



Report of a Survey  
on  
Creative Arts in the Youth Service

Inspected: 2000-2001

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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- 1.1 This report sets out the Inspectorate findings on the experiences of young people within the Youth Service in Northern Ireland in the creative arts. The findings are based on evidence from visits during 2000-2001 to a sample of 29 youth centres and nine Voluntary Headquarter Organisations (VHQOs), five creative arts projects facilitated by a range of providers and partnerships, and four training sessions for youth leaders. In addition, there were discussions with officers of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), professional trainers, resource and support providers, groups of young people and their leaders. Several inspectors also attended public performances and exhibitions.
- 1.2 The report assesses the extent to which youth centres involve young people in the creative arts, and the extent to which such involvement promotes their personal and social development. It also examines the ethos particular to creative arts and the provision for and management of work in the creative arts.
- 1.3 The document 'Youth Work - A Model for Effective Practice' states that participation in the arts can promote the central theme of youth work namely, personal and social development. The arts also support the three core principles of the youth work curriculum:
- preparing young people for participation;
  - promoting acceptance and understanding of others; and
  - the development of appropriate values and beliefs.

Through individual or collaborative work in creative activities, young people have the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and understanding about a range of activities, and to enhance their self-esteem, self-confidence and respect for each other's ideas and values.

*Young people involved in a three-year cross-border drama and creative writing project- Art and Design for Mutual Understanding, spoke confidently on video about the benefits of the programme, particularly about their work in creative writing. Collaboration was the key feature of the projects and the need to create a finished product ensured that the team members had a shared sense of responsibility.*

*“The project has meant to me that I met friends from different places that I wouldn’t have met if it wasn’t for the project. It has also given me greater confidence.”*

*“I learned the way different people in the group thought of Catholics and Protestants.”*

*“It was good for us to work with people from the North as we could appreciate how they saw things and how they felt - and this influenced our music.”*

*“For one week in August I learned teamwork, friendship and how to respect other people my age. I learned to trust.”*

- 1.4 In ‘Opening Up the Arts - A Strategic Review for the Arts Council’, one of the education and youth priorities outlined in *To the Millennium* is:

‘to co-operate with service providers to secure the place of the arts in the informal education system, to ensure that as many people as possible can develop their own creativity’.

One objective in the Arts Council’s current policy document is to enhance children and young people’s access to creative expression through the arts, in contexts of their own choosing and increase opportunities for participation as they grow and develop.

- 1.5 In correspondence with the centres, contexts and activities were identified within which creative arts activities could take place, including art and design, circus skills, cookery, craft, dance activities, drama, media studies, music production, photography, physical theatre, singing and video production.

- 1.6 Throughout the report a number of quantitative terms are used which may be interpreted as indicated below:

almost/nearly all	more than 90%
most	75% to 90%
a majority	50% to 74%
a significant minority	30% to 49%
a minority	10% to 29%
very few/a small number	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of provision, the Inspectorate relate their judgements to four performance levels which may be interpreted as follows:

- |    |                                   |                                |
|----|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Significant strengths             | good (ranging to outstanding)  |
| 2. | Strengths outweigh any weaknesses | satisfactory (ranging to good) |
| 3. | Weaknesses outweigh strengths     | fair (ranging to satisfactory) |
| 4. | Significant weaknesses            | poor                           |

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## 2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- 2.1 In the vast majority of the centres, the ethos within which creative arts activities take place is good. There are good relationships between the young people and their leaders, or those teaching the sessions; in many instances the relationships are excellent. (3.1)
- 2.2 In the vast majority of centres, the leaders display vision, motivation and enthusiasm and initiate ideas and projects. They encourage the young people to participate in and enjoy their experiences in the creative arts. (3.2, 4.3)
- 2.3 In a significant minority of centres, the leaders use the creative arts, not as a discrete area of provision, but as a means to deliver and promote the three core principles of the Youth Service. (4.2)
- 2.4 In a significant minority of the centres, the leaders include creative arts in their programmes but they lack confidence and expertise to plan beyond activities which are short-term. (4.4)
- 2.5 Over half of the youth centres visited have employed professional artists in projects; these projects have valuable outcomes for the young people. In other centres, there is no planned opportunity for the young people to progress or develop the newly-acquired skills for the benefit of themselves or others. (5.1, 5.3)
- 2.6 A significant minority of the youth centres has received additional funding for projects; professional tutors rather than youth leaders facilitate these projects. There is evidence that the complexity of current funding arrangements, the lack of easily available information and the process of application deter some groups from availing of valuable funding opportunities. (6.1, 6.2)

