



VisualRoots

Youth volunteering and work based learning in the visual arts

Introduction to Visual Roots

engage is the leading international membership association for gallery education. We promote understanding and enjoyment of the visual arts through advocacy, professional development, research and dissemination of practice. We work in partnership with visual arts venues to encourage people to participate in and enjoy the visual arts.

Visual Roots takes a fresh approach to the development of youth participation in the visual arts. The programme supports galleries to develop successful work-based learning models that enable hard to reach young people to gain skills and understanding that lead to personal development and accredited outcomes.

Phase One took place from October 2008 to March 2009. Four galleries provided placements for two volunteers who undertook an accredited placement of between 2 and 3 months. The programme is managed by engage and funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2008/09 and the National Lottery through Arts Council England in 2009/10. During 2009/10 six new galleries will be recruited into the programme. For information on how to apply for funding please visit the website at www.engage.org.uk

Key learning points from phase 1

How this kind of work can benefit hard to reach young people

Developing new talent: Engagement and employment in the arts from marginalized groups is substantially lower than other socio-economic groups. Placements can develop skills and confidence in a structured supportive environment, and can be a stepping-stone to formal education, employment or future participation.

Ambassadors: Young volunteers can become ideal ambassadors for youth participation in the arts. Young volunteers can deliver training and presentations to those outside their immediate peer group, which can lead to improving their self-esteem.

Measurable impact: Indicators and measures of success developed for individual participants and venues provide a framework for tracking the impact of the project. These indicators can also provide a mechanism for recording 'softer' outcomes and document the 'distance traveled' by the gallery and participants.

Placement structure and timing

Structure with flexibility: Placements that enable young people to experience a range of roles within a gallery can help identify specific areas of interest for the future. It is important

that young people are trusted, given responsibility and offered suitable timetables that will help them meet their targets.

Tailored around a larger project: Placements benefit from being built around an existing gallery programme. Projects where young people are responsible for delivering elements of a wider exhibition provide the opportunity to gain real life experience.

Placements can benefit both the gallery and young person: In addition to developing artistic and employment skills, young people can gain other skills such as working as part of a team, or with adults, the social aspects of working with people, regular attendance and having responsibilities. Galleries can find the work challenging, but also very rewarding. It is important to understand the resources required to deliver this kind of project and the need for specific training and experience for staff.

Recruitment period: Projects should allow for the time it will take to recruitment and engage potential volunteers in the programme. Group activities or projects can act as an introduction to generate interest and develop relationships.

Volunteer experience

Every young person is different: Placements should start with a clear understanding of the young person's motivation and needs and take into consideration current influences or priorities of the participants. Ongoing evaluation with the young people will help galleries to adapt or improve their practice.

Relationship with gallery: Young people are more likely to engage in the project if they have developed relationships of trust and an understanding of the gallery. Gallery educators need to be committed, consistent, and reliable as well as offering some of degree of flexibility regarding timekeeping, attendance and involvement.

Ownership: Young people can achieve exceptional outcomes if they feel real ownership and responsibility within a project. This requires developing at the start through direct consultation, a clear understanding of the roles of all everyone involved and their expectations.

Working with adults: Meaningful and trusting relationships with adults are central to this kind of work. Working with participants on one-to-one extended placements can help artists and educators gain new knowledge of how to work effectively with this group and develop their own skills as mentors.

Working with two volunteers: The pairing of young volunteers can work to mixed effect so it is important to consult with volunteers beforehand. When successful, this approach can result in the further development of skills such as negotiation and teamwork, but it may not be suitable for all young people and personalities and skills should be considered when delivering placements in tandem.

Accreditation

Accreditation can add value to placements and the experience of young people when used as a framework that supports the personal and educational development of the volunteer. Phase 1 has found the Arts Award provides a flexible framework, which in addition to



developing artistic ability, encourages self-reflection and evaluation and can be used beyond the project.

Partnerships

Agencies like Youth Offending Teams, Connexions and Children's Services can identify interested young people who can benefit from longer term accredited placements. Partnership commitment and understanding expectations is vital but could allow for the sharing of skills and knowledge and bring specialist resources to the project.

Progression and tracking

It is important that galleries look beyond the placement to ensure a young person's progression is considered and built into the project and may mean allocating time after the placement to provide continued support.

Organisational change

The Visual Roots programme is facilitating change in galleries and developing models for the formalised involvement of young people. By creating placements that help young people progress from informal participation to ongoing engagement, galleries can offer new routes of progression within their education frameworks.

Visual Roots is run by engage, the National Association for Gallery Education and supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. engage is a Registered Charity supported by Arts Council England.

Details of how to take part in Visual Roots in 2009 are available on the engage website at www.engage.org. For further information about Visual Roots, contact Norma Rosso, Visual Roots Director: norma.rosso@engage.org
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