

High Peak Community Arts Social Arts Exchange Creative Mentoring 2021

Report on the first full 12 months of the programme

Written and compiled from evaluation material by Katrina Laird

anxious
upset volatile
disengaged
angry lonely
confrontational
annoyed
worried

calm confident
comfortable
positive focused
happy
patient reflective
resilient engaged
relaxed

Executive Summary

The Social Arts Exchange mentoring programme was established at the end of 2020, launching fully in January 2021. It works with referring partners such as schools and provides weekly one on one mentoring for children and young people identified by the partner as being especially affected by pandemic.

In the first year of the provision one to one sessions were delivered to 59 disadvantaged children from at least 8 different schools in the High Peak. The children and young people were aged between 8 to 20, and came from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds, broadly representative of the local population. There were as many as 19 sessions per child and 498 total sessions from January to December in 2021.



Overall, the impact of the High Peak Community Arts mentoring scheme was overwhelmingly positive. The scheme affected children's lives in many ways as they have expressed in feedback forms. The sessions bridged a gap between school and healthcare by providing support to the individual students that needed it most. A huge number of students felt considerably better after these sessions, feeling more included and supported. In a time where social isolation and loneliness is more common than ever, these sessions have become a lifeline to many disadvantaged children in the High Peak, and have become integrated into their lives as part of their community.

About

The Social Arts Exchange mentoring programme was established at the end of 2020, launching fully in January 2021. It works with referring partners such as schools and provides weekly one on one mentoring for children and young people identified by the partner as being especially affected by pandemic. Mentees could be experiencing a range of difficulties such as; neglect, learning difficulties, short term memory disorder, autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to name a few. It also reaches children who may need support elsewhere for example students who are on the waiting list for school counselling. Sessions are offered in blocks of 8 to 16 depending on individual needs. The sessions are led by one of six different mentors, whose role is to support disadvantaged children by giving them a creative outlet using art, and a chance to build trust with the mentor. These mentors spend time with the children in need of support. The personal qualities of the facilitators are important when providing an accepting, non-judgemental atmosphere as this may contrast with their school and home lives. The mentor builds a relationship with the child and learns more about their needs, giving them the attention that may otherwise be missed. Session content is controlled by the young person and could include arts and crafts, creative writing and filmmaking and even stand-up comedy. A report is written after each session about the child, recording observations and conversations had by the child, similarly to counselling.

The mentor works with other High Peak Community Arts workers to support progress to Film Cuts Club and Tall Tales, which are youth projects involving small and large group sessions, giving the student the opportunity to feel part of a community and build relationships with friends. This signposting has proved more effective than previous in-school signposting, with 36.5% of students on the mentorship programme going on to join

another activity, compared to 8.5% coming from Music Arts Pod (an in-school music making project which ran from c.2015-2020). These additional projects provide the continuity of ongoing activity, meaning that support is not limited to a short allocation of individual sessions.



Methods

In the first year of the provision one to one sessions were delivered to 59 disadvantaged children from at least 8 different schools in the High Peak. The children and young people were aged between 8 to 20, with a modal age of 12, and came from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds, broadly representative of the local population (92% were white british, against 96% High Peak average).

The gender ratio was 45% female, 52% male, 3% trans. There were as many as 19 sessions per child and 498 total sessions from January to December in 2021.

Data from the students was collected in a qualitative manner, by filling out feedback forms after their sessions. The mentors also were required to fill out both feedback forms about the student, and summaries after the sessions. The reports discussed what the student spoke about and achieved during the session. The feedback forms used questions to evaluate the student's mood, relationships, art skills and attitude both before and after the sessions. This report analysed the 52 feedback forms and summaries available by November 2021.

Results

The results from the sessions varied, with many students finding the sessions beneficial for their development. Before the sessions some students reflected upon their wellbeing and felt anxious, sad, lonely or frustrated with some having low self-esteem. After the sessions the students had a



much more positive outlook. Upon reflection, many of the children reported that they felt proud and had a sense of achievement from the art sessions. They built friendships with the mentors and many said they felt less alone as a result. The sessions were fun whilst also making the students feel safe and supported. A large number of children reported an improvement to their personal relationships with teachers, family and friends, and mentors reported the children had less volatile relationships on observation. Talking to the mentors about the troubles affecting them was an important outlet and left students feeling calmer and happier. Confidence was also improved significantly towards the end of the sessions.

These word clouds contain both the overriding feelings of the children, and the observation of the child's behaviour by the mentors. These words were compiled via the reports written both before and after the mentoring sessions.

Before:



After:



Themes

Findings from the 52 feedback forms emphasised the therapeutic benefits associated with participatory arts. Three recurrent themes were identified through analysing the responses, including:

- Wellbeing and personal growth
- Connectedness to the community
- Identity and self-expression

Overarching themes	Sub-Themes	Connections
Wellbeing and personal growth	Self worth Confidence Positive environment Trust	Mental Health Physical health Social anxiety Bereavement
Connectedness	Community Isolation after Covid Group Support Skill Development Team work Rebuilding relationships	Working together Atmosphere Making new friends Understanding and empathy Supporting each other Being part of something
Identity and self-expression	Difficult life events Pride and achievement Confidence building Reflection	Sharing Ideas and new skills Getting lost in the art Trying new things

1. Wellbeing and personal growth

Of the 52 children whose evaluations were analysed, the majority were identified by their teachers as experiencing either physical or mental health difficulties, or a combination of the two. The children expressed that their participation in the scheme gave them a sense of identity and self-expression:

One of the main sub themes from the reports was a sense of pride or achievement. The children found that they were proud of their artwork that they had made in the sessions, which contributed to their self-worth. Children often reported showing their artwork to their friends and family and giving away artwork as gifts.

