

HAMPSHIRE YOUNG CREATIVES DANCE WITH MILITARY FAMILIES



The People

Hampshire Young Creatives
Aldershot HIVE
Dance Up
Aldershot Military Garrison

The Project

*This project had to be significantly re-scoped after the first session was cancelled. The below refers to the re-scoped project aims rather than the original ones.

The aim of the project was to engage military families from a variety of regiments across North Camp, Aldershot Barracks that may not have otherwise interacted with others across the Garrison.

The aims of the sessions were to:

- Encourage inter-regimental social engagement at Aldershot Garrison.
- Promote gross motor skills in early years children.
- Encourage social interaction in early years children.

12 sessions were delivered over 11 weeks (including one taster session) at The Connaught Community Centre, Aldershot HIVE. They were around 1 hour long each, and took the form of creative dance and play, co-delivered by two dance practitioners. Activities included movement to stories, copying set dance moves to song, imaginative storytelling and action, and parents/child-minders socialising. On average, 14 young people attended per session. The participants changed weekly due to the drop-in nature of the group itself.

Successes

- Social interaction between families – there was plenty of opportunity to chat and relax within the sessions, which were informal and friendly. The bringing together of people at the Garrison was the most successful element of the project, and strong friendships have subsequently arisen between families.
- The aim of observing a change in motor skills was slightly ambitious within the timeframe and the participants didn't attend every week, so this had an impact too, however there were

definite improvements noted in some of the children's muscle memory.

- There were noted increases in social skills amongst the participants.
- Both artists are keen to continue working within this environment.

Challenges

- It was hoped the practical sessions would be more family-focused with the parents directly participating in the activities – but they were mostly on the sidelines chatting and drinking tea! Possibly more of an effort could have been made to engage them from the start.
- A few of the parents were also very shy and did not want to participate – while some sat down, others were more reluctant to join in.
- Initially it was planned that the sessions would be aimed at teaching teens but due to a double booking at the centre, we had to develop a new project with a family focus. Both the artists had limited experience in leading this age group and had to do lots of research into creating the sessions and sourcing creative materials, props and music.
- There is a stereotyping of Garrison families and it is hard to break down these barriers.

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Suggested improvements for future projects

- Work to engage the parents more fully in the sessions.
- Make the sessions earlier in the morning, possibly around 9.45am, so that parents could come straight from the school run.

Recommendations for other organisations doing similar projects

- The artists had a lot of support from other playgroups that they visiting in terms of marketing the event. The mums used Facebook groups to post information about the class throughout the Garrison – this was helpful and effective.
- Find the right person to speak to at the Garrison. The Army Welfare Service Staff have some match-funding for projects like this. Local council also have funding to support integration between Garrison families and local families – look into available resources.

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

- As this was a drop-in session new people were joining every week. There appears to be a definite interest for the project to continue.

Participant Feedback

- *“Having just moved into the area, it’s nice to come and meet other families and see the little ones enjoying themselves and getting active.”* (Sarah Marston, BFBS Interview, Jan 2013)
- *“Believe me, army groups like this with so many different regs are not always so welcoming and friendly but Erin and I looked forward to our dance session every Thursday. I had started to imagine her being a little loner at nursery/school but the dance class was brilliant in bringing her out of her shell, showing her how to follow instructions and participate within a group. Every time we drive or walk past the Connaught Centre now, Erin shouts ‘Dance! Dance!’ It definitely made an impact on my little girl and encouraged me to try other army groups which I probably wouldn’t have done before in all honesty.”* (Lorna Oldham, post-project interview, March 2013)
- *“Sophie is due to start nursery in April and I didn’t feel like she was ready as she will be going to a nursery where she doesn’t know anyone. Since she has been coming to the dance classes, she seems a lot more confident in being around other kids she doesn’t know and I have no worries now about taking her to nursery. The dance classes have made it much easier for her to get on with and interact with other kids her age.”* (Kelly Young, Sophia’s mum (Session number 9).)
- *“We moved here 8 months ago and Lydia doesn’t have any friends here, so this chance*

to get out and socialise is fantastic. We moved from Colchester where she had lots of friends and has been really lonely since being here, so it’s great for her to get to meet new people.”
(Amanda Smith, Session 2)

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Credits

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

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