

SUMMARY Evaluation Report
Film and Theatre Project with Olive AP Academy
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Introduction and Background

In May 2021 students from Olive Alternative Provision Academy Cambridge (Olive Academy, formerly TBAP), came to Cambridge Junction for a 2-week arts based learning project. The young people at Olive Academy are not currently in the mainstream education system.

HighRise Theatre were appointed as the practitioners of the project because their extensive experience of working with groups of young people has bred positivity, inclusivity and creativity in groups of young people from 'inner-city' London, and because the multi-cultural company reflected the group of young people who were taking part. Dominic Garfield and Fahd Shaft from HighRise Theatre were the main artist practitioners and facilitators, working with Jas Pitt, the independent filmmaker who worked with Cambridge Junction's Creative Learning team to support the young people.

Through participation in theatre and film making workshops, and using the arts as a vehicle for self-expression, the programme offered the young people a safe space, contrary to the constraints often experienced in other aspects of their lives, in which they could begin to exercise agency, explore their own values, feel empowered and have their voices heard.

Project Aims

We know the impact that film-making projects can have on young people who are facing challenges, and on the wider community of teachers, youth group leaders, friends and families of the participants. We hoped to see a profound impact on the engagement of the young people we worked with at Olive Academy, especially in the following areas:

- **Increased confidence and self-esteem**
- **Improved social skills**
- **Developed verbal and communication skills and literacy**
- **Improved imagining**
- **Having their voices**
- **Feeling valued**
- **New and invaluable technical skills**
- **Challenging their own expectations**

We provided the opportunity for the participants to gain a Bronze Arts Award alongside the project, so that in addition to the anticipated outcomes of the project, they would also have a qualification as a result of taking part in the project.

Project Delivery

A group of year 11 students from Olive Academy were accompanied by several members of staff from the Academy each day. On average, there were 12 young people who attended each day, the majority of which had 100% attendance.

The first few sessions were about building trust between the adults and young people and also between the young people themselves. Despite being in a small year group at school, many had never spoken to each other before so it was important to establish a safe space where the participants could release their inhibitions. Games are an important part of theatre facilitation

process and often where the themes and ideas for the main piece come from, which was the case in this project too. They help to break down barriers by encouraging play, role playing and movement. The students involved don't typically play games during their school day, but the transformation in the participants was very positive. For instance, one participant was very reluctant to join in at first, but by the second week she was teaching newcomers to the project how to play the games.



The first week also focused on technical workshops designed to upskill and prepare the young people for making the film in the second week. This included filmmaking skills with Jas, such as using a green screen and camera. Dominic led workshops to help the young people relax in front of the camera, and Fahd ran a rap session. The rap session involved dissecting the work of artists the young people liked and teaching them how to write their own raps.

The first week saw an incredible transformation in the young people, preparing them for week two. By treating the young people like adults, they were able to be children and take off the armour that most had put up so prematurely in their lives.



The second week focused on devising and producing the film. The theme for the film came organically from the games played in the previous week and addressed the issue of inequality in Cambridge and what it's really like to live in a city famed for its university, which is viewed as inaccessible to those who are not part of that elite. Two young men from the group devised the script with assistance from Dominic and Fahd, and starred in the piece. One wore a suit and represented the Cambridge elite (the University, the pharmaceutical companies, the tech companies) and another wore a tracksuit and represented his own reality of Cambridge and the struggle of growing up in the UK's most unequal city. Subjects addressed included the contrast between working for a huge multinational like AstraZeneca (located directly opposite Cambridge Junction) vs drug misuse and homelessness being so prevalent within the city.

Because two students took a particularly strong role, Cambridge Junction staff were concerned that the other young people would be bored or potentially disruptive while they were not acting. However, they were surprised and delighted to see that during downtime, the young people were practicing their parts, creating new characters, writing scripts, experimenting with lighting, performing on stage, and documenting the process through photography. Their enthusiasm and dedication to the project was astonishing to their teachers.



Key Outputs

- We engaged 14 young people aged 15-16
- The young people participated in a total of 8 workshop sessions, plus 5 days for Arts Award
- It 78% of young people (11 out of 14) completed their Bronze Arts Award.

