Young people aged 13-25 are a priority for Manchester Art Gallery and Manchester City Council. Since 2000 a variety of informal one-off education projects have been set up to work with this age group, mostly resulting in the creation of an artwork displayed in the gallery or community. This work has led to our desire to create a more structured programme with a strategic overview and a longer term, sustainable approach to youth arts.

### en-vision research question:

How can we make our galleries more inclusive, not just in the education departments but across the whole service?

**en-vision project proposal:**

Phase 1: July to October 2003. Core group of 10 young people from Manchester to be trained to work with Gallery staff and film maker on audit of Gallery's services and programmes for young people. Aims to begin process of cultural change within Gallery

Phase 2: October 2003 to March 2004. Young people to work on "Disguise" exhibition, applying knowledge and skills they have gained

**project aims:**

- To engage staff across the organisation in exploring how the venue can be more inclusive for young people, to effect change and develop awareness of the diverse needs of young people across the service we deliver
- To ensure that that the young people are fully engaged in the process and have a voice
- To develop a best practice model for a young people's strategy and programme
- To build relationships with young people in Manchester, improving their knowledge and awareness about galleries and Manchester City Galleries in particular
- To positively affect their perceptions about galleries and to encourage them to overcome any perceptual and physical barriers they may experience
- To develop closer links with other galleries in Manchester, and with other youth agencies within the region and nationally

**time-scale:** June 2003 – March 2004.  
Programme still ongoing

**summary of activities and outcomes:**

- Creative consultancy engaging young people in an audit of Manchester Art Gallery's work and production of a video report making recommendations to staff. Over a twenty-week period participants were involved in a series of creative workshops and discussions with artists, filmmakers, gallery staff and other young people / the general public. The group created a short film documenting their experience and views of the gallery and making recommendations presented to other staff in the venue
- Joint curation of an exhibition by young

people with gallery staff. The group worked alongside the gallery team (including exhibition and education staff and designers) to co-curate a high-profile exhibition called Disguise showcasing work by a number of well-known artists and showbiz figures, targeted at the 16-25 age group. The group made recommendations which were incorporated into the exhibition's presentation to the public, including painting the galleries deep purple, creating a comfortable resource space with funky purple and blue velvet sofas, reading materials and young people's comments on the theme of Disguise, and comments in an interpretation booklet accompanying the exhibition. Disguise was exhibited at Manchester Art Gallery, 11 Feb- 6 June

- Report produced by an independent researcher, informed by the young people's views. A researcher from Salford University worked alongside the Creative Consultants and produced a report, which was distributed to all staff and will be used to inform future strategy for the inclusion of young people

**challenges:**

- The gallery found recruitment of the target 'at risk' group through outreach contacts problematic within the timescale, and eventually recruited through local schools, attracting young people who were already enthusiastic about the arts. With more time and experience the gallery is now recruiting young people from outreach projects, for example Look After Children groups
- Retention is no longer a problem as we have targeted individuals rather than an established group

**outcomes for young people:**

The Creative Consultants:

- Have talked about increased confidence in terms of teamwork, talking about art, experience gained of working in a gallery setting, meeting with various professionals and delivering workshops to the public
- Found meetings with curators and other professionals a positive experience
- Enjoyed the social aspects – meeting new

people taking part

- Enjoyed opinions and ideas being listened to and valued
- Are committed to the project, and felt a real ownership of the gallery
- Enjoyed trips to other venues
- Felt there was too much form filling and over evaluation, preferring more hands on art making
- Difficult to stay committed when its exam time

#### **outcomes for the gallery:**

- Opportunities to work with young people positive for gallery – learnt lots about ourselves and what we offer – steep learning curve
- The Creative Consultants are starting to make a real impact at the gallery, especially in terms of bringing high profile artworks such as the Emin and Epstein to the gallery
- The curators and other professionals are taking notice of the groups input and listening and responding to their ideas
- As a result of the project the venue has discussed creating a new permanent youth curator post. This has not yet been developed, however, the Creative Consultants freelance co-ordinator is contracted to work until March 2006

#### **changes from original proposal:**

- The gallery found recruitment of the target 'at risk' group problematic within the timescale, and eventually recruited through local schools, attracting young people who were already enthusiastic about the arts
- Timescale – less structure. However we learnt you can't accommodate everyone

#### **success factors:**

- Being flexible – young people need a structure / context for their work and freedom to direct the end results
- Learnt not to underestimate the time taken to recruit and bond a group together
- Project structure provided a great opportunity for a range of gallery staff to work with young people, many who usually have little contact with this age group
- Learnt that young people are ambitious and capable – no concessions made

- The mix of age groups and backgrounds works well – the Creative Consultants is now made up of 15 to 24 year olds and young people from diverse backgrounds. This mix could have been problematic, but results in a lively and supportive environment, and provides opinions from a wide range of young people, all facing and concerned with different issues

#### **what next?**

- Following the action-research project, the gallery has continued to invest in this area of work, securing funds from core budgets to offer an ongoing Creative Consultants programme linked to events / opportunities at MAG and other local and national venues
- The group have continued to meet and participate in a range of activities, including workshops for the public, using a current exhibition, working with the public programming curator to design and deliver the session
- The group is currently working on a DCMS funded national and regional strategic commissioning project which involves the young people borrowing artworks from the Tate's collection to link with the collection at Manchester. The group have chosen a Tracy Emin textile and Jacob Epstein's 'Rock Drill' and are developing an interpretation tool to help visitors understand and look at the artworks
- We hope the consultants will in future be able to support more excluded young people to get involved
- The group is now a real mix of ages and backgrounds from MA students to school age students. By inviting other groups of young people to the gallery to trail their Interpretation tool, hopefully they will be able to spark interest with new members
- The Creative Consultants are funded until March 2006, the gallery will soon be looking for new funding to ensure the group can continue

More info about Creative Consultants from Katy McCall project coordinator  
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