



Developing creative approaches  
in youth justice:

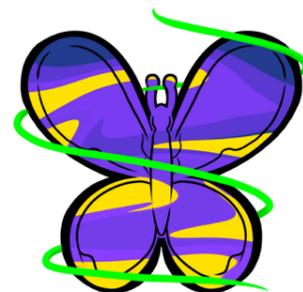
# A guide for youth justice professionals

## Published by...

Published by Sandwell Children's Trust and the Institute for Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton, 2023

This guide was written by Professor Laura Caulfield, Mike Botham, and Chad Smith. Please direct any queries to [icrd@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:icrd@wlv.ac.uk)

We would like to extend our thanks to: the young people whose needs and experiences have guided our work; the team at Sandwell Children's Trust who have embraced this new way of working; Sandwell Youth Justice Partnership board for their support; the Youth Justice Board for their support and funding the work at Sandwell Youth Justice Service; the West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit; and UK Research and Innovation for supporting the development of this guide.



**SANDWELL YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE**  
*CREATIVITY & EXPRESSION*

### Logo design

The logo above was designed by a young person engaged with Sandwell Youth Offending Service. The aim is that the logo will feature alongside the Children's Trust logo and any material related to the Sandwell Youth Forum. The design you see on the page represents a sustained period of work involving a number of people.

## Foreword

At the Youth Justice Board we want to support children to become the best version of themselves. As I highlighted in the YJB's 2021–2024 strategic plan, 'Children have huge potential, and we want to harness that. We need to give children the opportunities to realise this potential and succeed.' We know that collaboration is at the heart of this, which is why I have been delighted to see the collaborative approach to working creatively in youth justice highlighted in this good practice guide.

In February 2019 the YJB awarded Sandwell Youth Offending Service (YOS) pathfinder funding to develop an innovative, creative approach to address serious youth violence. Listening to children is part of our ethos at the YJB and, in developing their creative approach, Sandwell YOS listened to children and young people to understand what they wanted from the YOS – this directly informed the approach in this good practice guide.

The YJB has a commitment to the principles of a Child First approach to youth justice. Engagement through the arts and the work undertaken by Sandwell YOS is an example of how youth justice services can embody Child First principles by developing and delivering services that connect with children. It is also vital to ensure activity is evidence based and that new and innovative approaches are also contributing to our understanding of what works. While there is research evidence on the impact of the arts in youth justice, this was the first time a full YOS-wide approach had been taken. The new creative programme of work introduced by Sandwell YOS was innovative in working across the whole service with a range of arts and creative

activities. Sandwell commissioned the Institute for Community Research and Development to undertake research and evaluation, with the aim of sharing the learning about what worked.

Sandwell YOS and the Institute for Community Research and Development developed this good practice guide with the aim of helping others design and implement creative arts approaches in youth justice, and to understand the impact of what they do. This guide is the resource that the authors wish they had when they set out on their journey – it should be of use to staff right across youth justice services and prove to be a valuable resource.