Outcomes



At the start of the process we asked the young people to do a baseline assessment in order to measure their own perceptions of their skills and experience and what they hoped to get out of the programme. We asked the same set of questions a week later with generally positive results. One participant noted a very significant increase in creativity, teamwork, self-esteem and, most notably, respect for others. This was also observed by the practitioners.

Whilst the quantitative data is useful, the feedback we received from young people in their own words was very powerful and indicated just how much impact the workshops had on them.

The majority reported a significant increase in confidence with several noting that they would like to have a career in the arts as an actor, make-up artist or director. Interestingly, by being delayed to the very end of their time at secondary school, the timing coincided perfectly with them thinking about their next steps and showed a positive route for them to follow. All students reported that they felt heard and valued during the project.

*"For two people that have never acted before we smashed it. Last time I did drama was year 8 and then I was like, nah you want me to make a fool of myself. **Now like I want to that!** I just loved it all. It really boosted peoples confidence."*

*"I enjoyed it all. **It made me feel happy.**"*

*"I don't think you can change anything because for us to turn up and do it every day for 2 weeks.. If you change it we might not have done it. **We turned up everyday, on time!!** It was a surprise to see all the faces that actually came."*

*"The whole thing was just so eye opening. **It was like someone had taken a blindfold off.** You have shown us what is possible. If someone told me I was going to do what I did I never would have believed them."*

*"**I improved my confidence.** People who don't usually work with each other were working with each other during this project. I also improved my rhyming skills."*

*"Usually when I meet new people I don't really talk that much **but I did I spoke up.** The first exercise that we did when we introduced our partners I would not normally have done if it was anywhere else. But I did it and I enjoyed that."*

*"It brought the whole year group so much closer. Now we all have each other on socials. **We are all a lot closer .**"*

*"There was a lot of **positivity.** In school someone would probably tell you to "shut up."."*

*"I am a beautiful actor. I thought it was going to be a lot harder but I could just be myself and be natural. **I would love to be a actor.**"*

*"Yeah. **I'd love to do what you lot have done with us.** Like helping the community"*

"It made me think that I'd love to be a director."

*"I learnt from Cambridge Junction about having a positive attitude towards each other and showing you **everything is possible in life if you put in the work**"*

We also gathered feedback from the students' teachers who noted that the students were much more mature and resilient as a result of the project.

"They looked different then in school, happier, free to express themselves unlike on a normal school day... They have been able to actually be kids and it has made them smile so much which has been so good to see... They can see there are different opportunities for them. That it is possible to have a career related to something they enjoy and had probably never heard of... They have learnt to focus on a project, see it through to completion, to take risks and not be afraid of what people think... They will remember this experience for their whole lives."



Legacy and Sustainability

The end result of this project was a high-quality film and accompanying documentary which the participants will be able to access forever. It will be screened at the Total Arts Film Festival in 2022, and the participants will be invited to attend with their families to watch their production on the big screen among their peers and other young people and VIPs from the area. 11 students will also gain their Bronze Arts Award, which they worked on during the third week of the project. This is both a significant achievement and a practically useful outcome for the students by way of a recognised qualification.

The project also had a real impact on Cambridge Junction and we are keen to continue working with the young people at Olive Academy through more projects like this and other work, which we have already begun fundraising planning for. Several participants were

interested in applying continuing their relationship with Cambridge Junction through work experience, apprenticeships or open access courses.

Conclusion

This project sought to empower a group of young people who have faced challenges with mainstream education, to show them career options in the arts and to express themselves in a safe space. The project met these aims to a strong degree with the young people surprising even themselves with their level of commitment and engagement. All students reported an increase in confidence, self-esteem, and teamwork, with several actively seeking pathways into the arts after the project.

The project gave us an opportunity to work with HighRise Theatre, who we hope to forge a more long-term relationship with to continue providing opportunities to the young people of Cambridge who may not get into the arts through more traditional means.

The project was a resounding success that met its immediate goals while laying a path for more further interactions, conversations and partnerships with the participants and practitioners.