



Visual Roots Case Study

artsdepot

Summary

artsdepot provided two volunteer placements to young people aged 24 and 18. These placements enabled the volunteers to direct artistic projects tailored to their own interests, and work alongside various staff across the range of professions at the gallery.

Context

The organisation

Since opening in 2004, artsdepot has emerged as a leading professional arts organisation in North London. Located within the London Borough of Barnet artsdepot is a visionary arts centre which not only provides crucial enriching activities for the community but also brings international acts to a welcoming local stage.

The building is a contemporary multi-disciplinary arts centre; it comprises two high-tech theatres, the Gallery, education spaces and a cafe and bar. It has been reaching out into local communities, building strong community links and partnerships across London for over four years.

artsdepot has extensive experience working with young people aged 16-25 years of age. It currently delivers Barnet Council's Community Arts Plan and work closely with Barnet Youth and Connexions department. Our education work reaches out to 8,000 people each year.

The situation

The Apthorp Gallery at artsdepot exhibits the work of emerging and established artists in its annual series of eight professional exhibitions and accompanying talk programme. The gallery strives to connect the themes and genres of exhibits with the theatre, dance, music and education programming throughout artsdepot.

Young people are an integral part of all of artsdepot's activities and Visual Roots provided a fantastic opportunity to further engage them in visual arts and our Gallery and develop stronger links between the gallery and education programmes.

artsdepot currently runs Arts Award Accreditation but had up until this point only delivered Bronze Awards, this was an opportunity to deliver Silver Awards and act as a progression route for some young people who had previously completed Bronze accreditation.

The idea

artsdepot aimed to offer a programme that would engage young people in the gallery and visual arts at artsdepot, helping to increase work, social and life skills and so improve their future employment prospects.

artsdepot decided to offer two volunteer placements to vulnerable and hard to reach young people from June 2009 – December 2009. Each placement would be approximately 60 hours, and would be accredited with Arts Awards.

The young volunteers would develop their personal, social, educational and creative skills. They would gain transferable skills in working within a team, taking responsibility, achieving regular attendance, building self-confidence and motivation, and learning new skills. The careers advice and guidance that they gained from arts professionals, alongside their first-hand experience of the world of work would enable them to make the transition into employment.

artsdepot is in the process of establishing a Youth Forum. The Visual Roots programme gave them an opportunity to encourage longer-term involvement between young people and artsdepot, giving them a greater connection with the gallery. It is anticipated that these volunteers will become ambassadors for the gallery. artsdepot hope that in the future these volunteers will be represented on the Youth Forum to represent the gallery programme.

Project

Planning

Planning was undertaken by the Visual Arts Officer and Education Manager. Plans were based on previous experience of delivering placements and Arts Award accreditation as well as looking at the programme of activities and exhibitions that artsdepot were already planning to deliver during the period of the placements.

Before submitting the application artsdepot consulted with young people about the possibilities of delivering the Visual Roots programme. Feedback was positive and one of those consulted went onto become a volunteer.

Once the volunteer placements were appointed, the Visual Arts Officer and Education Manager worked with the participants to create a tailored programme of work based on what they wanted to get out of the placement and the type of skills they were keen to develop (for example, one volunteer was starting an ICT course at college and therefore wanted to develop these skills in the workplace).

An action plan was then drawn up, covering the number of weeks and outlining the main projects and areas they would be working on and their Arts Awards plans.

The volunteers had the opportunity to take part in a full and structured programme of work to ensure that they gained a wide range of skills and experience. artsdepot planned to offer work in four key areas to give a wide range of experiences within the organisation:

Gallery

- Invigilating the gallery during opening hours, meeting and greeting members of the public and informing them about current gallery exhibitions
- Assisting the Visual Arts Officer with the planning and organisation of gallery exhibitions
- Assisting the Visual Arts Officer in the curating and installation of gallery exhibitions

Education Programme

- Working with professional artists in the delivery of visual arts workshops to primary schools in the London Borough of Barnet, leading to an exhibition in artsdepot's gallery.
- Assisting in the delivery of visual arts workshops which are part of artsdepot's courses and classes. For example, Messy Play (our class for early years and their parents / carers which encourages creative play in our mess-friendly arts spaces for children aged from 6 months to 4 years).