### Keith Fraser

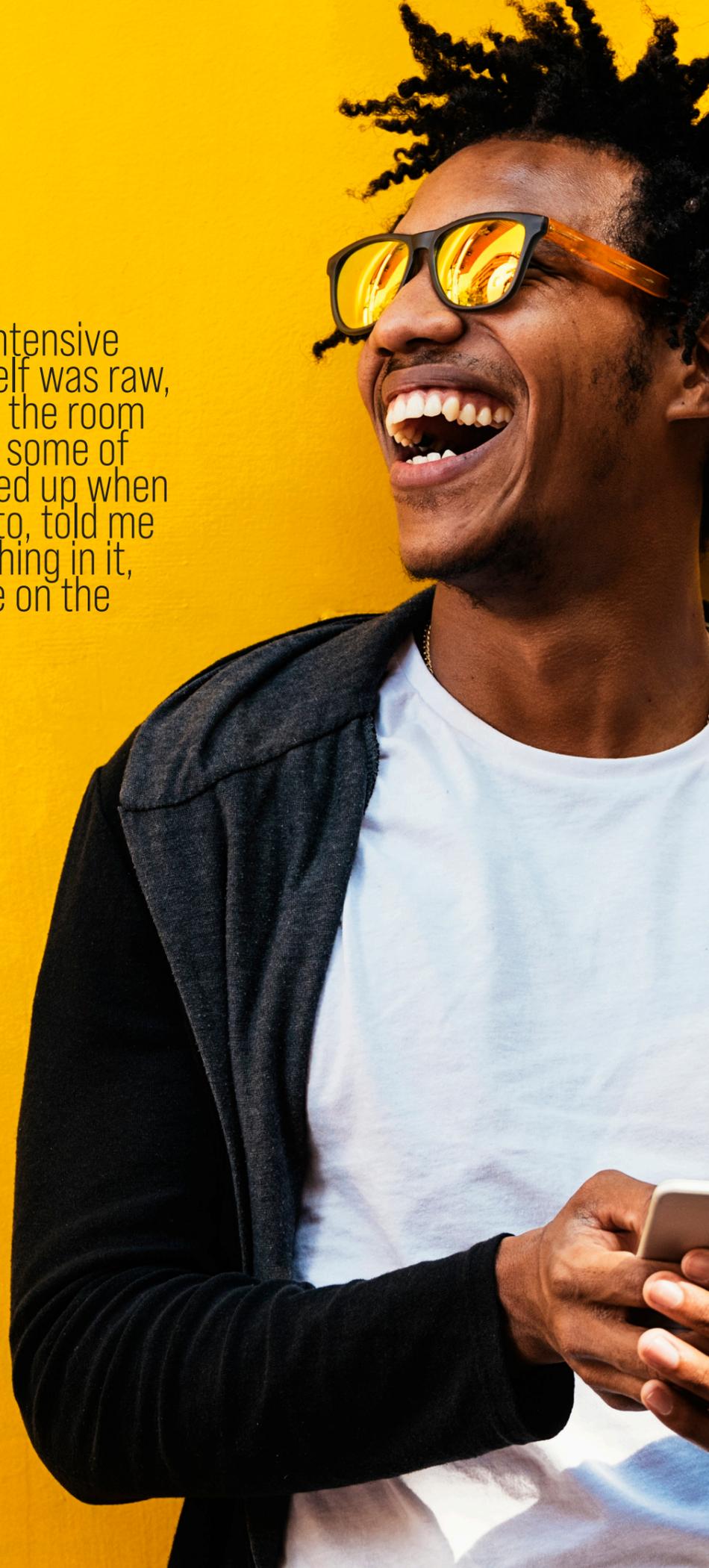
Chair of the Youth Justice Board



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>PAGE 5</b>
<b>The authors of this good practice guide</b>	<b>PAGE 6</b>
<b>Responding to the needs of young people</b>	<b>PAGE 7-8</b>
<b>Why a creative approach? The evidence base</b>	<b>PAGE 9</b>
<b>Developing and shaping a Service wide creative approach</b>	<b>PAGE 11-12</b>
<b>Sandwell's journey: key milestones</b>	<b>PAGE 13-14</b>
<b>Practical tips</b>	<b>PAGE 15-17</b>
<b>Images of work by young people at Sandwell YJS</b>	<b>PAGE 19</b>
<b>Other approaches</b>	<b>PAGE 20</b>
<b>What creative engagement looks like</b>	<b>PAGE 21-22</b>
<b>Building capacity and confidence within your team</b>	<b>PAGE 23</b>
<b>Arts and National Standards</b>	<b>PAGE 24</b>
<b>Developing external relationships</b>	<b>PAGE 25</b>
<b>Understanding the impact of your work</b>	<b>PAGE 26</b>
<b>Case study: a young person's journey</b>	<b>PAGE 27</b>
<b>A check box of things to consider</b>	<b>PAGE 28</b>
<b>Useful resources and further reading</b>	<b>PAGE 29</b>

It was resource intensive and the piece itself was raw, but the energy in the room and the fact that some of the children turned up when they didn't have to, told me there was something in it, and that we were on the right lines.



## Introduction

A few years ago, when I was Manager at Sandwell YOS, we completed a consultation exercise with young people we were struggling to engage. They gave us some tough messages; wanting to be heard more, to see people they could connect with, and to have an offer that inspired them and felt relevant. If sitting doing a worksheet ever worked in Youth Offending Teams, our young people certainly left us in no doubt that it wasn't what they wanted now!

We took the young people's feedback and tried to act sincerely on it. Combined with wanting to do something that would be accessible to a very diverse cohort, we decided to try and become more creative. Not just doing the odd piece of art, drama or music, but to fundamentally think about how we could be more creative across the whole range of services that we deliver.

To be honest, we didn't know where to start but we wanted to start somewhere. At that time, we didn't have a budget and our first foray involved using the youth centre and some table tennis tables to make a stage for a short piece on county lines that the children wrote and performed to a handful of staff. It was resource intensive and the piece itself was raw, but the energy in the room and the fact that some of the children turned up when they didn't have to, told me there was something in it, and that we were on the right lines.

In January 2019 we were awarded funding from the Youth Justice Board's Serious Youth Violence Grant to help increase the use of arts with the cohort. This good practice guide is based on our experiences between 2019–2021 designing, implementing, and growing a creative service.

Becoming more creative takes a lot of effort. We've had some successes, and we've met wonderfully supportive people like Professor Laura Caulfield, Helen Frost at Arts Connect, and Heather Alvey at the Youth Justice Board. Sandwell YOS is arguably still very early in the journey despite being over two years in. This document represents an attempt to collate our wisdom to date. It's the document I wished we'd have had when we sat down with our initial vision. I really hope you find it useful in kick-starting your journey. Please do get in touch to share ideas!

Mike Botham

## The authors of this good practice guide

### Mike Botham

Mike Botham began his work in youth offending as a seconded Probation Officer, and since then worked his way through most jobs in the Youth Offending Service. From practitioner, team manager, and then Head of Service for Sandwell – including through the last HMIP inspection, which resulted in a 'good' rating. Mike is committed to the creative engagement of young people and tries to be innovative in whatever he does. He has recently taken up a role overseeing a range of services for children and young people in Dudley and hopes to develop the creative offer there using the principles and experiences gained through the journey described in this guide.

### Laura Caulfield

Laura Caulfield PhD is Professor and Director of the Institute for Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton. Laura is an expert in the evaluation of programmes designed to reduce risk of crime, and she has particular expertise in evaluating arts and creative programmes in the criminal justice system. She has designed and conducted over 45 research projects and evaluations and has received funding from the Home Office, Economic and Social Research Council, the NHS, the Ministry of Justice, and several third-sector organisations. Her latest book, 'Criminological Skills and Research for Beginners', is published by Routledge.

### Chad Smith

Chad Smith began his journey working with young people at his local youth club while he was studying performing arts at College. Somewhere in the middle the two met and his love for using creative arts as a method to engage young people began. Chad continued his studies at the University of Wolverhampton and moved through various services working with young people until he joined Sandwell Youth Offending Service (YOS) 10 years ago. He feels fortunate to have worked with Mike who also shares his passion for creative methods and gave him the space to be creative. Together they have achieved a lot of firsts for a criminal justice setting including being the first YOS to achieve an Artsmark. In late 2022 Chad joined Mike at Dudley Children's Services

## Responding to the needs of young people

### Why the arts?

Youth Justice Services (YJS) nationally have been successful in helping to reduce the overall numbers of young people in the youth justice system. Numbers of first-time entrants have dropped by 84% since the year ending December 2009, and the number of children and young people who received a caution or sentence has fallen by 82% over the last ten years (Youth Justice Statistics, 2021).

This equates to there being far fewer children in the youth justice system overall, which should be celebrated. However, as detailed in the Youth Justice Board's Strategic Plan 2018–21, from this success emerge new challenges:

- As the cohort gets smaller it becomes more concentrated with children who have the most complex needs (including health and education needs) and challenging behaviours. This is evident from the high reoffending rate, especially for those leaving custody.
- Having a more complex cohort means that the expectations placed on youth justice practitioners are greater than ever. There are high levels of violence e.g. in the secure estate, with a proportion of this being against staff. This combined with other very serious issues (e.g. high levels of children self-harming) means that staff must try harder than ever to keep children safe.
- While we have seen such large reductions in the number of children entering the system, the rate of those children from some black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is not falling at the same pace compared to white children. This means that the proportion of some groups of children in the youth justice system is increasing. Those children who have been in local authority care are also over-represented in the system (Youth Justice Board, 2018).

The complexity is also echoed in this report from the Youth Justice Board regarding the assessed needs of children.

Along with increased complexity, communication difficulties are apparent within a large percentage of the cohort. According to the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, around 60% of young people in contact with the criminal justice system have some form of Speech, Language and Communication Need (SLCN) that affects them on a day-to-day basis. There is substantial and increasing national and international research evidence that SLCN is a direct risk factor for offending but also integral to accessing the complex verbal situation in the courtroom, in the restorative justice process, as well as the verbally mediated interventions delivered by the YOS to reduce reoffending.