"It made me feel better about myself as I've done well... I'm a good artist!"

The children highlighted the importance of feeling able to talk openly about their feelings and experiences, with trust being another recurring theme. The children found the art sessions to be therapeutic and felt more comfortable and able to talk freely with their mentor. Some of the slightly older children felt as though they could only trust their mentor as their friends or family would "gossip".

"I've had someone to talk to, who actually listens to me" "It's so good to talk to someone who's not from school or home, I'm really open with her."

Another theme is positive environment- there is no right or wrong in art, so children are encouraged to explore their feelings through what they are creating. Often children leave feeling more positive after the sessions which then affects their school life and home life outside of the sessions.

"I feel happier and calmer after sessions"

2. Connectedness

Initially the support comes from the mentors to the individual children one on one, before signposting to a group club. Children from different backgrounds ranging from disability to transgender then worked together in the group sessions to become part of an inclusive community. Here they also learn to work as a team. The children felt relaxed and in an accepting environment in all of these sessions.

"With Frances I feel safe, she is there for me"

After initially being referred for the mentorship programme due to feeling isolated or dominating in class, the sessions helped some children to become calmer and more confident in themselves. Common feedback from the mentors is that the child had matured after a set of sessions. When the children are then referred to the small group activities like Tall Tales or Film Cuts Club, they are then taught to work as a team to create artwork together. This is great for developing social skills and encouraging students to take other people into account and work together.

"I have warmed up to working with other people"



Many children reported an improvement in their interpersonal relationships after the sessions, saying that they were more patient and had a better relationship with their siblings and friends. Some made presents or cards for family. They also liked that they could show the skills that they had learnt during these sessions to their friends and family and teach them.



"I loved making my mums Mother's Day card... it was very special" "I like giving people what I've made for them"

Skill development is a great way for children to build confidence as the satisfaction of mastering a new skill gives a sense of achievement. Learning new skills also seems to be a way for the children to have purpose and communicate with others as most of the children explained that they loved teaching others their new skills after they have learnt them.

"I got to learn new skills like using charcoal and pastels"

3. Identity and self-expression

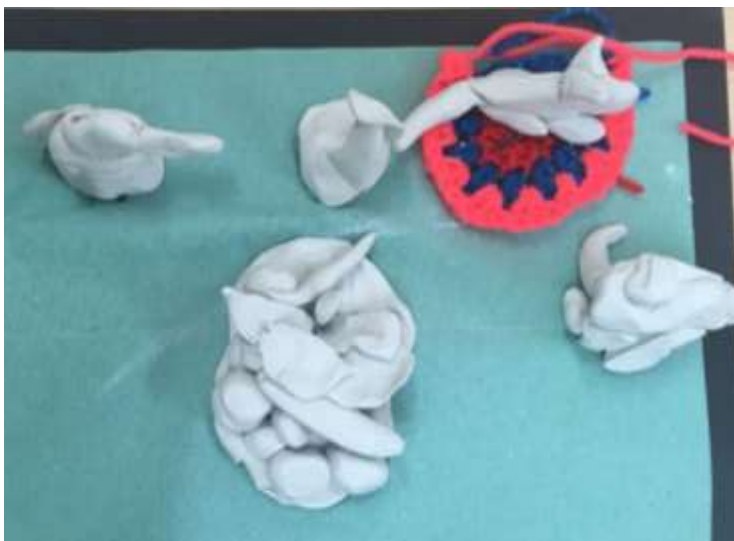
Many of these children have experienced difficult life events, from bereavement to parents separating. The art sessions have been therapeutic to a few of the children, a welcome distraction and new hobby for them to focus on.

"I feel more comfortable talking. It helps to get over what has happened to [me]."

Learning about self-reflection is critical for a young person who is having difficulties at school and

potentially being a little disruptive. Having time and space away from other people has given some students the time to think about why they may be unhappy or a little disruptive and enables them to grow socially and emotionally.

"It makes me think about my actions.."



Discussion

It is increasingly common for children to feel lonely or isolated, especially disadvantaged children with different needs or disabilities. In a world where technology and social media are the main forms of communication, personal connection and companionship is harder to come by. The themes from these reports show that the sessions have had a very positive impact on a large number of children in the High Peak, with all of the children on the scheme reporting that they enjoyed the sessions and wished they could have more of them. With decreasing accessibility to the arts for young people and more children needing support, these sessions are a sanctuary for struggling students.



It is important to also recognise any non-productive reports of the mentor sessions. In one of the reports the child stated that their mental health did not feel much different before or after the sessions and that the sessions had not influenced their relationships at home in any way. The student still enjoyed the sessions and wanted more of them, but maybe did not find them especially beneficial. The mentor's summary said that this young person enjoys the sessions a lot but had not improved in behaviour or

attitude. The child's parents were going through a divorce during these sessions, so the child may need more support than this programme could provide.

It is therefore important to be recognised that arts may not be the enough support for every child so further observation and communication with the child may be needed as they may need more complex attention.



Conclusion

Overall, the general impact of the High Peak Community Arts mentoring scheme was overwhelmingly positive. The scheme affected children's lives in many ways as they have expressed in their feedback forms. The sessions bridged a gap between school and healthcare by providing support to the individual students that needed it most. A huge number of students felt considerably better after these sessions, feeling more included and supported. In a time where social isolation and loneliness is more common than ever, these sessions have become a lifeline to many disadvantaged children in the High Peak, and have become integrated into their lives as part of their community.

References

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