

## **Visual Roots Case Study**

### **198 Contemporary Arts and Learning**

#### **Summary**

198 Contemporary Arts and Learning aims to integrate its exhibition programme with innovative visual arts education projects. Our creative learning programme supports socially excluded young people from BME communities in the London borough of Lambeth. The 198 Visual Roots project was developed to involve young people in the development of an exhibition and its programme which focused on the history of people living in Brixton and surrounding areas. The project encouraged their thinking around ideology, identity and belonging whilst exploring the religious historic spaces of Brixton and their alternative use.

#### **The context**

##### The organisation

198 Contemporary Arts and Learning was established in 1988 after the Brixton riots to provide a platform for the work of Black artists and has developed into a venue for artists from diverse cultural backgrounds with a profile for innovative issue-based exhibitions and critically acclaimed work in the field of art education. The exhibition programme showcases visual art that represents the changing cultural climate of British society.

##### The situation

The gallery has over ten years experience of working with hard to reach young people, particularly those from BME (Black and Ethnic Minority) communities on a variety of initiatives. These have included working in partnership with other organisations such as The Hayward Gallery and The National Portrait Gallery. This Visual Roots project has given 198 the opportunity to build on our current youth work, by integrating young people into the planning and development of an exhibition of significance to the local community. We see it imperative to the development and social wellbeing of young persons with an interest in the arts to gain not only creative skills, but to take a real world hands on approach to enriching life experiences and increase life chances. Visual roots have given young people the opportunity to do this whilst gaining accreditation.

Young people are referred to the project through a range of key partnerships with local organisations. We are also the lead organisation in THE IMPACT Consortium which supports NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) young people through a range of targeted services in partnership with five other organisations.

##### The Idea

The People, Signs and Resistance exhibition provided an opportunity for the gallery and a group of artists to work in collaboration with two young people who were taking part in the Creative Learning programme of the organisation. The two volunteers worked closely with Mutiny Arts, an artists collective, to develop strands of the exhibition. The volunteers were involved in photography, design for web, construction, and print designs for T-shirts as part

of their skills development. Mutiny Arts also encourage the young people to contribute to the scheduled talks, workshops and exhibition materials.

## **The project**

### Planning

Staff of the 198 met and discussed ways that young people could participate with Mutiny Arts. Timelines and activities were agreed in consultation with a group of young people that take part in some of the gallery programmes. Approximately 32 hours was spent on planning at the beginning of the project to identify the tasks and the level of support that would be required for the young people to do their work. The Director, youth participants, Creative Learning Team, Curator and Artists were involved in the planning and consultation. At the end of the project, participants were involved with around 20 professionals.

### Delivery

Two 19 year-olds were recruited to take part in the project. Neither was in employment, education or training at the time of the project.

The project was delivered over a 16-week period. It comprised weekly support sessions offered by one of the gallery freelance trainers to ensure that expectations and requests were met by all parties involved. This support framework was deemed important and led to successful outcomes because it provided a mechanism for participants to bounce ideas and check their learning. It was also a way of encouraging participants to use their skills while helping them understand the acquisition of new ones. They were involved in a variety of roles in the lead up to and during the exhibition including photographic work, design of publicity material, t-shirt designs, event support, interview and filming techniques, and workshop discussions. This allowed them to work with different staff members in the gallery giving them insight into the occupations available within an arts space.

## **Outcomes**

### Impact on participants

- Increased awareness of the different professions that operate within an art gallery space
- Development of a portfolio which can be used for gaining entry into further studies
- Practical experience on exhibition development, including its supporting programmes, such as talks and events. Focus on marketing and developing ideas visually.
- Confidence in presentation, interpersonal, organisational and self-motivation skills
- Opportunity to work in collaboration with another person, which posed positive challenges while providing motivation.

### Accreditation

Both young people undertook the Silver Arts Award. This allowed participants to place their learning and experience into a context during the development of the exhibition. It encouraged them to reflect on their learning. As part of the Award they produced their own visual materials with descriptions that were assessed via group skills sharing sessions and during contact hours. The journal was also very helpful. The accreditation has given them documented experience and assisted in their portfolio preparation, which will be used for gaining entry into further studies.

### Institutional impact

The project allowed 198 to develop a clear documented structure for volunteering placements. It gave them the opportunity to integrate participants from the creative learning programme into gallery work and to witness their progress. The gallery was able to learn about the benefits of one to one mentoring and increase their understanding of the Silver Arts Award.

### Evaluation process

The gallery used video clips made by the young people to share their skills with other participants in the education programme. Participants also produced different types of visual materials for both the Arts Awards and the exhibition. Resources given by Visual Roots to track and document the process were deemed useful. Currently they produce visuals which are assessed and write journal entries for each day on the project.

### **Next Steps**

The development of a structured volunteer placement has given the gallery new insights and experience into the process and increases their understanding of the value of this approach. Staff have now requested to be trained in Gold Arts Awards because of the young people's keen interest in progressing to a higher level.