In line with the above, the YOS caseload in Sandwell now consists of smaller numbers of young people who have very complex life stories. The young people may have committed very serious offences but are also often highly vulnerable to exploitation and have experienced significant trauma. Their experiences can understandably lead to mistrust or suspicion of those in authority and in turn, for practitioners, the challenge of engagement can seem insurmountable.

While the solutions to helping young people are multi-faceted and go beyond the scope of any individual service, we believe that the YOS itself should be brave enough to acknowledge its limitations and improve its methods of engagement and intervention to be more dynamic, flexible, and fulfilling to the young people and the community it serves. After all, if a young person does not feel sufficiently motivated to turn up to an appointment with services like the YOS, ultimately very little will be achieved.

After speaking with young people we at Sandwell considered that being more creative would respond to the issues described above and help to connect with young people. We chose the arts as an inclusive, flexible and accessible way to engage. We recognised that all the challenges around relationship building with our young people would not suddenly be resolved by offering more creative sessions, but we hoped to have a more attractive offer to make meaningful engagement more likely. Equally, we acknowledged that it would require significant effort for any new methods to succeed.

Our commitment to the young people is that they will be integral in shaping this offer as it continues to develop, which we hope will mitigate the risk of non-engagement with the concept. appointment with services like the YOS, ultimately very little will be achieved.

After speaking with young people we considered that being more creative would respond to the issues described and help to connect with young people. We chose the arts as an inclusive, flexible and accessible way to engage.

It is important to recognise that all the challenges around relationship building with our young people will not suddenly be resolved by offering more creative sessions, but we hope to have a more attractive offer, which makes meaningful engagement more likely. Equally, young people's motivation to engage will not suddenly increase just because we are changing our offer and it will require significant effort for any new methods to succeed.

Our commitment to the young people is that they will be integral in shaping this offer throughout its development, which we hope will mitigate the risk of non-engagement with the concept.

## Why a creative approach? The evidence base

There is a substantial evidence base around the impact of the arts in criminal justice and growing acknowledgement from policymakers of the value of the arts. A move towards engagement through the arts in youth justice fits within a contemporary 'Child First' approach by developing services that are legitimate and authentic to children.

Back in 2013 the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance funded a national study to explore the impact of the arts and creative activities in criminal justice settings (Bilby, Caulfield & Ridley, 2013). The report 'Re-Imagining Futures: exploring the process of desistance' highlighted some interesting learning points:

- Participation in arts activities enables individuals to begin to redefine themselves
- Arts projects facilitate high levels of engagement
- Arts projects can have a positive impact on how people manage themselves during their sentence, particularly on their ability to cooperate with others
- Engagement with arts projects is associated with increased compliance with criminal justice orders and regimes
- The status of arts practitioners as professional artists is highly significant in the success of projects and their impact on participants
- Arts projects provide safe spaces for individuals to have positive experiences and begin to make individual choices
- Showcasing creative work can provide opportunities for people to reconnect with families and friends and is an important aspect of the work.

Research focused on community youth justice settings has found that young peoples' levels of engagement were linked with how relevant they deemed the project to be, who seemed to be behind the process, and whether they felt they belonged there for any purposeful reason (Daykin et al., 2014). When young people had the chance to take ownership of a

programme and set their own ground rules then levels of engagement were good (Eagle, 2008). Recent research has shown that arts programmes can have a positive impact on sentence engagement (Caulfield et al., 2022), wellbeing, and educational engagement (Caulfield & Sojka, 2021).

Most research has looked at the impact of discrete arts programmes. The new creative approach developed by Sandwell YOS was innovative in working across the whole service with a range of arts and creative activities, and it was therefore important to commission an evaluation. The evaluation found improvements in young people's engagement, confidence, wellbeing, and aspirations (Caulfield, Sojka, & Massie, 2019; Caulfield, Sojka, & Devi-McGleish, 2021). Young people and staff developed new skills, and the relationships between young people and staff became more open. The evaluation also found quantitative increases in the percentage of contacts attended by young people and a reduction in breach of orders by young people when taking part in creative arts activities. However, more data need to be collected over a longer timeframe to test the robustness of these findings.

Some of the young people highlighted that their engagement was because the activities do not resemble formal school environments. Sandwell YOS have taken the time to ensure the activities are young-person led, and take account of practical concerns that can have a large impact on engagement. The evaluation identified that positive and mutually respectful relationships have formed through the creative arts. It is interesting to note that staff were generally very conscious of the improved relationships and having a better understanding of young people. This adds support to previous research about the use of creative activities a tool/process by which staff can engage with young people better (Meaby, 2019).



# Developing and shaping a Service wide creative approach – what to put in place before you begin

The experiences of our young people can lead to mistrust or suspicion of those in authority and in turn, for practitioners, the challenge of engagement can seem insurmountable. We therefore argue that an evolution of current approaches are required to more effectively engage, support, and help young people. The new National Standards for youth justice, underpinned by the Youth Justice Board's (YJB) helpful focus on a 'child first' principle, support a change in thinking and encourage YOSs to take local initiatives. Our vision was to focus on the use of the arts and reconceptualise the YOS over time into a 'Creative YOS'.

## Things to think about, from Mike's perspective as YOS Manager:

### Engaging your board

It goes without saying that if you're serious about developing a more creative approach then you need to engage your Youth Justice Partnership/YOS Management Board/whatever it is called locally. We wouldn't have been able to get sign off on a creative lead within our service, had we not put a lot of effort into our Board's understanding and agreeing to our aspiration. Our initial approach included having Arts Connect and Professor Caulfield come to a meeting of our Board to set the context of why our direction would be innovative. We grounded it in the feedback from the children we work with, which of course adds weight to any initiative, and a consideration of the needs of our cohort in terms of speech and language. We also set out with an intention of evaluation from the outset (i.e. we think this would work, can we try it and evaluate). This gained enough momentum to allow us to start our Artsmark journey (more on that later) and set it as a priority in our Youth Justice Plan for that year.

We were very fortunate to have some members of our Board who had experience of delivering arts-based activities with young people and who had fond memories of those times. This was useful in gathering

interest, but we have tried to keep our board members engaged throughout our journey with regular updates, sharing successes, and inviting to performances.

### Artsmark and Bridge Organisations

Finding and engaging with your local organisations is vital and you can read about this on page 25 of this guide.

### Finding innovation funding

The conversation with the Board was helped by us doing our homework around potential additional funding streams. For us, the timing in terms of applying to the Youth Justice Board's serious youth violence pathfinders was fortunate, but to a large degree, this was because we were prepared when such funding streams became available. We'd also explored a variety of other potential sources of funding – including Unitas and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner - for Summer Arts Colleges, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council bids, and so on. There are many potential funding sources available depending on what you have in mind and if you can link your ideas to the outcomes the funder wants to achieve. We also found that identifying local arts providers who can access other sources of funding was useful; in such cases, the provider can write a bid with the YOS as a delivery partner. A word of warning however: when working with any partner, we have found it very useful to have an open conversation at the start about the potential challenges. Doing this work is resource intensive and has to be flexible to the needs of the young people; a rigid programme with a provider who does not understand the cohort is unlikely to be a positive experience for anyone.