- 2.7 In the voluntary sector the time required to research the feasibility of a project, to forge possible partnerships and to make the necessary applications is often prohibitive and raises queries about equality of access for all young people to professional expertise. (6.2)
- 2.8 The partnerships between the leaders, ELBs and the professional individual artists or groups have brought together considerable expertise to provide different experiences which help to develop young people, personally and socially. (6.3)
- 2.9 The provision, training and support for the creative arts in the Youth Service are under-developed and vary greatly. The good practice which already exists should be extended and developed across all board areas. (7.1)
- 2.10 There is a need to develop a more structured partnership between the ELBs and groups of professional artists, to draw up a more strategic programme for training which ensures progression and sustainability, and to have a systematic process of monitoring and evaluating the influence on the work in youth centres. (7.2)
- 2.11 There is wide variation in the effectiveness of the management of creative arts development within centres. In a significant minority of centres the management of a creative arts programme is good. (7.4)
- 2.12 Inappropriate accommodation and storage is a problem in a significant minority of the centres. These centres often lack funding to acquire more expensive materials or equipment such as information and communications technology (ICT) hardware or media studies equipment, to ensure that young people are challenged sufficiently or progress to higher levels of attainment. (8.1)

### 3. ETHOS

- 3.1 In the vast majority of the centres, the ethos within creative arts activities is good. There are good relationships between the young people and their leaders or those leading the sessions; in many instances the relationships are excellent. Mostly there is a friendly and relaxed atmosphere and the young people and the tutors work together effectively and with mutual respect. In a small number of cases, youth leaders report that a few professional artists do not have a suitable rapport with the young people; in these instances the young people are less motivated and the intended outcomes are not realised.

- 3.2 In the vast majority of centres, the leaders display vision, motivation and enthusiasm and initiate ideas and projects. They encourage the young people to participate in and enjoy their experiences in the creative arts. In the best practice, the leaders make effective use of participation in the creative arts to benefit the young people in terms of their personal and social development and social inclusion. They create opportunities for the young people to celebrate their achievements through displays, exhibitions or performances of their work within the centres and to wider audiences. A minority of leaders do not fully appreciate the contribution made by the creative arts. In such instances, often the work on display is not recent and does not stimulate the young people. There is a need to develop or extend the range of provision within these centres through appropriate training or working in partnership with outside facilitators.

*A major factor in the promotion of the creative arts programme in this centre is the commitment and expertise of one of the leaders. Sound written planning supports art and design, dance and circus skills. The leader interests and motivates the members, encourages and develops the skills of the other leaders, and ensures that the members have good experiences in this aspect of the curriculum. Regular local festivals provide opportunities for the leaders and members to demonstrate and celebrate their achievements. Support and encouragement and occasional in-service training sessions provided by ELB personnel are valued by club leaders.*

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## 4. PROVISION FOR CREATIVE ARTS

- 4.1 Almost all of the centres visited offer art and design and craft activities. A significant minority of centres offer drama, dance and cookery throughout the year. The opportunities for drama and singing increase in preparation for seasonal productions. In a few centres dance activities are of a very high standard; however, much of the work in dance is informal and unstructured improvisation by the young people and lacks progression. There are instances where the leader has particular expertise or has allocated centre funds to specialised equipment. On other occasions specialist tutors provide the necessary expertise and resources for the duration of a specific project: such work includes making or recording music, learning to play an instrument, photography, media studies including animation and video work, and circus skills. Only a small minority of centres has sufficient ICT hardware or software to influence activities in the creative arts.

- 4.2 In a significant minority of centres, the leaders use the creative arts, not as a discrete area of provision, but as a means to deliver and promote the three core principles of the Youth Service. In the best practice, the leaders and the young people plan carefully and creatively to provide a variety of valuable and enjoyable experiences across the age range. The experiences provide appropriate opportunities for the young people to develop their skills progressively in a range of activities, to make friendships beyond the centre and to continue the activities into adult, and on occasions, working life. Frequently the leaders use the feedback effectively to inform future planning.

