

Arts Centre Washington – Youth Arts Provision in Washington area

Since Helen Green took over in the newly created post of Creative Director of Arts Centre Washington, she has been working towards re-establishing the Arts Centre as one that provides high quality artistic events and participatory projects for the community of Washington and beyond. She has placed a specific emphasis on providing artistic work for and by young people between the ages of 13 and 19 years. She is a great believer in the social benefits of the arts to young people, believing they can:

- instil confidence
- foster motivation
- raise aspirations
- broaden horizons
- widen the circle of friends and acquaintances
- encourage life skills e.g. communication, vocabulary etc

Prior to Helen's commencement at Arts Centre Washington, a small SIB grant was made in 2008 to consult with young people about what activities they wished to see happening at the Arts Centre. In Summer 2009, Helen was able to follow this up by creating Mix Up – a Summer holiday project offering a range of arts activities to 13-19 year olds. As a pilot project it was very successful, attracting 70 young people from all over Washington. Some of the comments by the participants appeared in the Sunderland Echo feature on the project:

"If this wasn't on we'd just be asleep or watching TV but it's been brilliant and I've met loads of new people"

"taking part in this helps build your confidence"

"it's been very friendly and informal. I'd definitely do it again"

Current youth arts provision at the Arts Centre is:

- 3 youth theatre groups catering for 3 different age ranges (ages 8 – 19)
- the Saturday Art Club (ages 9 – 16)
- Oxclose Music Project virtually every space in the venue on Sunday afternoons to rehearse and record their music (ages 13 – 19)

In addition, several youth arts initiatives that have funding attached are in the pipeline:

- Community Music Space – this is a central government initiative through the Department of Culture Media and Sport that provides funding for musical instruments, equipment and capital for soundproofing to improve facilities for musicians in the 16-25 age range.
- Youth Music – a partnership between Arts Centre Washington, The Forge arts in education agency for Sunderland, Washington Schools Extended Services, Gentoo and grant-making body Youth Music are discussing the possibility of the Arts Centre becoming a hub for young people's music in the Washington area by supporting outreach work and giving access to its facilities free of charge.
- Young Lead Officers - Arts Centre Washington is also privileged to be one of the North East organisations selected by Arts Council England to pilot this scheme. This has enabled 3 young people to become attached to the Arts Centre as "critical friends" advising on the appeal to young people and how that can be improved.

Annex 2c – Washington Area Committee: Learning Action Plan Update

Helen Green now wishes to bring all these disparate elements together to create a focused youth arts programme that meets on a weekly basis throughout the year. Provisionally entitled REMIX (moving on from MIX UP) this would provide activities in all artforms on a Wednesday night between 6pm and 8pm. Helen is already working with the Young Lead Officers on what type of artistic activities would be included – apart from the normal artforms a poetry group and photography group have been suggested. It is hoped that REMIX will eventually be run by a panel of young people with guidance from the Arts Centre staff, professional artists and youth workers.

It is recognised that many young people attracted to these sorts of activities are already engaged and motivated young people. Therefore a separate, smaller programme working with young NEET and disadvantaged young people will run alongside the main REMIX programme. Participants in this programme will be encouraged to move on to the REMIX group enabling them to progress both personally, socially and artistically.

Ideally the REMIX and NEET programmes would be an ongoing project for several years to come and preparations must be made to ensure the project is sustainable. However, an initial 1 year programme funded by SIB, partnered by the DCMS and Youth Music funding and with in-kind support from Arts Centre Washington will enable the project to get under way. Ideally the project will start after the spring half term allowing time to publicise the programme and recruit participants.

An application for SIB funds will be approximately £25,000. This will fund leaders for 48 weeks, resources and promotional materials. If possible a further amount for a Project Co-ordinator would be very helpful.

This project would place the Arts Centre firmly in the centre of the community; improve its image and profile amongst young people and help address the lack of activities for young people in Washington highlighted in the Local Area Plan.

Proposal:

Allocation of SIB/SIP: Committee is requested to agree the provision of £25,000 to fund leaders for 48 weeks, resources and promotional materials.