### Find the person!

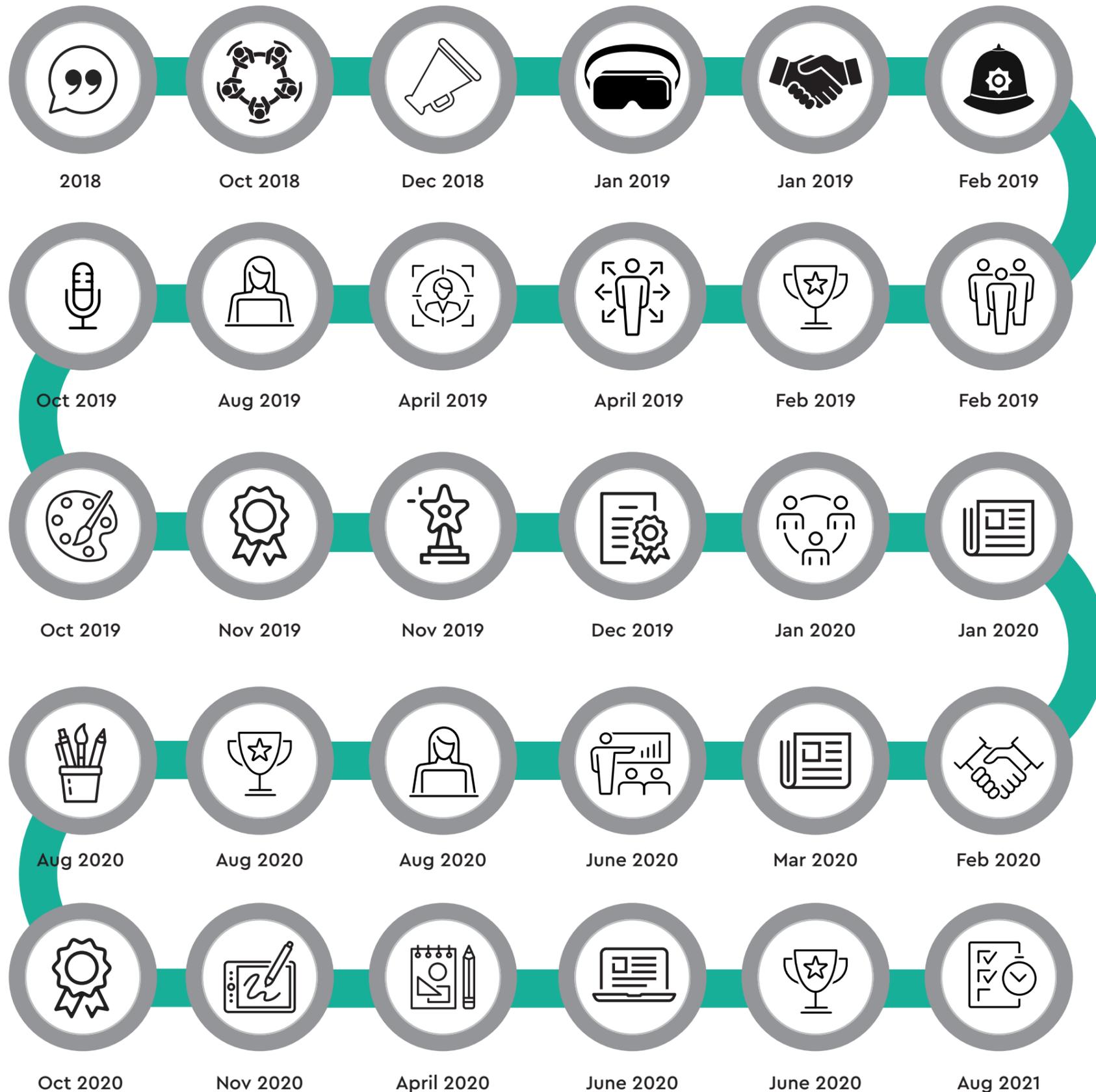
In your organisation you will have someone who is creatively minded. You might have more than one person, or your whole team might be creative (you

lucky thing!). It might not be anyone obvious, they may be hiding it, but someone will have an arts background, or enjoy drawing/painting/dancing etc in their spare time. The key is to find that person (or people) who is willing to try new things, break the mould and inspire other practitioners and young people to see the value of what is happening. In my organisation it was Chad Smith, who has a drama background and comes up with about a million ideas every day.

When we were struggling to find funding, we talked and decided that if we were serious about changing things we should try with or without funding. I set Chad a challenge of co-producing a short drama piece with young people to see whether the idea was worth pursuing. When I saw what the young people managed to achieve in such a short timescale it made me confident that we were about to embark on something worthwhile.

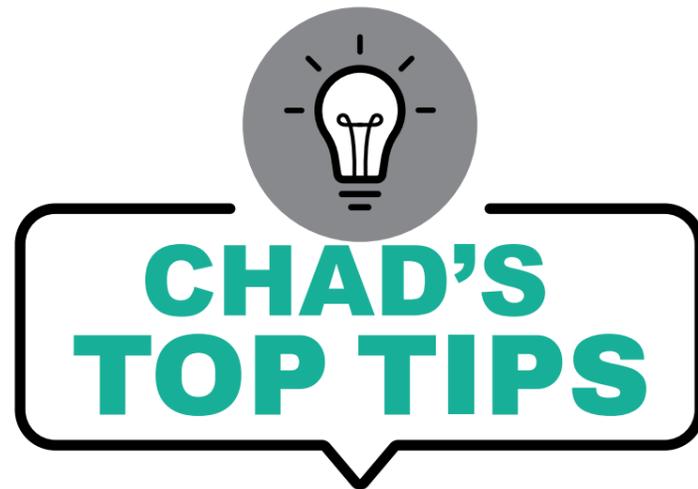
It goes without saying that while there are some people who will immediately be excited about being able to be more creative in their practice, there will be others for whom this concept is daunting. If the long-term ambition is to be successful, then we know we have to work hard to engage all our managers and practitioners in understanding and connecting with the concept. It is useful to ground this in the child's voice (children want us to be more creative) and in our first evaluation we tried to show some of the benefits to practitioners in terms of children coming in to appointments more regularly and engaging better, but cultural change takes time. Slowly but consistently we are trying to help all colleagues feel safe and understand their role in the journey. The second evaluation report, written two years into our journey, shows that more staff are building confidence and connecting with the approach. We don't want all practitioners to be incredible artists, we just want to try and encourage creativity across our offer.

