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Introduction

IN2 IS INTENDED, NOT AS A PRACTICAL MANUAL BUT AS A WAY TO IDENTIFY AND CONNECT WITH CURRENT YOUTH ARTS PRACTICE. IT IS ESSENTIALLY A COLLECTION OF WINDOWS INTO THE WORLDS OF PRACTITIONERS WHO WANT TO SHARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES AND INNOVATIONS. IT SHOULD HELP US UNDERSTAND SOMETHING OF THE CONTEXTS OF THEIR WORK AND HOW IT HAPPENS, AS WELL AS SOME OF THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS IMPACTING UPON IT. WE SHOULD ALSO HEAR OF NEW IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES AND WHERE STRATEGIES ARE BEING DEVELOPED TOWARDS SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENT. OVER THE YEARS, A CONSTANT FEATURE OF THE GROWING AND SHIFTING COMMUNITY OF INTEREST DESCRIBED AS THE YOUTH ARTS SECTOR HAS BEEN A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO CONSIDERED AND IMPROVING PRACTICE. IN2 HAS BEEN A KEY RESOURCE IN THIS SO FAR AND WILL CONTINUE IN THIS SUPPORTING ROLE.



As an annual publication aiming to reflect experience across a widespread and developing sector, in2 must cast its net wide. If there are thematic flavours to an issue, these tend to emerge from the focus and concerns expressed through the content rather than being chosen in advance. In this particular issue if there is one recognisable theme it is that of a more evident youth voice. In the initiatives outlined here, young people are being seen (and heard) not only as recipients and participants, important as that is, but also as commentators and planners.

Some of the articles here are written by young people rising to the challenge of telling a group or organisational story while also bringing their own experience and voice to bear. In other articles we hear of young people finding a voice through engaging with art and expressing their thoughts on their own issues and concerns. A question is obliquely being posed to the arts, community and youth sectors and to decision makers anywhere; young people are prepared to give voice, are we prepared to listen?

The Art of the Possible

The Art of the Possible

Freedom to be, to dream, to do, to learn, to grow, together

If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it. Albert Einstein

To Be

Why bother with art? What use is it in the greater scheme of things, particularly for young people? Nowhere among the issues crucial to young people highlighted by the media and those agencies charged with providing for and advocating on behalf of young people's needs, do we hear of a burning need for art. Smoking, drinking, drugs, mental health, education, employment, criminality are all currently issues which are given precedence when speaking of youth. The spotlight is often on the negative potential of youth: the dangers young people are prey to, or indeed the threat to society they are seen to represent themselves, rather than the precious gift to the future that all young people are.

Yet we know that art – whether through music, dance, drama, painting, literature or film – uplifts us, communicating emotion and reflecting on life in imaginative, striking and energizing ways. We know that young people involved in creative activities, whether especially talented or not, become more confident, articulate, self-motivated and comfortable interacting outside their own social group¹. Engaging in creative activities develops transferable social, intellectual and cognitive skills that enhance their overall personal development. We know that these skills are an important factor in determining future success, health and well-being in life. Why then are we still not fully convinced that the need to be artistic and creative is an intrinsic part of all of us, seeking expression and influencing how well we adapt to and manage our life? Why the reluctance to provide substantial and sustained investment, funding and support?

The artist Pablo Picasso said 'All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.' For most of us being artistic is not part of 'grown-up' behavior and thus we tend to undervalue that part of ourselves and others. Art is for entertainment or ornamental purposes only, inconsequential, a diversion from the real problems rather than a solution to them. When I say 'we' I'm speaking to those of us concerned with education, youth work and the rights of young people generally, rather than the arts specifically.

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How important is what has become known as 'youth arts' to our overall vision for young people and how receptive are we to young people's hunger for creativity and artistic expression in their lives? Unless we truly value that dimension of life ourselves, we will be blind to the need for it in others.

To Dream, To Do

Art, in its broadest meaning, is the expression of creativity or imagination, or both. We recognize art in the products of human creativity; beautiful and significant things such as songs, stories, great buildings, statues, paintings, films and dance. These things are not simply descriptions of life. Through art we understand and empathize with the feelings, thoughts and living conditions of others. Through art's resonance, we can also become more attuned to our own inner world. Art encourages imagination, and it is imagination that creates the future. Art shows young people how they might express and clarify their own feelings, experiences and aspirations through painting, drawing, acting, music, dance, etc.

If art offers this transcendent experience, why are the arts so uncomfortable for many adults? Children often have a more innocent relationship with art, open to its meanings, curious about its mysteries, unaware of any perceived differences in status attached to various cultural pursuits. For many adults, particularly where contact with the arts was not a part of growing up, perceived elitism, exclusivity, and the sometimes alien language of art have dampened the relationship. This ambivalence can form a barrier, when it comes to providing opportunities for young people to engage in artistic and creative pursuits.