*In one centre the members play an active role in shaping and planning the activities. They use ICT to produce a newsletter, advertise and plan events and murals depict different issues affecting particular age groups. Using outside facilitators, the leader initiated a project to encourage all age groups within the centre to explore 'Personal Expression through Arts Activity'. The groups identified a series of life issues about which they had to make decisions and made a large canvas board game. The experience offered the young people opportunities to:*

- *Engage in aesthetic and creative activities;*
- *Explore a future which they are most likely to meet;*
- *Consider issues difficult to raise in school/home;*
- *Present their viewpoint to a prestigious but sympathetic group.*

- 4.3 The range and quality of the work in the creative arts vary according to the expertise, interests and enthusiasm of the leaders. In just under half of the centres the leaders extend the young people's experiences beyond their club situation. There is good practice in centres where the young people work collaboratively on activities leading up to large events such as, preparing a float for the Saint Patrick's Day parade, exhibits for town festivals, pantomimes, plays or dance/fitness championships.

*In preparing for these events the young people were encouraged to develop their own ideas and skills by designing costumes and T-shirts, using computer images to personalise the T-shirts, making large model floats, stage scenery and costumes and using ICT to produce news sheets, tickets and programmes.*

- 4.4 In a significant minority of the centres, the leaders include creative arts in their programmes, but they lack confidence and expertise to plan beyond activities which are short-term. The young people enjoy the experience but there is limited progress or challenge in the activities and they are not encouraged to experiment sufficiently; there are few opportunities to use ICT creatively. In a minority of centres the leaders give insufficient attention to stimulating the young people to refine and improve their work. As a consequence, the pieces of work are of a low standard and lack progression.

## 5. PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT CREATIVE ARTS

- 5.1 Over half of the youth centres visited have employed professional artists to add breadth to their programmes; they have done so by:

- setting aside money from their centre funds;
- using ELB resource centres;
- developing an independent section in the centre for specialist provision;
- seeking sponsorship;
- attracting funding from ELB partnerships or from a range of funding organisations.

- 5.2 Almost all leaders report that the use of facilitators enhances significantly programme development and the quality of the experiences in the creative arts. Short-term funding and the lack of peripatetic tutors restrict progression for the young people and the continued professional development for leaders. A minority of centres has used professional facilitators successfully; the leaders have used the expertise gained from linked arts programmes, to develop their initial ideas into other areas of the arts.

- 5.3 Many of the one-off projects have valuable outcomes for the young people in terms of social and practical skills which are transferable to their school work, the world of work and the community. These experiences are particularly relevant and useful when youth centres have already established strong partnerships with the local community, for example, through drama productions, concerts or festivals. The young people progress with confidence from the youth club into community activities. In other centres, following an introductory experience to a new activity, there is no planned opportunity for the young people to progress or develop the newly-acquired skills to the benefit of themselves and others.

*One professional group 'Kids in Control' (KIC), seeks to develop in young people a creative sensibility and physical theatre techniques; the training uses the street idiom of the young people. The group has the necessary flexibility which allows the young person to continue within a group and to develop their self-esteem, peer education techniques and creative voices as well as physical theatre techniques once the project is over.*

*In one centre, young people who were participants in the Millennium Volunteer programme studying aspects of media, were offered full time jobs in broadcasting thus contributing to the wider issues of economic regeneration within Northern Ireland.*

## 6. FUNDING TO SUPPORT CREATIVE ARTS

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- 6.1 A significant minority of the youth centres visited has received additional funding from organisations such as the Arts Council, Arts Council Lottery, Millennium Volunteers, Border Directions, Cross-Community funding, New Opportunities Fund (NOF) or Peace and Reconciliation Partnership funds; professional tutors rather than youth leaders facilitate these projects. To plan, organise and apply for funding, the youth leaders and others have to invest considerable time, energy and commitment. Where leaders have the knowledge and expertise to apply successfully for additional funding, the young people have benefited from many useful and exciting short-term experiences. The projects include: young women's photography projects, adventures in music, film making, rural art work, circus skills, physical theatre, large scale drama and dance productions. In a few instances, these experiences have motivated and equipped the leaders and the young people to initiate other activities either within the centre, or with another group of young people.