# Sandwell's journey: Key milestones



- 2018** – Feedback from our young people about what they want from the YOS
- Oct 2018** – Partnership board: creative approach idea agreed as direction by the board with regular updates since
- Dec 2018** – Initial drama project
- Jan 2019** – County Lines VR Project
- Jan 2019** – First Meeting with Helen Frost from Arts Connect
- Feb 2019** – Presented at National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance conference
- Feb 2019** – Three staff trained to deliver Arts Award
- Feb 2019** – Funding awarded from YJB
- April 2019** – Creative Careers week
- April 2019** – Youth Justice Plan: Being more creative agreed as an area of priority
- Aug 2019** – First Summer Arts College
- Oct 2019** – First podcast recorded
- Oct 2019** – Arts Connect Blog
- Nov 2019** – Koestler first time entry award
- Nov 2019** – Artsmark Statement of Commitment submitted and Sandwell YOS become the first YOS to receive Artsmark Award
- Dec 2019** – First evaluation published
- Jan 2020** – Whole team arts intervention training
- Jan 2020** – Work featured in Express and Star
- Feb 2020** – Arts Lead vacancy filled
- Mar 2020** – Work featured in Sandwell Herald
- June 2020** – Three staff trained to deliver draw and talk sessions
- Aug 2020** – 'Getting to know' creative intervention embedded into service
- Aug 2020** – Funding awarded via YJB
- Aug 2020** – Lockdown Summer Arts College
- Oct 2020** – Virtual Silver Arts Award Project
- Nov 2020** – Featured delivery partner during Artsmark Celebration week
- April 2021** – New logo designed by young person
- June 2021** – Website launched
- June 2021** – Koestler Platinum Award, Bonze Award, and U25s Special Award
- Aug 2021** – Follow-up evaluation report published

## Practical tips



Deciding to use creative arts as a method when working within the context of the criminal justice system is a brave but worthy approach to take. Expect feelings of euphoria but also frustrations and challenges along the way. The highs will certainly outweigh the lows.

### Tip 1

#### Time

As the Arts Lead for Sandwell YOS, I had the luxury of being able to focus my time on everything that is creative – time case managers won't have. I can honestly say that if I was asked to do my creative role split with case management it would not work.

Don't underestimate the time that is needed to fully embed arts into the service successfully. While there is no tried and tested formula on what approach to take, it can be very time consuming and often invisible. Other members of staff won't see the amount of work that is needed to run something like a Summer Arts College, especially in the final weeks when you are working until the early hours to pull together young people's work ready for the Arts Awards moderation. The visible parts are the fun sessions you take part in alongside young people.

### Tip 2

#### Team work makes the dream work (but you may end up being a lone wolf)

It can be a lonely experience doing this type of role so where possible try and include other members of the team, but approach with caution! It is unlikely that you will get the response you were hoping for from everyone (refer to tip 1). Case managers won't have time to sit in weekly creative arts planning meetings and you must be prepared to push ahead. Don't stop trying to engage staff in the process, continue to invite staff to co-create, give regular feedback in team meetings, share young people's work with the team, ask for volunteers to help run programmes and offer training opportunities for staff to upskill.

Having support from line management and above will be key to help drive change within the service by imbedding the creative plan into to the Youth Justice Plan.

### Tip 3

#### You can't be everything at once

Having access to a network of artists and organisations will be the only way you can deliver a varied and enriched arts offer. In the beginning I relied heavily on online searches to find local artists to deliver sessions. This can be very hit and miss and financially costly.

I have worked with artists who are very skilled within their discipline but have been unable to transfer their skills to young people successfully. As your network grows you will start to come across the same names of artists and organisations who have a proven track record. That's not to say you should automatically go with them, but I would recommend asking the artist for examples of previous projects they have been involved in and organisations they have worked with. Then contact those organisations to see how things went. Alternatively commission a taster session with young people before committing to bigger pieces of work.

Social media can be your best friend: many artists and organisations showcase their work on platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. This will give you the opportunity to see what kind of work they produce. We are also fortunate enough to have a very good relationship with our local arts bridge organisation 'Arts Connect'. There will be an equivalent within your area, so seek them out. They will help you connect

to the arts world and offer support and guidance to navigate it.

Why have an Arts Lead in the service and pay for artists? My background is Drama, and while I have creative flair and am willing to have a go at all things creative, watching a few YouTube videos on how to throw a pot does not make me a potter! Young people are more likely to get involved if they can see that the person in front of them is legitimate. I cannot stress enough that no matter what your background is or how good you are, young people will see you as a YOS worker not an artist. I have seen how young people's interests have peaked during a graffiti project because the artist was talking about the time he worked with Banksy, and when a music producer name droped some of the biggest Grime artists he has worked with.

It is important to use a range of local artists who look or sound like the young people you work with. You want young people to look at an artist and think 'If they can do it, so can I!'. This approach also makes sure that the creative offer is diverse and rich in culture.

### Tip 4

#### Kathakali isn't for everyone and everyone wants to do music production!

Always consult with young people to find out what they would like to take part in. Your participation numbers are more likely to be higher if you do. It is likely that most young people will only be interested in wanting to do music production, mainly because this is all they have ever been offered before and also because of the costs involved in studio hire, so it is a quick win to offer this.

It is also important to throw a curve ball in occasionally and give young people the opportunity to try something different, such as photography. I guarantee that you will be surprised how resistant young people will be at first but will leave the session asking for more (but only if the sessions are relevant and fun). For example, if photography is a programme you would like to introduce, get young people to create photos for an advertising campaign for a brand or retailer they like.

## Tip 5

### Get your hands dirty

If you are going to ask young people to step out of their comfort zone and get involved, then you and other staff should also do the same. Having staff on the side, sitting with their arms crossed looking like they don't want to be there will give young people a way out.

Young people are more likely to give something a go if they see that you are too. But be prepared to be laughed at and ridiculed by young people when your pot goes wonky on the wheel!

## Tip 6

### An Apple mac won't help you be as creative as you think

While having a large budget at your disposal would be nice, the reality is it will be relatively small (if any)! Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you need lots of money to run a creative programme.

Our first creative programme was a drama project working with young people to create and perform a play based on County Lines. The final performance included sound effects and a soundtrack that I played off my phone through a Bluetooth speaker and a backstage that was separated from the performance area by upright table tennis tables. While the play wasn't likely to win an Olivier Award, it met the original aims of the project and engaged young people because they led throughout the process: it was their story, their characters, and it didn't matter where they got to tell their stories.

