

## Culture: looking out for looked-after children

Looked-after children are some of the most vulnerable people in society. The government's own figures show that up to 50% of young people leaving care go straight into unemployment, and that 20% will be homeless within two years. They also show that up to 75% of children in care leave school with no educational qualifications; the figure for all school leavers is 6%.

Research and an established body of practice show that culture has the potential to strongly improve life chances for children and young people in the care system. Culture & sport services allow looked-after young people to explore new ideas, take risks and build confidence. They allow young people to meet and work with positive role models, and develop social skills among their peers.

Culture works because children and young people are drawn to cultural pursuits. Whether it be art, sport, music, performance or the riches of a museum collection, culture offers a huge variety of opportunities for young people to participate in a wide range of activities, developing new confidence, interests and skills. These activities have the power to engage and inspire young people, raising their chances of beating the statistics stacked against them. Such activities are strongest when delivered in close partnership between Local Authority Children's Services and cultural organisations.

### Contribution to wider aims and objectives:

Culture, arts and sport can meet a wide range of key local authority needs, including:

- Emotional and behavioural health
- Educational attainment of children in care
- General educational attainment and progression
- Young people's participation in positive activities
- Reduction in NEET
- Reoffending

### Case Study 1 – Making music make the difference

The Blah Blah Blah Sessions were designed to engage looked-after young people in music-making. Delivered by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's music outreach department and Guildhall Connect in partnership with Tower Hamlets Leaving Care Service (for young people approaching their 16th birthday, the point at which they have a right to request independent accommodation), the project's focus was on identifying artistic talent. There was also a strong emphasis on technical skills, communication skills and the ability to co-operate among those taking part. The scheme, which comprised two weekend taster sessions and an intensive four-day component, finished with a musical performance to an invited audience at the acclaimed East London music venue Rich Mix.

12 out of the 13 project participants completed the project over a month's duration, with all reporting a desire to continue similar activity in the future; project evaluators observed that all of the young people engaged by the project improved confidence, team-working skills such as compromise and cooperation, and the core musical skill of listening. Two participants were subsequently selected for Connect ID, Guildhall's new mentoring programme for young people who show exceptional musical potential.

Tower Hamlets Leaving Care Service Manager is enthusiastic: "The Blah Blah Blah project has been tremendously successful in allowing young people who are often marginalised from mainstream society by their experiences of family breakdown and their care history, to access an opportunity to learn how to play instruments and sing alongside talented professionals and their peers. These

young people often have disrupted education and lose out on opportunities to develop skills in these areas. The Blah Blah Blah project allowed creative learning in a fun way. I have no doubt that it also had a positive impact upon the young people's self-esteem and confidence."



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### Case Study 2 – A scientific approach to improved relationships and greater achievement

Family Footprints is delivered in partnership by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Family Services and the Natural History Museum New Audience team. The project was specifically designed to involve looked-after children, their friends, foster carers and others in learning about science and the work of the museum. As the project finale, participants delivered presentation and Q&As on exhibit specimens in the museum for tour-groups and members of the public.

Family Footprints has run for three years, and plans for the project's fourth year include a focus on hard-to-reach young people in residential placements, and expansion to become a London-wide project.

Outcomes have been strong, with a number of participants progressing from the project to work placements and volunteer positions, and significant number of children reporting improved relationship with their carers, and vice versa.

Roy Clare, CEO of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, said "Both participants and their guests are hugely enthusiastic about the project and the opportunities it offers. The project is also successful in developing longer-term relationships." that it also had a positive impact upon the young people's self-esteem and confidence."



### Recommendations for taking this work forward in your borough

**Share local knowledge** – conversations between Care Services and Cultural Services will help establish which local cultural partners have experience of working with hard-to-reach groups, including children and young people in care. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and Arts Council England can also provide this information.

**Think differently** – Cultural partners are well positioned to offer innovative approaches and design services to help Care Services address their priorities in supporting those in care, and to help children and young people who have struggled in formal learning to flourish and progress.

**Take the long view** – projects for vulnerable young people always meet challenges along the way, but flexible, resilient partnerships with shared goals and a long-term vision can reap enormous benefits. Providing young people with a platform to re-engage with work or training can save many from a heightened risk of long-term worklessness, offending behaviour, teen pregnancy and ill-health, with the potential to alleviate pressure on associated long-term Local Authority and central government budgets.

**Celebrate - and build upon - success** – learners and communities alike are inspired and brought together by the achievements of such activity, whilst the successes of initial partnerships can provide a platform for collaborations between multiple boroughs, cultural organisations, education institutions and the third sector.

**Working with Children's Services** is a strand of the London Cultural Improvement Programme designed to improve joint working between Children's Services, Cultural Services and the wider cultural sector. For additional case-studies, references for figures and a range of supplementary materials to accompany this document, visit: [www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/wwcs.htm](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/networks/lcip/wwcs.htm) or contact project manager John McMahon: [john.mcmahon@mla.gov.uk](mailto:john.mcmahon@mla.gov.uk) / 0207 273 1404

The Audit Commission have published guidance for Local Authorities on targeting NEET and associated groups. These can be found at: [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/health/nationalstudies/againsttheodds/Pages/targetedbriefingsforpractitioners\\_copy.aspx](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/health/nationalstudies/againsttheodds/Pages/targetedbriefingsforpractitioners_copy.aspx)