

praXis Creative Remedies Arts and Health Awards 2011

About your project

Please provide us with background information about your project

Project title

My Life

Tell us who your participants were, their age range and how many took part in your project

Young people: Looked after Children, between the ages of 9 and 16. Nine children took part in the project.

When did your project take place and how long did it run for?

The young people worked with photographic artist Helen Sweeting for one week in the school summer holidays, then the exhibition of the young peoples work ran for a month in the Art Gallery during September.

Please tell us where your project took place (including postcode)

Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Lichfield street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1DU.

Tell us who your project funders were and your total budget

Looked After Children's services paid for the artist, materials, text panels and exhibition leaflet, staff and refreshments and the equipment used where paid for by Wolverhampton City Council and Renaissance West Midlands. The total budget was £3000 although we already own the cameras, computers etc and staff time was given in kind.

Project website or blog address (if applicable)

www.Wolverhamptonart.org.uk

What health issues was your project exploring?

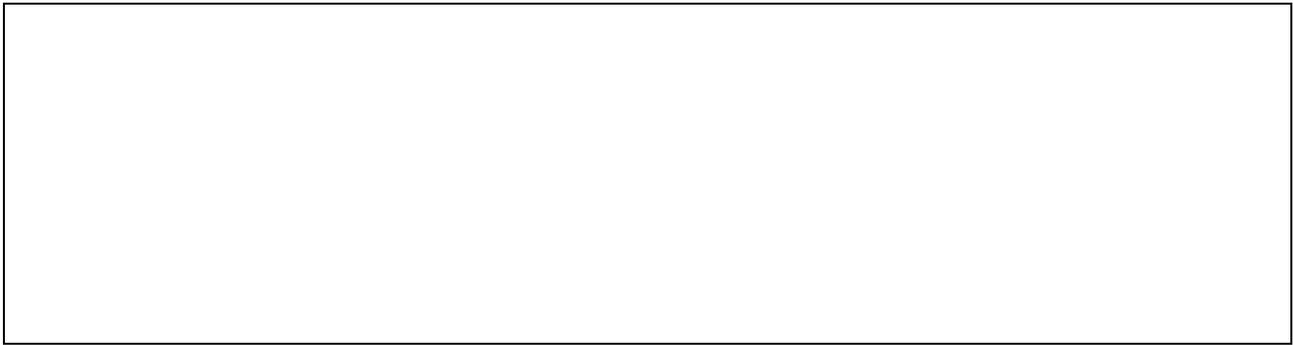
The mental health and wellbeing of young people in care.

What was the involvement of the participants in health issues prior to the project starting?

All the young people involved had been in long term foster care. One young person admitted to previously self harming. A couple of the young people had learning difficulties.

Please give a brief description of your project (100 words max.)

Looked After Children's Services came to us for help finding an artist to work with their young people on a photography project. They wanted to dispel myths about what it is like to be in care. The young people created the images which were shown in an exhibition at the Art Gallery and included in a booklet which is given to stakeholders as an advocacy document.



Please tell us about the creative activities that happened during your project, e.g. artists who were involved, artforms used, products made etc (100 words max.)

The young people worked with artist Helen Sweeting in the school Summer holiday's. They learnt how to use digital SLR cameras. They initially practiced taking images of their precious objects using depth of field. They then decided what aspect of being in care they wanted to depict. They worked in sketchbooks recording their ideas and techniques using photographs, drawings and words. After taking their images representing their life in care they took part in a joint selection process. Each young person had a piece of work professionally printed and hung in the gallery.

4. Partnership

Evidence of useful partnership working on the project: how this worked, how it influenced the process and product, how it may have been used to address any problems etc.

Did you work with any partners on the project? Please tell us who these partners were

We worked with Looked After Children's Services Participation Team the young people and the photographer Helen Sweeting.

Please tell us how you identified the need to work with this partner and why this partnership was useful / beneficial / made a difference to your project (100 words max.)

We have worked with Looked After Children's Services before, providing workshops for a Funday and working with Looked After Children's Education Service on a curator project. I am also a member of their extended services group. LAC wanted to work with us on this project, as they felt we have the expertise guide them through the process of recruiting an artist to fulfill their brief. The project also sits well within our Arts and Social Care Project and our remit as part of the local authority to improve life chances for young people and to enhance health and well being.

Did this partnership influence the process and final outcome of your project? Please tell us how (100 words max.)