Be realistic about what is achievable and aim to do that the best you can with what you have got. You will never have the budget to make a feature length Spielberg worthy film on knife crime but you can always make a five minute film that young people can be proud of using a good phone or handheld camera.

## Tip 7

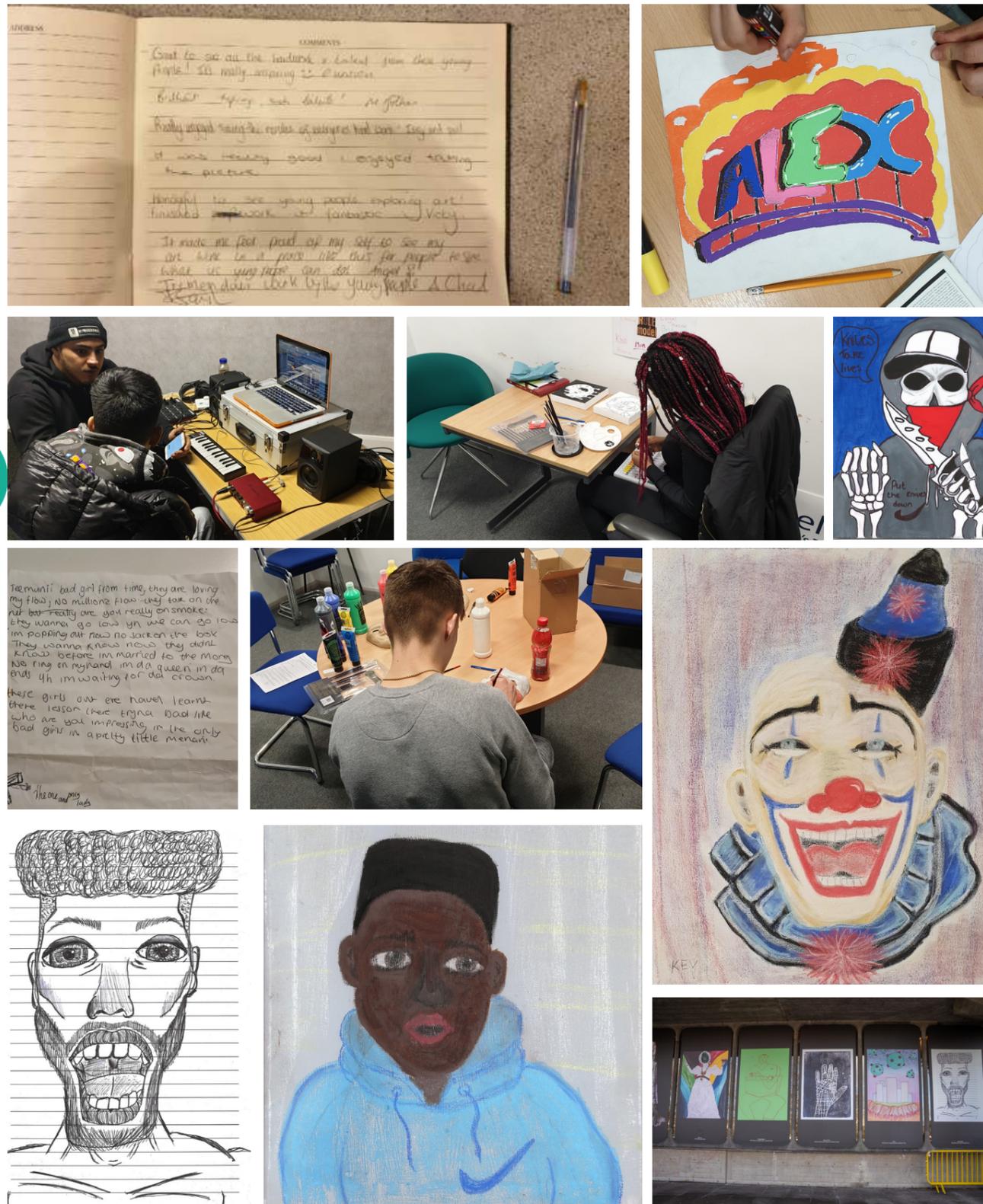
### "I never knew I'd be in a musical, let alone win an award for one" Nicole Kidman

Whatever wonderful arts project you run, make sure that young people will achieve an accreditation for their work and celebrate their achievements. It will probably be the first time that they have gained an accreditation/qualification or been told they are good at something. We use Arts Awards as our main source of accreditation because they are extremely flexible and friendly and do not rely on young people being able to put pen to paper. We also enter young people's work into the Koestler Awards each year which is specific to the Criminal Justice System.

Whatever programme you choose to embark upon and no matter how big or small you choose to go, I guarantee it will be the thing that young people will remember the most about their time at YOS.



## Images of work by young people at Sandwell YJS



## Other approaches

The Sandwell approach covered in this good practice guide in one way of implementing creative arts across a YOS. We spoke to our colleagues in the South of England about an alternative approach.

In Focus Education & Development CiC works with local authorities in the South including Southampton Youth Offending Services (SYOS). In Focus Education & Development CiC was set up in 2015 to provide much needed extra-curricular, arts-based learning for at-risk and vulnerable young people in the South. The team consists of highly skilled Artist Educators and their primary art form is photography, but they also deliver film, poetry and other creative activities. They work with local authorities and charities on projects that support, amongst other things, crime prevention, restorative justice, youth diversion and pro-social behaviour models.

With SYOS they have delivered a weekly Arts Award programme with them for nearly a decade as well as supporting their journey to Artsmark Gold. They have also worked with Isle of Wight (IoW) YOT supporting them with their Artsmark and Arts Award delivery. They have also worked with Hampshire Youth Offending Team (HYOT) and Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) to deliver school holiday arts colleges for over 10 years.

**"we pride ourselves on our joined-up approach and openness to share our best practice with others. In this way we have been able to not only work closely with the YOTs, but also support them with to embed their artistic practice as part of a wider diversion and desistance programme."** In Focus

There is no pressure put on the young person, no exams and no grading. This approach works well for the YOTs as the YOT workers can engage with the workshops as much as the young people. With every programme they share young people's work at the end, via exhibitions,

online platforms or publications. They have held exhibitions as part of the Tate Exchange programme in 2017 and 18 and have had several young people's work exhibited in the prestigious Koestler awards.

In March 2021 In Focus held their first Creativity in Youth Justice Symposium online where they encouraged people in the sector to come and share their experiences. They hope to continue this on a bi-annual basis.

