

Inspiration:

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Embedding the Arts in Your Youth Work Setting

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12 Trusty Tips for Starting and Sustaining Youth Arts Work:

Youth arts work involves, by necessity and design, the collaboration of young people, youth workers and artists – and this combination of people and purpose is powerful when approached in a meaningful way.

Various artistic mediums are used to address young people's needs and various issues they face, and I have experienced the direct benefits for young people and organisations using the approaches described below when they engage in arts practice.

It is important that proper consideration is given to the planning and delivery of these programmes to ensure successful outcomes for all involved. The greatest single learning I have taken is the importance of sharing resources, learning and ideas across individual practitioners, groups, projects and organisations. For that reason, I am suggesting some useful tips for anyone who wants to begin and maintain youth arts within their organisation.



12 Trusty Tips for Starting and Sustaining Youth Arts Work

1. **Make the right connections:** You need to identify the needs and interests of the young people involved: only then source artists who have the right skillset and values to work with the young people, and to match these needs and interests.
2. **Build joint ownership:** Young people, youth workers and artists must be involved in every step of the process. Boundaries, working contracts, values and roles must be named from the beginning in order to ensure clear understanding and ownership over the programme.
3. **Identify the purpose:** Educate board members, other young people and youth workers within your organisation on the purpose and potential of Youth Arts. People are often engaged in Youth Arts without people having clear plans or the language to identify what it is they are intending to do in this work. Knowledge is power and encourages people to develop further.
4. **Ensure respect:** Make time for all involved. Do regular check-ins and check-outs to ensure that everyone and every group involved is being listened to and included. Give recognition throughout because that is a very human need. A little praise goes a long way.
5. **Value Artists' Skills:** Seek funding for the skills you require to conceive and deliver the programme you want to put in place. Artists are often undervalued and their efforts seen as unskilled or easy to access/replace. Nothing could be further from the truth: the value of art as a transformative tool is unquestionable and well documented. One would never question paying an outdoor instructor for what it is that they do: artists deserve the same respect. They also deserve recognition and appreciation for the talents they demonstrate and share.
6. **Invest in equipment:** This supports a good quality process and pride in the work.
7. **Share learning:** Be open and transparent about your programmes, resources, methodologies and linkages. There is strength in numbers. The more easily accessible a programme is the better chance that people will try it out and continue on the good work.
8. **Plan, deliver, evaluate:** Think though what you intend to do, and plan for the resources, steps and sequences you need to achieve. At the same time, don't be a slave to plans when the context or circumstances change. Don't be afraid to make mistakes; constantly try to learn from them and improve your practice.



9. **Find a balance between process and end-product:** The process has to be meaningful and inclusive for those involved – but process with no outputs in sight will frustrate participants: a strong end product fills a group with pride after hard work and commitment. Both elements need due thought and consideration in planning, implementation and reporting.

10. **Ask questions:** If you are unsure of anything as you are planning a programme/project, implementing it or trying to evaluate it, seek advice and inspiration by contacting other youth workers, artists or the NYCI. Chatting things through will almost always help, whether that's avoid an obstacle, overcome a blockage or accept a situation.

11. **Link theory to your practice:** Use the resources available, such as the Creating Magic resource from NYCI, to clearly articulate what you are doing. Evaluate the process and share the findings. You'll find that if you are able to frame your programmes according to NQSF and funder requirements, planning and capturing outcomes as well as activities, then there will be more support for your work.

12. **Have fun:** Last but not least, have fun and enjoy what you are doing. Youth Arts is a great area of work to be involved in, so savour it and make the most of it. If you are happy in your work the effect will soon spread, resulting in those you engage with wanting to be involved.