*Wheelworks, in partnership with other agencies, facilitated a successful mobile rural arts project. Young people from a number of youth centres in a rural area worked on a project with a professional artist, and came together to have their work displayed at a public exhibition. The project involved a great deal more than producing large-scale environmental sculptures and sound patterns. The young people had researched and observed their local areas well, made choices about the images that they wished to use and how to portray them in a range of forms, as well as learning the practical skills of photography, sound production and manipulation of various materials to produce their*

*final sculptures. As well as developing their self-esteem, letting them know that their work is valued, participation in the project showed them, and others, that they had skills which they could take forward into the world of work.*

- 6.2 There is evidence that the complexity of current funding arrangements, the availability of information and the process of application deter some groups from availing of valuable funding opportunities. In the voluntary sector the financial and other resources required to research the feasibility of a project, to forge possible partnerships and to make the necessary applications is often prohibitive and raises queries about equality of access for all young people to professional expertise. Of the centres visited, a very small number have been granted Arts Council or Arts Council Lottery funding. One centre received heritage Lottery funding.
- 6.3 The partnerships between the leaders, ELBs and the professional individual artists or groups such as Border Directions, City Wise, KIC, Play Resource Warehouse or Wheelworks, have brought together considerable professionalism and expertise to develop young people personally and socially using different experiences. Without partnership funding or independent fund raising by leaders, few of these valuable projects would have taken place.
- 6.4 A number of long-term projects have acquired considerable amounts of funding. The outcomes for the individuals in the groups are good in terms of their growth in confidence and development of skills. To ensure that like funded projects in the future sustain the interest and commitment of the participants throughout and beyond the project itself, there is a need for regular qualitative evaluation of the work. In addition, at the planning stage, greater account needs to be taken of the features of good practice identified in previous projects.

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## **7. MANAGEMENT OF THE CREATIVE ARTS**

- 7.1 The provision, training and support for the creative arts in the Youth Service are under-developed and vary greatly. In the best practice, ELBs ask leaders to identify their needs and offer effective programmes of training or support across the art forms. Appropriately, they include aspects of the creative arts in their foundation and post-foundation training. In addition, one ELB has appointed a creative arts field officer, established a number of specialist centres for art and design and good quality drama, and also provides valuable specialist peripatetic support. This good practice should be extended

and developed across all board areas. In some areas, ELB officers report that it is difficult to find appropriate trainers or professionals who can afford to work for a level of remuneration that falls well below the standard rate of payment.

- 7.2 Good quality creative arts training and support in the creative arts are available from other agencies, and ELBs provide funding for leaders to attend the well organised professional courses. These courses however, are not linked to strategic planning for the creative arts within the Youth Service. There is a need to develop a more structured partnership between the ELBs and groups of professional artists, to draw up a more strategic programme for training which ensures progression and sustainability, and to have a systematic process of monitoring and evaluating the influence on the work in youth centres.
- 7.3 The leaders in the majority of the VHQOs visited wish to provide creative experiences for young people. In some instances, the young people produce work of very high quality. Appropriately, one organisation has written a policy for the creative arts and another has appointed an arts adviser to co-ordinate the development and promotion of arts activities. At least two groups have made partnerships with professionals to develop sustainable arts programmes within their units or to use creative approaches to raise awareness of, for example, health issues with 8-10 year olds.

*The drama workshop in The Rainbow Factory, a group established by Youth Action Northern Ireland (YANI), took the form of a skills workshop much of which was based on improvisation and focused on parent/child issues and relationships. The members, many of whom were drawn from disadvantaged backgrounds, communicated complex messages in ways that both amused and informed their peers. The drama work was both imaginative and energetic. The large majority of the members were creative both in their thinking and in their portrayal of different characters and situations. They showed, through their work, the desire to base their drama on their own experiences and knowledge.*

- 7.4 There is wide variation in the management development of creative arts within centres. As part of the survey, the leaders of the centres were asked to list the strengths and areas for development in their work in the creative arts. In many instances the responses from the leaders concur with those identified by the Inspectorate.