[www.infocusedu.co.uk](http://www.infocusedu.co.uk)  
[info@infocusedu.co.uk](mailto:info@infocusedu.co.uk)



# What creative engagement looks like at Sandwell YJS

Young people have been involved right from the beginning, sharing their ideas about what creative arts activities appeal to them. We sent out a questionnaire, via case managers, and listened to young people's responses. We also threw in a few 'curve balls' to broaden young people's experiences. Now that we have a Youth Forum at Sandwell, we seek their feedback regularly.

The offer for each young person is tailored to them and their needs, but might look something like this:



**'Getting to Know'** booklet – designed by Sandwell YOS and aligned with first Arts Award – is the start point for engagement with every young person. The booklet includes a range of creative activities that cover core tasks right at the start of young person's order. It provides a way for staff to get to know the young person, their environment, and family relationships. The booklet helps relationship building with the young person and takes a maximum of eight hours to complete. Depending on the order, this might be worked on daily or might be completed over several weeks.

**Draw and Talk** invites young people to express themselves through drawing. Three staff members at Sandwell YOS are currently trained to deliver this activity, which is offered as an additional offer for young people to help young people express themselves and explore anything that is concerning them. Draw and Talk is designed for those identified as having SLCS difficulties and is not suitable for young people involved with CAMHS or therapy.

**Creative approaches to statutory programmes.** The team have taken existing statutory programmes and shaping them creatively. For example, young people taking part in the Motoring Offence programme can write a fictional story and design a driving safety poster. For young people who have been involved in knife crime, one option is to develop a storyboard of a knife incidence. The case manager can then use this to explore consequential thinking and what could have been done differently. These statutory programmes are designed so that any case manager can deliver these activities.

**Bespoke opportunities.** To respond to the individual needs of young people, Sandwell YOS facilitate bespoke opportunities. For example, they secured funding for a young person identified as having a talent for music

to attend a local studio. External opportunities, such as engaging with an external arts organisation or group, are reviewed on a case by case basis, assessing risk and responding to need. Where appropriate, a case manager might accompanying a young person to support them.

**Career planning.** The team work closely with Connexions to provide clear career advice and guidance around creative careers.

Young people with a particular interest in the creative arts are put in touch with the Arts Lead for the Summer Arts College. Creative approaches are on the agenda for every team meeting.

## Building capacity and confidence within your team

A huge amount of energy came from the YOS Manager and the Arts Lead to develop and implement the new creative way of working across Sandwell YOS. The creative arts approach represented a significant change in working practices, and it's important to acknowledge that any change like this takes time to embed.

It was clear early on that the approach was developing well and that many staff within the YOS were engaged, but that ownership sat very much with the Arts Lead. Changing the practice and culture of an organisation takes time – some individuals will champion that change, while others will take longer to adapt. This is normal, but a focus on change management is important to maintain team cohesion and continue to drive change forward.

To engage all staff, build capacity and confidence, and work towards shared ownership of the creative approach, these are things you could consider:

- Ground the approach in the voice and needs of the children you work with
- Invite colleagues to co-create creative activities and approaches
- Have creative approaches on the agenda for every team meeting
- Share young people's work with the team
- Share evidence about the impact of the creative arts and success stories (like those in this good practice guide)
- Ask for volunteers to help run programmes and offer training opportunities for staff
- As the creative approach develops, produce and share a clear calendar and resource list of activities

By 2021 it was clear that staff at Sandwell YOS were seeing the positive impact of the creative approach on children – including their confidence, sense of achievement, wellbeing, self-expression, and an outlet for emotions. Seeing this impact helped staff engage and value the creative arts. There was a strong sense among staff that creative arts helped develop more open relationships built between staff and children and staff felt positive about children's aspirations being built through the arts, offering new potential future pathways for education and work.

*"We don't want all practitioners to be incredible artists, we just want to try and encourage creativity across our offer."*

(Chad Smith, Arts Lead)

## Arts and National Standards

A creative approach to working with children aligns with elements of the national standards for children in the youth justice system. Specifically, we think that it shows alignment with the following elements:

The principle 'child first' guides the work of the YJB.

These standards have been designed to assist agencies adhering to that principle making sure that they:

- Prioritise the best interests of children, recognising their needs, capacities, rights and potential.
- Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime. This leads to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.
- Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.
- Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system.

### National Standard 1:

local strategies and services are in place to ensure positive outcomes for children, including sustainable desistance from crime and to prevent children from becoming involved in crime and/or anti-social behaviour

the promotion of positive constructive behaviour

### National standard 3:

local practice prioritises children's best interests,

constructively promotes their potential and desistance, encourages their active engagement, and minimises the potential damage that contact with the system can bring · court orders are managed in a way that reflect the aim of the youth justice system; to enable children to live a safe, crime-free life and make a positive contribution to society

In managing an effective whole sentence YOTs must: · engage the child, parents and carers and demonstrate through evidence their efforts to do so · establish a meaningful trusting relationship with children whom they supervise · take diverse needs into account and promote equality in access and engagement · assist the child to build a pro-social identity to enable sustainable desistance

Source: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/957697/Standards\\_for\\_children\\_in\\_youth\\_justice\\_services\\_2019.doc.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957697/Standards_for_children_in_youth_justice_services_2019.doc.pdf)

## Developing external relationships

### Arts Mark and Bridge Organisations

Artsmark ([www.artsmark.org.uk](http://www.artsmark.org.uk)) is the only creative quality standard for schools and education settings, accredited by Arts Council England (ACE). While it has been developed for application in schools, we found it useful as an overarching framework to think about where we were, what our aspirations were, and showing progress. It also helped to think about how the arts can be used as evidence for inspection criteria, be that Ofsted or HMIP. When we received our Silver ArtsMark we were thrilled at the recognition of the effort we'd put in and proud to be the first YOS in the country to achieve it. Southampton YOS have since received Gold, which we've set as our ambition for the future.

ACE funds a network of Bridge organisations to connect the cultural sector and the education sector so that children and young people can have access to great arts and cultural opportunities. They work with local schools, art organisations, museums, libraries, music education hubs, local authorities, Further and Higher Education Institutions and many other partners to develop a network of cultural provision. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/bridge-organisations>

Our bridge organisation is Arts Connect <https://www.artconnect.co.uk>, who were incredibly helpful in helping us to understand our starting point, connecting us with other likeminded people/organisations, and supported our Artsmark journey. We strongly recommend getting in touch with your local bridge organisation.

Your bridge organisation will also help with the coordination of your local Cultural Education Partnership (CEP). We found the CEP useful in making connections and to ensure that the young people open to the YOS were considered in the Borough's broader arts offer.

