

Supporting Arts Award in Libraries across Southampton



The People

Southampton Libraries

Element Arts

Theatre in a bag

Southampton Scrapstore

The Project

In 2015, Artswork built on existing project work to support Southampton Libraries to continue their partnership work with Element Arts. Also involved in this work were Theatre in a bag and Southampton Scrapstore. The project's aims were as follows:

- Train three more library staff as Arts Award Discover advisers
- Increase the amount of children completing Arts Award Discover
- Provide cultural and artistic opportunities for children in libraries, free of charge

My son loved this – he can't wait for the next one. I enjoyed being creative too! Thank you so much.

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Aleesha, Parent, Central Library

- Further embed Arts Award as a cultural offer from public libraries (in the same way that the Summer Reading Challenge has become a part of many children's early cultural lives)

Children were provided with creative crafting opportunities based on the theme of 'dinosaurs', and were encouraged to borrow dinosaur-themed books from Southampton Libraries. Arts Award Discover was



A monster in amongst the books: the children work on their own smaller creations in Shirley Library

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delivered to over 100 children.

Activities were run across eight libraries, with the three largest sites chosen for large-scale craft work. Element Arts built three large dinosaur sculptures using waste materials; these were then used as an inspiration for the children and young people to do the same on a smaller scale. The libraries also complemented the activities by purchasing extra nonfiction stock on dinosaurs that could be used as research and borrowed by those taking part.

Two half-day sessions also took place, delivered by Southampton Scrapstore, where participants made models based on the theme of 'animal travel'. In the spring prior to the Summer Reading Challenge, a Henry V Story Walk through the old part of town used heritage and local landmarks to inspire children to create their own storymaps.

Successes

- We were able to successfully train three more staff to become Arts Award advisers – this means that when they run future arts and craft sessions in libraries, they will be able to bring their adviser training and learning into play.
- All the creative sessions were extremely well attended – most sessions were in excess of 25 children; the half-day sessions were attended by between 50 and 70 children on a drop-in basis.
- Purchasing the Arts Award Discover logbooks helped increase take up and made it easier for frontline library staff to understand what Arts Award was all about. There was a significant increase in the amount of children completing Arts Award Discover this year through SCC Libraries.

Challenges

- This was the second year we had run Arts Award in the libraries, and while I think

progress was made in terms of frontline staff promoting successfully, there is still some way to go to ensure every member of staff feels comfortable enough to promote Arts Award to families in the same way that the Summer Reading Challenge is promoted. Changes in personnel and bank or temporary staff mean that sometimes, frontline staff are not as well equipped to help with this. The Young Volunteers who help to deliver the Summer Reading Challenge have minimal training and often start helping some way into the summer holidays; so increased training and motivation would greatly help them in this area.

- The lack of an immediate reward/prize for completion of Arts Award in library settings does put it at a disadvantage somewhat, when compared to the Summer Reading Challenge initiative, where there are ongoing incentives and a certificate and medal 'on the spot' for finishers. If there was a more tangible/instantaneous reward for Arts Award, I am confident that more children would be keen to take part, and to see it through to completion.



On a Henry V Story Walk in Central Southampton

How might the project influence how you approach or deliver similar work in the future?

Time and resource constraints mean it can be very difficult to track and encourage children who are part-way through the Award to actually complete. Most children who complete have motivated parents who will visit the library on multiple occasions during the summer holiday. There may be significantly more children who complete the Award and unfortunately do not return to the library in September; this means we are not able to include them in our stats, even though they may have actually completed.

We could offer 'exclusive' Arts Award sessions that might address the issue of partial or non-completion. The main problem is that due to lack of staff, and to some extent, actual physical space, we tend to offer everything to families. Therefore, the age of children taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge is currently quite young in Southampton (with a 4-7 year old age range), whereas Arts Award is only for ages 5+.

We would always be open to more training for frontline staff, particularly on the benefits to libraries of offering Arts Award.

Recommendations for other organisations doing similar projects?

- We would definitely advise public libraries to offer Arts Award because it dovetails with the reader development work that is often already going on with families. It provides a framework with which to plan and organise workshops in a more joined up way.

Impact of the project

There is a definite need for this type of ongoing investment and getting partners organised earlier on in the year would also be an advantage. We would love to be able to offer Arts Award throughout the year to

I told my friend Daisy about Arts Award. I told her it was good finding out about things and she says she might do it now.

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Marisa, 9, Central Library



Bringing stories to life: a giant dinosaur takes over Bitterne Library

schools that visit us for library sessions; this would involve liaising more closely with schools but would deepen the value of their visits to the library.

Feedback

“My son loved this – he said he can’t wait for the next one. I as a parent enjoyed being creative too! Thank you so much.” (Aleesha, Parent, Central Library)

“It was really nice that she could just make the monster in any way she liked. She is a very creative person so it was great she could show that in her own way.” (Su, Parent, Portswood Library)

“I found out about an author. He was called Lewis Carroll. One fact was that his real name was Charles Dodgson.” (Ben, 7, Central Library)

“For my Arts Award, I found out about David Walliams. He swam 140 miles for Sport Relief and saved a dog that had fallen in the water.” (Josh, 8, Shirley Library)

“I told my friend Daisy about Arts Award. I told her it was good finding out about things and she says she might do it now.” (Marisa, 9, Central Library)

Final Thoughts

Our evaluations possibly don’t really do justice to the full value and impact of running Arts Award in Southampton libraries. Children and families have been incredibly positive about the free creative sessions and the chance to gain their Arts Award. Although we are facing a huge change to the way in which library services will be delivered in Southampton

in the future, we are keen to do our best, dependent on resources, to keep offering Arts Award to children. It really enhances the cultural offer from libraries in a very accessible way.

Credits

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