



Arts Enrichment with Looked After Children & Young People

2017-20 QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Since 2012, arts charity Creative Futures has been working with Looked After Children and Young People (LAC) in the London Borough of Hounslow. We have delivered a wide range of short- and long-term programmes ranging from 3-day holiday courses exploring multiple art forms, to multi-year programmes focussed on music and art.

We are grateful to have received funding for this work from a number of trusts and foundations, as well as investment recently from the Hounslow Virtual School. Our funding partners are listed at the end of the report.

This report examines the impact of our Arts Enrichment programme, delivered after-school from September 2017 to July 2020 with young people of secondary school age. The report includes evaluation material gathered by Creative Futures, as well as findings from an independent evaluator, Sara Rossi, who conducted a research evaluation into the impacts of part of the programme for a Masters degree at the University of the West of England.

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1. Children in Care: the context and the challenges

In England in 2018-19 there were almost 80,000 children in care. The majority of children are taken into care because of abuse or neglect. Of those in care, 63% are aged 10 years and above, and 45% have mental health conditions. Here are some statistics: Looked after children in England

- **Achieve less well at school:** at KeyStage 2, only 37% of LAC reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, compared to 65% of non-LAC. At KeyStage 4, the average Attainment 8 scores for LAC were 19.1 compared with 44.6 for non-LAC.
- **Are 10 times more likely to have Special Educational Needs:** 28% of LAC in England have SEN, compared to 2.7% of non-LAC children.
- **Are 3 times less likely** to be in education, training or employment at age 19: 36% of Care Leavers in 2017/18 were not in education, training or employment compared to 10% of non-LAC
- **Only 6% of care leavers go to university** immediately after leaving school, compared to 27% of non-LAC
- **LAC are 6 times more likely to be cautioned** or convicted of an offence than non-LAC; and half of children in custody in England have experience of the care system, even though only 1% of children in England are in care.

Despite these statistical challenges, there are many examples of young people who have come through the care system and achieved great things. Through our programmes we aim to support LAC to have good mental health, to be resilient, creative, adaptable, and to achieve their aspirations.

2. Overview of activities delivered

In the three school years from September 2017 to the summer of 2020, three strands of work were delivered in the London Borough of Hounslow:

- Weekly term-time band sessions, after school, for 11-18 year olds
- Fortnightly term-time art sessions, after school, for 11-18 year olds
- Short holiday courses for LAC aged 7-18, including activities such as film-making, song-writing, creating a radio play, dance, drama, spoken word and art.

During the coronavirus lockdown, from March 2020, band and art sessions moved online, and continued weekly, including through holidays, until the end of July 2020.

Number of sessions delivered

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Art	20	17	10
Band	32	34	19
Online during lockdown	0	0	22

All activities and sessions were delivered by experienced, DBS-checked artists from Creative Futures, in partnership with the Hounslow Participation Team, and supported by a Creative Producer from Creative Futures.

The young people's achievements were celebrated each year at a 'Kids in Care Awards' event, organised by the Hounslow Virtual School each autumn.

Numbers of participants:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Art	16	24	23
Band	7	13	13
Holiday activities	19	6	n/a
No. Individuals	28	18	30

3. Objectives and outcomes of the programme

Three themes underlaid the programme, giving structure to the activities, outputs and evaluation:

Youth Voice: giving young people more of a voice in the shaping of their service, and expressing their experiences, through creativity and the arts.

Progression: building on skills and proficiencies e.g. in music and art; taking these skills and aspirations to new levels; creating work of which the children and young people are proud.

Impact: measuring impact in as robust and sustainable a way as possible without 'over-testing' – especially through the longer-term programmes such as Art and Band.

It was important for us throughout the programme that the young people involved could steer the project in the direction they wanted. During the coronavirus lockdown this became especially important. The needs of the young people began to emerge as the sessions took shape, and enabled activities to be focussed more on conversations that were important to them at the time. For example, the artist would introduce topics in order to begin dialogue which meandered through a diverse range of issues, from current affairs to working out their family tree and their journey into care. Many art sessions also explored the young people's anxieties about leaving care and their imminent transition to independent living, made in many cases more stressful by the Covid-19 measures in place.

In tracking the impact of the programme on the participating young people we collected observational reports from Participation Officers and our arts practitioners, feedback from the young people gathered from interviews, and the research evaluation. We did not carry out any testing or questionnaire-based evaluation as we were keen to avoid any additional written tests for these young people who already undergo significantly more testing than non-LAC children.