Yes because we worked together on the brief, LAC wanted to change perceptions about what it is like to be in care and also to give young people a project which enhanced their skills and wellbeing. The brief for the artist was written jointly taking into account the needs of the young people ensuring that the artist was not only skilled artistically but would be able to work well with the group.

5. Participation

Evidence that the beneficiaries were involved in the decision-making and development of the project.

Tell us how the participants were involved in your project, e.g. creative engagement, final outcome, advocacy etc. (100 words max.)

Young people were on the interview panel representing the participants. The project was about giving the young people a voice through the skills they learnt, they chose the aspect of being in care they wanted to depict, they chose the final images and we used there statements to go alongside the work.

Tell us how these participants were involved in getting your project off the ground e.g. decision making and planning etc. (100 words max.)

The young people chose to be part of the project, they picked the artist and produced the work. It was all around them, without them there would not have been a project.

Once your project was up and running how did the participants influence it? e.g. Did you change or adapt the project? If so, why? (100 words max.)

Again, they were led through the creative process by the artist and staff, the artist taught them techniques but it was vital that it was their voice that was reflected in the work. The artist and staff were attuned to their needs in terms of breaks, attention span and particular interests. A couple of the young people had

mild learning difficulties and one member of the gallery staff worked particularly closely with them. Most of the young people were teenagers however, there was one nine year old sibling involved.

6. Learning and Reflection

Evidence that the people involved in the project have demonstrated a commitment to learning and reflection in their work and sharing what they have learnt through their experiences.

What were the outcomes of your project and what difference did your project make? (100 words max.)

The outcomes were images and accompanying statements that were exhibited at the gallery for the wider public, also a lovely booklet to be used for advocacy by LAC for prospective foster carers, staff, funders and other stakeholders. The difference these will make is a in perceptions about Looked After Children.

A major outcome was also the increase in skills, confidence and wellbeing felt by the participants. The difference that this will make is to improve the life chances and wellbeing of the young people involved; hopefully they will continue to have an interest in the arts.

How did you know if this project was successful? (100 words max.)

Because the young people's feedback stated how much they enjoyed the project, as did the staff. feedback from the management team in LAC was excellent. The Young people were palpably proud an excited to bring friends and carers to the Private View at the gallery.(see below)

Was there anything you would have done differently if you could do this project again? (100 words max.)

There were a few communication issues between the artist and the Participation Officer, so the project was more intensive from the point of view of the gallery staff than anticipated. I am not sure that this could be avoided as it was mainly to do with 'personalities'. I think more pre project planning might have helped though it was difficult to fit into everyone's diaries; so much of the organization was via e-mail.

7. Additional comments and information

If you have any other comments, quotes or useful information about your project, please tell us here

Feedback from the young people:

What do you think was your biggest achievement of this week?

Being shown how to use a camera and taking pictures.
Making new friends.
Beginning to actually tell of the day I was taken into care. Trust.
Taking excellent photos.
Being shown how to use a professional camera.

Is there anything you are particularly proud of?

My photo of a bear.
Taking good pictures.
Helping my friends.
Yes taking pictures that have feelings and mean something

What was the best photo you took and why?

The waterslide photograph because I had to make it look like people on the waterslide but we were in the gallery.
My first holiday. I loved that photo.

What was your favorite experience of the week?

Meeting new people.(They all said this)
Taking blurred photographs (They were meant to be blurred)

Artist comment:

"The young people worked so hard throughout the project and created such stunning photos and pieces of writing; it was a very rewarding project to be involved in". Helen Sweeting , Photographic artist

Comments From Jenny Cockcroft Corporate Parenting Officer:

The 'My Life' project enabled a group of young people to express their views and feelings about being Looked after through the medium of photography. It is well known that engagement in creativity has a powerful therapeutic impact for young people who are looked after, helping to develop resilience and self esteem and its clear through this project young people gained in confidence and self worth. This project also allowed the young people a powerful medium to share with decision makers and members of the public what care feels like for them, helping to challenge negative pre-conceptions and informing service delivery. The finished photos were of an extremely high standard and the young people developed a range of new skills working alongside a professional photographer and are now looking to develop these with further work with the Art Service.

Other Information:

Every effort was made to ensure the quality of the exhibition, an experienced artist was employed, the gallery collections and staff helped to inform the work. The work was printed at a professional photo printing company. The exhibition was hung to a high standard.

The young people held a Private view and their carers and staff from the council came along to celebrate the work they had done. The young people were proud and pleased and had grown in confidence over the course of the project.

We are now planning a number of other partnerships with LAC including carnival mask making in December and another photography project as part of the Bilston Leisure Centre Development.