Events

- Attending private views and gallery talks, giving young people the opportunity to meet professional artists and learn from industry professionals.
- Assisting in the organisation of private views and gallery events.

Marketing and Administration

- Organising the gallery invigilator's rotas
- Working with the marketing department to assist in the production and distribution of marketing materials for the gallery (such as producing website content, putting online listings of exhibitions and talks and researching venues for print distribution).

Delivery

In order to recruit and select the two placements, artsdepot first approached their partner organisations including Barnet Refugee Services, Barnet Youth and Connexions and Barnet Youth Offending Services. Barnet Youth Offending Service staff were very keen to get a young person onto the programme, but could not find the right candidate.

The volunteers recruited came through Barnet Refugee Services and had been part of an artsdepot programme for refugees and asylum seekers. Both volunteers had previously participated in visual arts projects at artsdepot and had completed Bronze Arts Awards. They wanted to progress further and achieve Silver Arts Awards and develop their arts skills.

One volunteer is an asylum seeker, who is not in any education or training, and works 2 days a week on a market stall. She has been attending projects at artsdepot for 2 and half years.

The second volunteer is a refugee who has studied ESOL at Barnet College and is now doing a part time ICT course. She has been attending artsdepot projects for 18 months.

The volunteers worked in all areas described above under 'Planning'. One volunteer was particularly interested in working with children, and worked with the education team at artsdepot to organise a large scale Play event for the Big Draw in October. The other volunteer deepened her experience with ICT by working within gallery administration on tasks such as data-inputting and web-based research. Additionally, both participants developed their own artistic practise; one creating an exhibition of her photographic work (which was exhibited for one month) and the other designing and making a piece of stained glass (an extension of glass work she had begun in Kenya).

Outcomes

Impact on participants

Both volunteers gained Arts Silver Awards through their participation in the programme. Both young women contributed far more time than originally forecast, (one volunteering for 159 hours and the other for 97 hours), and will continue to be involved with artsdepot through the roots and wings projects.

Outside of artsdepot there are limited opportunities for one volunteer as she is yet to get citizen status in the UK.

Accreditation

Two Silver Arts Awards

Institutional impact

Delivering the Visual Roots programme helped to provide staff members with valuable experience and the skills to develop future volunteering programmes and other accredited qualifications in the future (such as the BTEC edexcel).

Evaluation process

The Arts Awards gave a strong evaluation structure to the programme. The young people outlined their aims at the start of their placements, these included: improving photography skills, improving their English and communication skills, developing office work skills, and experience in creating an exhibition.

These aims were then reviewed at the end of the project to measure their progression at attainment of these aims.

Both the Visual Arts Officer and the Education Manager had regular meetings with the two volunteers to check their progression, to identify any problems and look at what areas they needed more support or development.

They also met regularly to discuss plans and make any changes as were required to meet the needs of the volunteers. For example, one volunteer soon showed great skill in dealing with customers so her work plan was altered to involve more interaction over the telephone and in person.

Lessons learned

Taking part in Visual Roots has strengthened the education strategy at artsdepot by offering young people the opportunity to learn in a gallery and to gain insights into the world of work, by working closely with a small and committed team of professionals.

The elements of individual choice and responsibility were important to the students, and tailoring the project to the participants' interests helped to realise the aims of the project successfully.

The Arts award provided a sound structure for the scheme and a great sense of achievement for the participants.

Next steps

Both participants are keen to work towards their Gold Arts Awards at artsdepot so we will look for funding and training opportunities to enable us to do this. artsdepot are training one staff member to gain Gold advisor accreditation.

artsdepot will soon offer accredited volunteering schemes, and in September this year will start a number of placements with NEETs. They will continue to work with the two volunteers through their roots and wings projects and we will provide the opportunity for them to continue volunteering in the gallery.

With additional funding, artsdepot aim to have a paid team of gallery assistants.