The areas we assessed for impact were:

- Developing skills in the arts, and
- The impacts through the arts on self-confidence, social skills, and well-being.

4. Impact on the participating young people

Over the three years of the programme, the young people involved created numerous new songs, developed instrument-playing techniques, and produced an array of art outputs including a pamphlet for other children in care and social workers about the care experience.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Creative skills: learning a wide range of music and art skills
- Exploring topics such as culture and identity through the creative arts
- Working independently, and working as a team
- Focussing on something and seeing it through
- Creating a booklet by and for LAC explaining the care system and what support is available

Creative Skills

Through our programme, participating young people developed skills across a wide range of creative disciplines including exploring many different instruments and learning to play some of them; developing knowledge of harmony and musical texture; composing, lyric-writing, improvisation and song-writing skills; developing skills in different visual art-forms such as papier mache, photography, graffiti, paint, transfers, and printing onto T-shirts.

One music practitioner commented *“J has worked really well and is increasing in his musical ability both in guitar technique and his creative ideas.”* This young person is also pursuing the guitar through lessons at school, and by playing in both of these settings he has identified what he finds most interesting about the instrument, namely it’s ability to create versatile sounds. *“My favourite thing about the guitar is all of the different musical genres you can play with it.”* He has learnt a lot from the collaborative process of song writing during band sessions. *“We remixed a song. It was actually cool... sometimes we write up words and make songs associated with them”* (‘J’, young person).

“C had written 4 lines of lyrics and put them to a melody. She also created some music using overlapping vocal riffs using garage band which was great” (Music practitioner).

G has created melody lines for the keyboard and learned how to play chords as well as try out the guitar, bass and cajon. She really loved playing with the electric drum machine, and created really strong rhythmic parts for 2 of the songs with this” (Music practitioner).

Working independently and as part of a team

Throughout the programme, there has been an evident change in the way the young people interact. Many of them did not know each other at the start of each project as they attend different schools and live in different areas, so our sessions offered an opportunity for these young people with a shared experience to meet and make new connections. We noticed how the groups worked increasingly well together as each project-year progressed, and that pro-social skills and teamwork developed and improved.

“S’ is a very high achiever and struggled with accepting guidance from others or having patience with others who are not as able or quick to learn as her. Through the sessions she has been learning this and is now much more patient and offers support to others, asks for help and is much more willing to listen” (Participation Officer).

“G is a positive and enthusiastic part of the group who really helps to keep a productive and friendly group dynamic, encouraging the other young people who are not as confident as her. I feel like she really values the group and is finding a way to express herself through music in a safe environment” (Music practitioner).

Self-confidence

We witnessed many young people’s confidence grow over the course of our programmes, helped – we believe – by offering a consistent service over a sustained period of time led by familiar and consistent professionals. For example, at the start of one project year ‘G’ was very self-conscious about giving her ideas in front of other participants. But by the third song she was *“flowing with ideas and taking the pen to write and organise everything and creating the structures for the songs. One of the songs is about being positive despite how hard things are for teenagers. The hook goes ‘I’m gonna, Keep On Going”* (Music practitioner).

Self-confidence is also evidenced in greater self-awareness and sense of identity. For example, ‘V’ (12) after attending the sessions for two years, has *“noticeably grown in her confidence, and is much more self-assured and clear on her sense of identity. She now proudly identifies as Black British and consciously reflects her heritage in her changing choice of hair styles. She is inquisitive, expresses opinions and preferences and is never afraid to ask direct questions when something isn’t clear to her. It’s fantastic to see her grow and develop in her sense of identity and to be more bold and vocal in her opinions and ideas”* (Art practitioner).

A safe space in which to be creative and expressive

“Participants sought in musical activities a space to feel in control of their lives, a basic determinant of children in care’s wellbeing. For instance, music was seen as a tool to explore, process and relieve unexpressed emotions, that most of the time was employed implicitly, within the boundaries of individual minds. Music was perceived as a “happy place”, a way for

young people to be protected from surrounding, chaotic social worlds and take a break from uncomfortable situations.

“Sometimes [music] can help you.. say you’re emotionally blocked, you are upset or worried about something. You might listen to a song and it might help you find your way out, being social.. It’s like a relief, like it helps us relief stressful stuff.. You put the headphones on when you need some fresh air” (Young person).

These findings resonate with the literature and show the unique way in which individuals experienced music within the band and the varied channels through which it affects children in care’s wellbeing.