We recommend that progression routes are thought of both in terms of contact with the YOS, but also beyond that. This latter point will need continued work to further develop (local) relationships with external organisations, and the YOS team should be mindful about the demands of this, the boundaries of their remit, and what other organisations might be able to offer to support this.

## Understanding the impact of your work

It is important to understand the impact of any new programme of work. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Set up internal monitoring and feedback
- Commission external evaluation
- Develop a clear logic model or theory of change

Whether you implement one or all of these, the key is to ensure that your data collection tools are mapped against the key aims of your approach. What are you trying to achieve and how can you best measure this?

For example, the evaluation of Sandwell's approach was designed to understand if there was an impact on:

- engagement with the YOS
- motivation and aspirations
- YOS staff openness to, and confidence with, using the arts and creativity to deliver youth justice services
- if there were any changes in children's relationships outside the YOS sessions (e.g. with family members, peers, and others)
- if there was any impact on attitudes and behaviours, and well-being
- any barriers to success

It can be useful to think about process and impact evaluation:

**Outcome and impact evaluation** measures progress in the outcomes that the programme is aiming to achieve and assesses programme effectiveness in achieving its ultimate goal. With Sandwell, the evaluation team worked with young people and staff to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and the impact on them. The evaluation team worked with data routinely collected by the YOS to understand whether any change had occurred in young people's engagement with the Service.

**Process evaluation** determines whether activities have been implemented as intended. This can focus on understanding how the new approach has evolved, and the relationship between this and the outcomes (impact). With Sandwell, qualitative data were collected through interviews (young people, staff, and other stakeholders) about the way the service had been developed, implemented, and managed. This element has helped support the continued development of the creative approach.

We recommend that quantitative data is collected to understand if any change occurs, with qualitative work to understand how this change might be happening, foregrounding the voice and experience of children and staff. It is useful to review your internal monitoring data and use this to understand impact. Working with your data colleagues and using the data you already routinely collect, you could design a monitoring template and use it to answer the following questions: are there changes in children's engagement? Are there changes in the medium to long term in types and amount of reoffending?

When considering your activities and how they might create impact, you could consider developing a Theory of Change (ToC). A ToC can be defined as 'a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context' (Center for Theory of Change, 2021). A ToC identifies how programme activities lead to goals being achieved by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place to achieve the goals. Developing a ToC helps to clearly define the objectives that the programme is aiming to achieve. This in turn then helps to inform and define the objectives for evaluation.

## Case study box: A young person's journey

### CASE STUDY: Lexi

Lexi (not her real name) is a 17 year old female who has been engaging in arts activity while engaged with a Community Order at Sandwell YOS.

Lexi is NEET (not in education, employment, or training). Historically she struggled with pre 16 education and has never voluntarily applied for or engaged with training courses.

Lexi engaged in a photography workshop during the Easter holidays as part of the Creative Careers week at Sandwell YOS. Initially she was reluctant to be involved in the workshop and could not see how photography could be used to express herself. Her only experience previously was taking selfies with her friends.

Lexi was clearly captivated by the workshop and instantly began following the photographer on social media. She began regularly talking about her photography experience to others. This led to becoming interested in other arts and creative activities/interventions. She participated in Sandwell YOS Summer Arts Programme, co-creating a piece of multimedia live theatre that was performed at a local Police Station.

As a result of her exposure to various art forms, particularly photography, Lexi asked for support to apply for a photography course at a local college. She was excited by the thought of attending training for the first time in her life. Unfortunately, the college she applied for declined her application for the course based on the needs outlined in her Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP).

Although Lexi views this as rejection, her determination to continue her arts journey has led to her ambition to complete the Silver Arts Award by organising a photographic exhibition showcasing work she is going to produce based on her journey within the care system.

Lexi's engagement was very positive, but also highlighted ways that we needed to work with local education providers and partners to develop opportunities for progression for our young people.

## A checklist of key things to consider

### CHECKLIST

- Have you listened to feedback from the children you work with?
- Are you clear about the evidence? I.e. why a creative approach might work well in your YJS?
- Have you identified the creative person/people in your team?
- Have you engaged your senior leaders and your board?
- Have you identified your key local partners?
- Have you identified potential sources of funding?
- Have you considered on-going work to engage colleagues and build confidence?
- Have you built in monitoring and evaluation to understand if what you're doing is successful?
- Have you got mechanisms to keep listening to feedback from the children you work with?

## Useful resources and further reading

- The National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance (NCJAA) Evidence Library contains over 100 UK studies on the arts in criminal justice <http://www.artsevidence.org.uk/>
- The Prison Arts Resource Project was launched in the United States, building directly on the Evidence Library, as a repository for US studies on the arts in criminal justice <https://scancorrectionalarts.org/>
- Evaluation reports for Sandwell YOS creative approach: <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/icrd> and follow-on evaluation of Sandwell Youth Offending Service – a creative approach to working with young people ([yjresourcehub.uk](http://yjresourcehub.uk))
- Caulfield, L. S. (2021). The role of the arts in the criminal justice system, in Towl, G. and Crighton, D. (eds.), *Forensic Psychology*, 3rd edition. Wiley.
- Youth Justice Statistics: Youth justice statistics – GOV. UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))
- Useful links for planning an evaluation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-in-health-and-well-being-overview>

### References to research cited in this guide

Bilby, C, Caulfield, LS, Ridley, L (2013) *Re-imagining futures: Exploring arts interventions and the process of desistance*

Caulfield, L.S., Jolly, A., Simpson, E., and Devi-McGleish, Y. (2022). 'It's not just music, it helps you from inside': Mixing methods to understand the impact of music on young people in contact with the criminal justice system. *Youth Justice*.

Caulfield, L.S., & Sojka, B. (2021). *An evaluation of the Birmingham Youth Offending Service Youth Music Project 2018–2021*. Grant report for Youth Music.

Caulfield, L.S., Sojka, B. & Devi-McGleish, Y. (2021).

*Follow-on evaluation of Sandwell Youth Offending Service – a creative approach to working with young people.*

Caulfield, L.S., Sojka, B. & Massie, R. (2019). *An evaluation of Sandwell Youth Offending Service – a creative approach to working with young people.*

Daykin, N, de Viggiani, N, Moriaty, Y, Pilkington, P (2014). *Musical pathways: An exploratory study of young people in the criminal justice system, engaged with a creative music programme*

Eagle, S (2008). *Evaluation of the miss spent programme 2008*

Meaby, V. (2019). *Nothing to lose? Using ethno-mimesis to explore loss in the lives of young people who offend*. University of Durham: Unpublished PhD thesis.



# Developing creative approaches in youth justice

---

This guide was written by Professor Laura Caulfield, Mike Botham, and Chad Smith. 2023