

# Discovering Oska Bright

*supporting a film festival with a difference*



*Still from Transitions: A Rap by 7B*

*Run by Brighton-based charity Carousel, Oska Bright is the original international festival of short films made by people with learning disabilities. Each year, the festival team puts a call out for submissions from people around the world. Once submissions close, the team works over an eight-week period to judge and curate a three-day festival, which takes place at the Brighton Dome Corn Exchange.*

*Artswork supported Oska Bright through their Arts Award Festival Investment initiative to encourage more young people to take part in different aspects of the film festival.*

In 2016, the Oska Bright Film Festival team noted a decline in both the number of submissions from, and the attendance of, young people. In 2017, with the support of Artswork, they worked to solve this issue. They worked with local Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools to recruit a group of young

people who would form Young Oska Bright. The aim was for them to work alongside the rest of the Oska Bright Festival team to curate a new screening of films by young people.

The young people were also able to work towards Arts Award Discover as part of the film festival.

## The People

Carousel

The Cedar Centre School, Brighton

The Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

Downs Park School, Portslade

Hillside School, Portslade

Manor Green School

Patcham House School

The Old Market Venue, Hove

British Film Institute

Brighton & Hove City Council

## Successes

Sold out screenings (accounting for over 200 children and young people) at the Discover Oska Bright Day at the Film Festival showed the appetite for films made by young people, and the significant effort in reaching out to and engaging with SEN schools in the region.

During the process, Oska Bright was awarded Arts Award Good Practice Centre status. Festival Producer, Lizzie Banks, said: "This has helped us to develop a stronger Arts Award profile, and has meant we are able to showcase our artists through Arts Award Voice magazine too.

"Overall, it's enabled us to become much more engaged with the Cultural Education offer locally, specifically for SEN. Our networks are widening to include East and West Sussex."

As well as this, four learning disabled artists and four Carousel staff were trained as Arts Award advisers, at Discover, Bronze, and Silver levels.

As Lizzie explains, Carousel have big plans for the future too: "In the coming year we

will become Artsmark Supporters. We will begin to map our work towards Artsmark, and will be able to support other Special Educational Needs schools to undertake their Artsmark journey."

## Challenges

As with any project, the Festival team experienced challenges amidst their successes. They found it difficult to engage SEN schools in Brighton and Hove, in terms of getting them to take part in the Discover Oska Bright segment of the Festival. More interest was reported from those schools in West Sussex.

The venue's capacity meant they weren't able to facilitate as many people as they would have liked: "This had an impact on the number of Arts Award Discover certificates we were able to deliver", says Lizzie.

"The layout of the venue was challenging at times too, as it lacked break-out and networking space for large numbers of people. In future, we would relocate the Discover Oska Bright day to another site, one that could facilitate more break-out areas."

## Learning

The team plans to build on the success of delivering Arts Award Discover at the Oska Bright Film Festival, with a goal of delivering a further 75 Arts Awards at the 2019 Festival.

Further goals include training up more learning disabled Arts Award advisers, says Lizzie:

"We have plans to train more of our artists up in the next three years. In particular, we would like to explore a leadership role within Arts Award for learning disabled artists at Bronze and Silver levels. We would like to pilot this with the support of Trinity (Arts Award) and produce a case study on the benefits and challenges."



*Still from AARGH! | Manny Banerjee*

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Carousel has significant expertise in working with SEN students and schools. We would like to make this more available and more visible to the sector, and engage more closely with the Cultural Education Challenge across the region.

*Lizzie Banks, Carousel*

### Future Initiatives

“There is a definite need for the work to continue”, says Lizzie. “The number of disabled people working in the creative industries has flat-lined at 5% since 2005. This is significantly lower than the 11% of disabled people in the UK workforce as a whole.”

Lizzie believes one of the issues in engaging young learning disabled people is the lack of cultural role models currently present in the industry: “These young people have no real cultural output that reflects their community. The work of Young Oskia Bright will help towards a sustainable future of learning disabled people engaged in the cultural sector.”

What is crucial then, is that organisations step up and respond to this skills gap in the adult workforce, and Carousel is working to do so. The lack of film education and training for younger people with learning disabilities means people so often miss out on all that is possible for them, both in their childhood and in their adult lives.

Carousel is therefore calling on big names in the industry to help, including the British Film Institute (BFI). “It is important that young learning disabled programmers are included and develop the skills necessary to take learning disability cinema to the next level”, Lizzie urges.





*Still from Brahim's Slapstick | Brahim Bouriche*

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Part of the BFI's strategic focus is on young people as film audiences. It's important that young learning disabled programmers are included and develop the skills necessary to take learning disability cinema to the next level.

*Lizzie Banks, Carousel*

## Progression Routes

In terms of progression routes for the young people involved in this project, there are plenty of plans afoot. "Young people have been invited to engage with future Carousel projects, in particular, the Oska Bright Film Festival Committee", says Lizzie.

"We also have a two-year Young Oska Bright programme of work outlined, and within this we are planning to maintain our contact and offer for regional SEN schools."

Since being involved in the Oska Bright Film Festival, two of the young people have begun working towards their Gold Arts Award, a huge achievement for both the

young people themselves and as a marker of success for Carousel. In the words of one of the young participants, Tina, engaging with film whilst working towards an Arts Award has shown her a whole new world of possibility:

"[It] has helped me to show what I can do and that my learning disability doesn't stop me from showing the world what I can do. It made me aware that I can learn new things and try new things that I've never done before, and that I can do it with some help."

*Case study compiled by Laura Smith, Communications Writer, Artswork*

*Taken from a Project Evaluation by Lizzie Banks, Festival Producer, Carousel*