Adults acted as role-models to some children in care who were able to laugh at their mistakes constructively, others gained a sense of mastery and control, whilst everyone found self-worth and sense of coherence to some extent.

“I just like coming because I get to interact with others as well as it’s a good way to talk to others...you can broaden your horizons I think, the instruments and other people” (Young person).

The strengths of the band were determined by engaging musical activities but most of all, by stable relationships with peers, musicians and the Participation Officer. Although participants had stable social networks outside the Virtual School, the band increased their ability to build further, positive and trusting relationships.” (Rossi, 2019)

Learning about the care system and support available

One of the key aims of the project in 2018 was to create a booklet by and for children in care, explaining more about the care system and what support was available. The idea for this booklet grew from discussions in the sessions.

It became apparent that many of the young people were not aware of the additional support and opportunities available to them from the Virtual College or other institutions. In many cases they did not realise that they were eligible to apply for help with a laptop, for example, or to get extra-curricula lessons and tailored support in their education. There seemed to be a misconception surrounding the fact that the Virtual College is a team dedicated to their education and not a social care team. This lent weight to the idea of producing a booklet about the care system, generated by and for the young people. In discussing the full breadth and scope of what the Virtual College provides we were better able to raise awareness among the young people, both retrospectively for those who were above the age threshold, and to the advantage of the younger members of the group. Everyone learned through discussion and became much more informed as a consequence.

Case Study: Participant ‘A’ (during online sessions)

Gradually throughout the sessions, ‘A’ started to become more confident, turn his camera on and participate more in the conversation.

He participated in music challenges we set in the first part of the project, including writing a verse of lyrics, exploring and finding 3 interesting sounds that he likes around the house. He started to share his ideas more with the group and contribute to what we were focusing on.

He chose the theme of 'family' for us to write a song about and in real-time in the group he created and edited lots of the lyrics, finishing them at home after the session. He worked really well with the rest of the group, listening and building on their ideas. He contributed ideas to create the melody for the song, the chord structure by giving us directions of what he preferred when we played guitar, the structure, and how we could change elements of it to create a different feel (style/ tempo/ structure).

'A' seemed to gain a lot from the course, as his participation and contributions increased rapidly throughout the sessions. His confidence in sharing ideas and also believing in his own ideas seemed to increase very quickly. Despite only being remote, this allowed him to learn new skills, express himself and feel connected through a really difficult time. By the end of the group, he was a really active member of the group and had helped write a full song" (Music practitioner).

"Working online with band has been so much fun and helped to me overcome the stressful situations I have been in" (Participant 'A', 2020).

5. Conclusion

In 2010, the National Foundation for Youth Music published an evidence review of projects it had funded with Looked After Children entitled "Looked after children and music making" compiled by Lucy Dillon. Here are two paragraphs from the Executive Summary:

"The poor outcomes experienced by children who have been in care when compared to their peers are well documented. They are apparent across a range of areas in their lives, including: educational achievement; employment status; contact with the criminal justice system; mental health well-being; experiences of homelessness; and substance misuse. The factors that contribute to these poor outcomes are complex and reflect looked after children's pre-care and care experiences, as well as their personal needs. Alongside a range of other activities and interventions, music-making has been identified in both government and other published evidence as having a role to play in meeting these young people's needs. The findings of this review provide further evidence of this.

Analysis of the collective experiences of Youth Music funded partner's to date shows that engagement in high quality music-making projects has the potential to deliver on a range of outcomes which can support the development of looked after children's resilience when dealing with the barriers they face as children in care. Three sets of outcomes were identified; social and personal development outcomes; music-making outcomes; other educational outcomes." (Dillon, 2010)

These paragraphs concisely outline both the challenges faced by Looked After Children, and the impacts that music in particular have been evidenced to have. Our programmes from 2017 to 2020 reinforce and amplify these findings, as well as demonstrating that music is not the only art-form which can have significant and worthwhile benefits for young people in care.

At Creative Futures we therefore wish to reaffirm our commitment to continue working with and supporting children and young people in the care system through carefully devised and delivered arts programmes across a range of disciplines, as well as growing our offer to include care leavers and young people in boroughs across London.

6. Funders

We are very grateful to the following who supported our work with Looked After Children and Young People from 2017-20:



Andrew Lloyd Webber
Foundation



**London Borough
of Hounslow**

For more information about our work with Looked After Children please look at our website:

<https://www.creativefuturesuk.com/looked-after-children>

Contact: Julian Knight, Creative Director, Creative Futures

julian@creativefuturesuk.com

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