

Hampshire Young Creatives: A Carers' Collective



The People

Hampshire Young Creatives
Sue & Sue – A Carers' Collective
Young Carers from across Hampshire

The Project

After liaising with various Young Carers groups across Hampshire, we began projects with groups from three areas:

Romsey – three groups; a younger group of 6-9 year olds, 'Stepping Stones' 9-12 year olds and a teen group called 'Moving On' for 12+.

Eastleigh – two groups – a younger group for 8-11 year olds and an older group for 11+.

Fareham & Gosport – two groups consisting of 6-11 and 11-18 year olds.

When researching various cultural venues across Hampshire, it became apparent that the factor drawing all these locations together was the theme of

'collections', be they artefacts, books, prints, photographs or paintings. The work of Michael Craig Martin at Winchester Discovery Centre gave us a further idea for the project – mixing a collection of objects with typography.

'Collections'

Our starting point for the project was asking the Young Carers to bring in a treasured possession or collection of objects; pieces that either meant something to them or objects they felt reflected their personalities. We wanted to touch on the idea of identity and explore with them what it is like to be a young carer today. Using their precious objects/collections was not only a springboard for the theme of our workshops, but it also provided a vehicle to talk to them about their lives.

Workshops

The first few sessions involved the Young Carers drawing, collaging and photographing their collections. They responded enthusiastically to the theme, and with the rest of the group.

Following this, we held a series of workshops where the Young Carers made a collection of handmade, hand-stitched and printed journals for them to use



Image: Paul Carter

during their cultural visits. This format of creating their own books engaged them more when they were out on their cultural visits as they were keen to fill their own handmade books. It also gave them something tangible and memorable to take home at the end of the project.

As part of the project we wanted to explore the world of typography through collections of words. We gave the Young Carers an opportunity to talk about their caring roles and to come up with words and phrases that reflected the good aspects and the more difficult aspects of being a young carer. This collection of thought-provoking words and phrases formed the basis of a series of workshops and were visualised using different art techniques:

Rubber Stamps – We introduced the older Young Carers at Romsey to the process of hand-cutting their own rubber stamps (similar to lino cutting), which involves a degree of dexterity and concentration. They worked in a group to create a series of individual letters which could be used to create a collection of words and phrases reflecting their role as carers. Working with handmade type in this way gave us an opportunity to explore with them the world of typography.

Papercutting and Printing – The younger groups explored typography through the process of papercutting and hand printing.

In addition to the workshops at the Young Carers bases, we made four Cultural Visits:

Mottisfont, National Trust, Romsey

The trip to Mottisfont was a wonderful opportunity for the three groups to meet and work together. The Young Carers explored the idea of identity by creating a collection of self portraits, using a variety of processes including collage and papercutting, pen and ink, pattern and print.

At Mottisfont, the Young Carers not only had the chance to explore the house and the collections within it, but also to visit the gallery, where a collection of work from the London Group was exhibited. For some, this was the first time they had ever been in a gallery environment. Whilst touring the house, our guide gave the children an entertaining tale of the *trompe l'oeil* drawing room painted by Whistler and the children seemed transfixed. The guide commented to us afterwards how interested and attentive the Young Carers were. He also mistakenly thought that the Young Carers were 'cared for' not 'carers' and was very surprised that the children were so young to be in a caring role.

We are very grateful to the National Trust for their ongoing support of our work with Young Carers.

Milestones Museum, Basingstoke

We took Eastleigh Young Carers on a trip to Milestones.

We chose this particular museum for its extensive collection of everyday objects across the decades, which we felt encapsulated the whole ethos of the project. The children were fascinated by the thought that maybe one day some of their collections could be exhibited in a museum such as this. They drew their favourite items from the Milestones Collection in their handmade journals. The teddy bear collection was a particular favourite, as were the room sets from different decades. Many of the children had never been to a museum of this scale and the visit was extremely popular.

The children were fascinated by the thought that maybe one day their belongings would be exhibited in a museum like Milestones too.

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Southampton City Art Gallery

The young carers were able to explore the gallery's archive art collection and also an exhibition of prints, drawings and paintings from the Philip Schlee Collection, with works from world famous artists including Henry Moore, Elizabeth Frink and David Hockney. This significant and very eclectic art collection was put together by Schlee and his brother to demonstrate the importance of drawing in the artist's process. We talked about the works and techniques used, and the children completed an interactive questionnaire as they went around the gallery.

The remainder of the day was spent running a drawing and printmaking workshop in the gallery's education space, where the children were able to respond directly to everything they had seen in the gallery. Southampton City Art Gallery provide ongoing support for our work with disadvantaged groups.

