



## Visual Roots Case Study Fabrica Gallery

### Summary

Fabrica had previous experience of working with young offenders but wanted to find new ways of diversifying its volunteer team and extend the offer available to hard to reach young people. The project offered Fabrica a space to explore the feasibility of longer term engagement and strengthen their links with the Youth Offending Team (YOT) in Brighton, who recommended two candidates. The Fabrica team worked with the volunteers to introduce them to the process of exhibition planning and development of the gallery's Spring exhibition and also to help them organise the local YOT's Summer exhibition for May 2009. The placements involved skills sessions, discussions and visits to other local galleries and working towards Silver Arts Awards accreditation. The accreditation was chosen by the young people. The Youth Offending Team Exhibition is part of Brighton & Hove's second *Youth Arts Fringe* (see [www.youthartsfringe.org.uk](http://www.youthartsfringe.org.uk) for information on the first event in 2008).

### The context

#### The organisation

Fabrica is a contemporary art gallery in Brighton & Hove. The gallery is a registered charity with an educational mission delivered by producing large-scale art installations and a wide ranging education programme. They also run a programme for volunteers and professional development activities for artists.

#### The situation

Fabrica is committed to developing new education and volunteer initiatives while seeking new ways of diversifying the volunteer team and working with new audiences. Prior to Visual Roots, the gallery had undertaken two projects with young offenders: *Straight Talking* (funded as part of the engage envision programme), a photographic research project and a one month placement for a young offender, both delivered in partnership with Brighton and Hove YOT.

The gallery saw this new initiative as potentially offering real benefit to the right young people. It was felt that it would provide experience working on real projects which would develop work-based skills, personal competencies and knowledge of contemporary art, and Fabrica.

#### The Idea

The idea of offering an extended placement offered the opportunity of developing the profile of the gallery's volunteer base. It also provided the opportunity for BHCC YOT and Fabrica to build on their relationship to support the YOT annual exhibition. The longer-term volunteer placement offered two young people the opportunity of learning exhibition organising skills and applying this experience and to use that relationship for the development of the YOT's Spring exhibition. The project also introduced accredited learning to the Fabrica volunteer programme, something that has been investigated for some time but to date had been unachievable.

## **The project**

### Planning

The project was developed by Fabrica's Co-director in consultation with the Brighton and Hove Youth Offending Team Social worker. Other staff members, including the Exhibition Space and Volunteer Managers were involved in its development. Members of Brighton Youth Arts, YOT team and Artists' project managers were also involved. Two young men, both aged 17 and under supervision of the YOT, were recruited to undertake placements. Both volunteers were briefed on the planned activities, timetable, types of accreditation available and its requirements. The young people were given the opportunity to choose certain types of activities within the parameters of the placement to best suit their particular interests.

### Delivery

A programme of weekly meetings, visits and workshops was planned to cover the placement period from November 08 to February 09. The sessions were led by the Exhibition Space and Volunteer Managers with the support of the Co-ordinator. As the gallery was closed during part of the placement, visits to other galleries were arranged to introduce the young people to curators, artists and learn about exhibition planning programmes. Some sessions took place at Fabrica to offer first hand experience of professional practice; working with artists, practical considerations of the exhibition space and interpretation.

Parallel to these activities, the young volunteers worked on the plans for the Youth Offending Team (YOT) 2009 exhibition for which they selected as a theme, The Seven Deadly Sins. They used the experience gained in the placement to develop the exhibition and worked with an experienced YOT Exhibition Co-ordinator who guided them through the process. They developed production schedules and set up meetings, wrote and sent out press releases to ensure the successful presentation of the exhibition in May. They also wrote the brief for submission of works and publicised the show to other young people. Throughout this process the young people were also developing their own work for the exhibition.

The project ran successfully until December, when due to the complex nature of the programme and the demands placed by the YOT exhibition, there was a breakdown in communication with participants. However, Fabrica has continued a productive relationship with the YOT and the participants providing support in the planning and delivery of their

exhibition. One of the participants is also completing his Silver Arts Awards qualification, which will offer him a recognisable accreditation to include in his portfolio.

## **Outcomes**

### Impact on participants

The participants elected to work towards a Silver Arts Award and demonstrated increased self-esteem and confidence, improved life skills, meaningful relationships with professionals from the cultural sector, persona and career progression routes away from offending.

### Accreditation

Volunteers met with staff to discuss accreditation options. The volunteers were keen to work towards the Silver Arts Award. Had the project been conducted over a longer timescale, the young people may have attempted the Gold award. The Youth Arts team met with the volunteers regularly to provide guidance.

### Institutional impact

The project gave the team at Fabrica a better understanding of the needs of working with hard to reach young people as well as working more effectively with the YOT and the Arts Awards scheme.

### Evaluation process

Evaluation was an ongoing process. The volunteers made visual and audio diaries to record their thoughts and the evolution of the project. All the participating partners logged their time allocations and the Exhibition Space and Volunteer Managers and the Co-ordinator also kept diaries. Fabrica's Co-ordinator monitored the schedule and co-ordinated the project's progression.

## **Next Steps**

Fabrica has plans to link their work with the John Hansard Gallery and develop a long-term project for this target group in partnership with Youth Offending Teams in Wessex, Brighton and Hove and with engage.