- 7.5 In a significant minority of centres the management of a creative arts programme is good. In the best practice observed the strengths included:
- the time, energy and commitment of enthusiastic young people, leaders, volunteers and parents who recognise the value of experience of the creative arts;
  - the leaders who have been encouraged to develop a range of skills and who respond flexibly to the needs of the young people;
  - the availability and good use made of safe and secure accommodation and resources, including the creative use of ICT;
  - creativity used to develop the core themes of the Youth Service curriculum;
  - access to adequate flexible funding;
  - good links and partnerships with other agencies and opportunities to use professional expertise;
  - regular opportunities to celebrate and demonstrate achievements.

- 7.6 In a minority of centres the weaknesses in the management of the creative arts outweighed the strengths. The contributory factors which inhibit the development of appropriate programmes include:
- the lack of professional development and recruitment of suitably qualified or experienced leaders;
  - insufficient leaders to allow other activities to be organised simultaneously;
  - the lack of secure long-term funding to ensure a broad creative arts programme, or to obtain and sustain the work of professional artists, or those with particular expertise;
  - insufficient contact with those who can advise and support leaders in the development of a purposeful and relevant creative arts programme;
  - the lack of appropriate accommodation, storage and resources to support a creative arts programme;
  - the lack of progression routes for members beyond the centre.

## 8. ACCOMMODATION AND RESOURCES

- 8.1 Inappropriate accommodation and storage is a problem in a significant minority of the centres. All centres visited, appreciate greatly the provision of raw materials for creative activities by Play Resource Warehouse. The centres often lack storage to keep a sufficient supply of materials, or the funding to acquire more expensive materials such as ICT hardware or media studies equipment, to ensure that young people are challenged sufficiently or progress to higher levels of attainment.

## 9. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The report on the current practice, provision and management of creative arts in the Youth Service identifies a number of strengths and examples of good practice. It highlights the good ethos relating to creative arts in the majority of centres, the use of creative arts programmes to deliver and promote aspects of the Youth Service core curriculum in a significant minority of centres, and the good use made of partnerships and professional expertise by about half of the groups to add breadth to their creative arts programmes.
- 9.2 Without significant training of youth leaders or greater availability of specialist tutors, the provision will not improve significantly and will continue to be fragmented. There are a number of areas that require further development if a broader range of experiences in the creative arts is to become accessible to all young people. These include:
- more strategic planning by ELBs and VHQOs to promote sustainable creative arts programmes within centres and to encourage innovation;
  - more structured planning at centre level to ensure that creative arts are used as a medium to promote the three core principles of the Youth Service;
  - more structured partnerships to help provide a more systematic professional development for leaders;
  - greater access to funding to ensure sustainability and equal access to the creative arts for all young people;
  - a process by which to monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision for the creative arts at all levels.

**YOUTH CENTRES VISITED 2000 to 2001**

Ardcarnet Youth Centre, Belfast  
Ardoyne Youth Centre, Belfast  
Ballyoran Centre, Dundonald  
    Kreative Kids Club  
    Greengraves Drama Group  
Ballyronan Youth Centre, Magherafelt  
Charter Youth Club, Belfast  
Duke of Westminster Youth Centre, Ballinamallard  
Glenfoyle Youth Centre, Strabane  
Holy Trinity Youth Club, Portrush  
Kirkubbin Youth Centre  
Maghera High School Youth Club  
Moneyreagh Youth Club  
Monkstown Community School/The Bridge Youth Centre  
Nubia Youth Centre, Belfast  
Portrush Youth Centre  
St Agnes's Youth Centre, Belfast  
St Breacan's Youth Centre, Londonderry  
St Mary's Youth Centre, Limavady  
St Michael's Youth Centre, Enniskillen  
St Patrick's Youth Centre, Lisburn  
Shankill Creative Arts Centre  
Stevenson Youth Centre, Dunmurry  
Top Spot, Belfast  
Viscount Bangor Youth Centre, Killough

**VOLUNTARY HEADQUARTER ORGANISATIONS VISITED 2000 TO 2001**

Catholic Guides of Ireland

Scouting Ireland

MENCAP NI

Girls' Brigade Northern Ireland

Guide Association

Scout Association

Youth Action

YMCA

Voluntary Service Belfast

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