Gosport Gallery at Gosport Discovery Centre

A final cultural visit was made during the Easter Holidays to the Gosport Gallery with Fareham & Gosport Young Carers. Incredibly, most of them (adults included) had never been to this place right on their doorstep! It was a new discovery for us too and a cultural venue we would be very keen to work with again. We took the young carers to the Matisse Papercuts exhibition and ran a collaborative papercutting workshop in the gallery's education space. We worked with a wide range of ages, from 6-15 year-olds, and it was good to get them all involved in a project together. It also gave the older ones the opportunity to help the younger members of the group, as they worked on a mural together. During the workshop we talked about Matisse and his life, the

techniques he used and also his contemporaries – an introduction to art history for the young carers.

The culmination of this HYC Art Project

Over the past 3 months, the Young Carers have created a large and eclectic collection of artwork in our workshops. We are keen to seek a venue where this work can be exhibited. These children deserve a platform to share their work with the wider world. Although the project has now ended and the workshops are complete, we are now in the post-project process of collating this large body of work which will eventually return to each of the Young Carers groups and create a lasting legacy for them.

Successes

- Our workshops seemed very popular and the Young Carers were keen to be involved and immerse themselves in the project. We had a consistent number of attendees.
- The cultural visits to galleries, museums and historic spaces. Young Carers rarely get an opportunity like this to go out for cultural visits on their own. If they ever visit with family they are there very much in their caring roles and not able to engage in their surroundings in the same way.
- We had fantastic support and enthusiasm from each of the project leaders. Despite the groups running their own 'art and craft' sessions, they welcomed and embraced the opportunity to work with us as professional designers and utilised our design experience.
- The variety of cultural experiences on offer in Hampshire enabled us to take the young carers on some very thought provoking and memorable journeys that will remain with them for a long time. The cultural visits certainly informed and inspired their artwork.
- We were able to show the group leaders that you don't need to venture far to experience high quality culture and heritage. Many groups we work with ordinarily go for day trips to places like Thorpe Park and ignore the rich heritage on their doorstep. Hopefully this project has opened their eyes to the possibilities of cultural experiences locally available to them.
- One of our art workshops was filmed by a professional crew for a documentary about the national charity Kids. The film was then used at a big fundraising event in London to raise awareness for the charity's work.
- Being able to work on a longer-term art project was great. These projects enable us to 'scratch beneath the surface' and allow us to build on our understanding of the challenges young carers face today.

Challenges

- The lead in time, from being given the green light in December to beginning the project was insufficient. When we embarked on the HYC project, the groups were firstly just about to take their Christmas breaks and many had already timetabled their activities for the first quarter of 2013. Despite with us engaging and corresponding with Andover, Forest and Basingstoke Young Carers, these particular groups were unable to commit to our long term project.
- Due to the tight timeframe set by HYC, the planning and organisational stages were difficult, and more time-consuming than they needed to be. It became a complicated logistical exercise organising the various groups' timetables, bearing in mind all our workshops had to be delivered either during evenings, weekends or school holidays. If this timetabling stage had been organised in say, September or October, this would have been much more straightforward as the groups all plan their activities in advance and find it very difficult to schedule a major project like this at short notice.
- To work with three different Young Carers groups in a 3-month time frame was very ambitious. Although we feel we delivered a high quality project, and have touched the lives of 56 Young Carers during this project, you have to question whether it would have been better to work in depth with one or a maximum of two groups within this tight timeframe. We had to fit the three groups (7 sub-groups!) diaries into a 10-week window, which was quite a feat. The sheer number of young carers wanting to engage adds a layer of complexity when planning a project such as this in a tight timeframe.
- The project having to be done outside of school hours, within a very limited timeframe.

Suggested improvements for future projects

- To bear in mind that each of the YC groups have two (if not three) sub-groups for the different age ranges, all of whom would benefit from engaging in an art project.
- Consider the sheer number of young carers in Hampshire (some as young as 6!) wanting to engage in our project. Although the original HYC criteria recommended 3 groups of 6 Young Carers, this is very much just the tip of the iceberg.

- Ask for a longer lead in time for organising the project and liaising with all the different groups.
- Longer delivery time if working with more than one Young Carers group.

Recommendations for other organisations doing similar projects

- We have years of experience of working with particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. You need knowledge and experience of working with marginalised groups as well as empathy and understanding to make a project of this kind a success.
- It's vital to put in a huge amount of research and preparation beforehand to ensure the workshops are of the highest quality.

How could the project partners best support this kind of work in the future?

- The carer group leaders need guidance in selecting and partnering up with high quality experienced arts facilitators.
- The facilitators and the projects need to be funded to enable the young people to experience quality projects on an ongoing basis.
- From our extensive experience working in this sector, it is clear that projects like this are incredibly beneficial to the young people that take part. It gives them respite from their daily caring duties. Therefore, these kind of projects need to be funded and delivered on a regular/ongoing basis. For many children, they are a life line. We believe these workshops bring more than just a pleasant evening 'away from it all'.

Projects like this are a life line – they provide young carers respite from their daily caring duties. They are more than just a pleasant evening away from it all.



Credits

Taken from: Hampshire Young Creatives Development Programme 2012/13 Report and Recommendations

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