

## **Incorporation of Youth Engagement Programmes into a 'Pop-Up' Collaborative (Museums, Libraries, Archvies And The Hive) Project Model:**

### **Background:**

The Culture & Leisure Services briefing paper for the November 2023 Economic Development Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel referenced the 'Finding Their Voice' youth engagement project developed and delivered by The D-Day Story (September 2022 - September 2023). The project comprised a series of outreach workshops at the Portsea, BYAC, and Hillside Youth Centres and at the Brook Club and visits to The D-Day Story. The majority of young people participating in the project were aged approximately 11 – 16. The museum had not previously worked with the young people involved and the project staff worked closely with the Youth Centre staff and managers to facilitate and deliver the project.

The following reflections are a result of this project and a variety of other cultural, 'informal learning' projects developed and delivered for young people with a variety of interests and needs in Portsmouth. These projects were designed for young people who had not necessarily visited or participated in projects delivered by the museum / heritage site and who often had limited access to their local heritage and cultural offer. Creative arts workshops and activities were used as a strategy to engage the young people and to help develop their trust and confidence.

From experience successful youth engagement projects:

- Require time to establish relationships and the trust of the young people.
- Are most effective when delivered with the active support and involvement of youth organisations and their youth workers.
- Combine both outreach workshops at the youth centres with visits arranged to the heritage site or museum. Transport is often required with all costs covered to remove any financial barriers to engagement.
- Sufficient staff to support the project and engage the young people including experienced professionals to deliver workshops e.g. artists / creative practitioners. This potentially will require a high adult: young people ratio.
- Flexibility to allow projects to adapt to the interests of the young people. Whilst outcomes are almost always successful, they are not necessarily the outcomes envisaged at the start of the project.
- Sessions / workshops generally take place in the evenings with the possibility of some taking place at the weekends or during the school / college holidays (although consideration has to be given to those young people with weekend or holiday jobs).

- Realistic expectations – whilst some young people may engage briefly in an individual activity, a few will commit and engage for the duration of the project over several weeks. Developing a project that comprises a series of 'stand-alone' activities that are structured towards creating an authentic final outcome (such as an exhibition) allows young people to 'drop in' for individual sessions whilst also offering greater development opportunities for those young people who wish to commit more fully to the project. This strategy will allow a greater number of young people to participate as asking young people to commit to an entire project from the start can create a barrier to participation.
- Success can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, the number of young people who accessed the project even for one activity, the quality of the final outcome and, importantly, the 'value added' outcomes such as the development of young peoples' confidence and skills and those young people who progress onto other opportunities e.g., other projects and programmes or formal education opportunities.
- A high-quality outcome (e.g., an exhibition, performance or event) to showcase the work of the young people is important to demonstrate to them that their work / skills are valued. It also provides the young people with additional evidence of their skills and commitment when completing CVs and personal statements.
- Attendance of parents / carers / family and friends at showcase events is possible but not guaranteed.

Since 'youth engagement' programmes provide positive opportunities for young people aged approximately 11 – 24 from a wide range of backgrounds, requiring a variety of support with varying levels of confidence 'a one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. There are other models of youth engagement projects (such as Youth Forums, Young Curator groups etc.) which are particularly effective for young people who already have the confidence to participate independently or who have already developed a relationship with the museum / heritage venue through other projects and activities. This type of youth engagement model could work effectively within the framework of a 'pop-up' collaborative cultural project model.

## High Street Cultural Pop-Up Models and Youth Engagement Projects

A high street 'pop-up' cultural model could support and enhance youth engagement projects in a variety of ways.

- The available temporary exhibition space in museums and heritage sites to display and showcase work such as exhibitions and events created by young people is often limited. A 'pop-up' cultural venue could offer additional space to showcase the outcomes of youth engagement projects.
- Available accommodation in the youth centres to deliver outreach workshops and activities can be limiting and temporary 'pop-up' cultural venues might incorporate the space required for workshops to take place which could benefit both youth engagement projects and the wider community. This opportunity may be impacted by the need for transport for the young people and / or the times the workshops take place (see practicalities below).
- Subject to the availability of museum curatorial staff to provide support and expertise, a 'pop-up' cultural venue could provide opportunities for young people to engage with museum collections in more depth with the opportunity to co-curate displays and exhibitions inspired by the museum for their local community.
- Young people could be involved in developing holiday and weekend events and activity programmes at the 'pop-up' cultural venue for the local community.
- In addition to structured youth engagement projects, a 'pop-up' cultural venue could also provide work experience and volunteering opportunities. As with any work experience programme, sufficient time to plan the programme, staff to support the young person and meaningful activities for the young person to undertake would be essential to ensure that it is a positive experience and success. A work experience / volunteering model of youth engagement may appeal to young people aged 15 - 24 with greater time flexibility and who are pro-actively seeking volunteer or work experience.
- The collaborative 'pop-up' model (Museums, Libraries and Archives and The Hive) offers additional opportunities for young people to access a range of cultural and support services.

### Practical Considerations:

All the above would be dependent on the availability of specialist staff support (for example, curatorial staff to support the development of a 'pop-up' museum, professional artists / creative practitioners to facilitate creative workshops, youth workers to support the young people and project officer(s) to co-ordinate the youth engagement programme). Funding for the development and delivery of activities would also be required.

The following practicalities would also influence the format and outcome of the youth engagement project:

- Shop leases may be very short-term.
- Potential for last minute change of venue or dates.
- Evening opening of a 'pop-up' cultural venue may not be an option.

### **In summary**

Previous youth engagement projects have demonstrated that young people do want to engage with their heritage and history but rather than a lack of interest it is often practical barriers such as cost, transport and the opportunity to visit which stand in their way.

Developing the trust and confidence of the young people involved is essential for success. Therefore, an outreach programme of activities at youth centres may still be required when developing a youth engagement programme for a 'pop-up' cultural venue. This would potentially include visit(s) to the relevant museum or library so that the young people appreciate the connection between the outreach workshops, the museum / library and the 'pop-up' cultural venue. As mentioned above, if working with young people who had already established a relationship with the museum / library or who had the confidence, an alternative model could be developed such as a youth forum with agreed outcomes from the start, working to a more specific time frame.

A visit(s) to the museum(s) / library / archives should still be an integral part of any youth engagement programme as this might represent the first opportunity for some young people to visit and engage with their local heritage.

Developing and incorporating a youth engagement programme into a 'pop-up' cultural project model could extend the opportunities available to young people to engage with their local heritage and provide them with relevant and practical experiences. Youth engagement projects provide an ideal opportunity to develop the skills and confidence of young people. They can also signpost young people to further informal learning opportunities such as volunteering and for some young people they can provide a 'stepping stone' to further 'formal' learning opportunities at college or university.