'Art needs somebody to listen to its message, somebody to desire it, somebody to drink it up...otherwise it makes no sense.' (Magdalena Abakanowicz, Sculptor). Paradoxically, we can't listen to, desire or drink up art if we already believe art makes no sense, is 'not for us', is not important and hence feel indifferent to it. It's difficult to encourage young people's creativity and respond sincerely to the art they produce if we have this unease with art

ourselves. It's unlikely that art and creativity will feature strongly in advocacy, policy-making and educational or recreational provision for young people, or in the successful implementation of policy that does exist, in these lukewarm conditions. Recognition of the value of art comes as a result of a lifelong engagement that fosters familiarity and fluency with its language, its practice and rituals. Through this comes the discovery of the enjoyment art can bring. If we compare it with sport, for example, the GAA, the peripheral position of the arts in Irish life becomes even more apparent. GAA sports permeate Irish communities from local parishes, through city and county to national level. The GAA involves all generations, from young to old and it's open to everyone, of whatever level of proficiency. It's visible, it's familiar, it's popular and it promotes a needed sense of belonging and communal celebration amongst many. Why, in contrast, do the arts continue to sit on the edges of our culture, failing to capture the emotions and loyalties of the majority as sports do? Does the fear that popularizing the arts can only be done by 'dumbing down' their content somehow contribute to a voluntary marginalization and elitism?

Sport, while highly competitive, is also very much about the fun of participation and play. To experience anything in a playful and fun way requires confidence; unfortunately, many people don't feel very confident engaging with the arts, whether through lack of access, or a perceived lack of relevance to their own lives, or inadequate mediation by those producing and displaying the art. Sport successfully reflects community identity, whether local or national. Can we say the same of art? For those outside the arts world, it can seem quite alien. These issues must be addressed in a robust manner, on behalf of all age groups, if young people's experience of the arts is to thrive in an atmosphere of conviction. Informed, widespread support and integration with other educational provision, both formal and non-formal, will only come about through adults who feel confidence and familiarity where the arts are concerned. The Public and the Arts¹, a comprehensive survey of people's attitudes to the arts carried out on behalf of the Arts Council in 2006, found evidence of a movement in attendance at arts events from conventional or subsidised art forms (e.g. contemporary dance,

opera, classical music) and genres towards more popular and commercial art forms and genres (e.g. film, popular music). Why can't we identify with classical music, ballet or poetry as readily as a film or pop concert, whatever our background? Is it simply a matter of engaging with whatever is most visible and convenient? The challenge then is to find ways to permeate and redefine 'popular' culture such that everyone has a wider choice of cultural experiences to engage in. Young people could do with a counterpoint to mass consumer culture, its ring tone downloads, reality TV shows and celebrity magazines, compulsively fascinating as they are!

Referring to the Public and the Arts survey again, it was found that *'Almost nine out of every ten people believe that the arts play an important and valuable role in a modern society such as that of Ireland'*. Superficially, we are all inclined to agree that the arts are 'a good thing' whether we engage with them or not. Art represents us as a society in a way that nothing else can. Works of art symbolize who we are, or want to be, and what we stand for as a society at any given time. Everybody knows what the Statue of Liberty is. It couldn't be said to fulfill any practical purpose, yet none among us would say it should not be there. We understand instinctively the symbolic purpose and power it holds and that we need such symbols in the world. Artists – being outside the mainstream – are free to comment on, criticize or celebrate what they see, and this remains as a lasting testament in the products they make. We could look at art as a luxury, acceptable in times of plenty, reliant on wealth and a stable economy to thrive. Or we could look on it as an essential basic necessity, something that both enriches life and challenges complacency. Participation in the arts, when seen as an expression of status and wealth, can be a superficial engagement, self-conscious and exclusive. Whereas when the arts are encountered as an integral part of being human, open to everyone, this allows interactions of confidence, informed opinion, pleasure, stimulation and fulfillment to occur. It is up to those of us involved in promoting, supporting and facilitating the arts to ensure that we find ways to create these positive encounters; an important part of ensuring that we can do so is by regularly feeding our own artistic needs.

[Continues on page 30]



MANSIONS OF THE IMAGINATION

Niall O'Baoill is Arts and Culture Co-ordinator with Fatima Groups United. In this article Niall looks back over a unique experience of arts in urban regeneration and forward with confidence in the community's plans

A 7 YEAR BREAKTHROUGH IN LOCAL ARTS DEVELOPMENT

Fatima Mansions, once a local authority flat complex in the south west inner city of Dublin and officially one of the most disadvantaged communities in Ireland, now enjoys an emerging international reputation as a pioneer of community led regeneration. That this shift away from societal notoriety to community achievement can be attributed, in part, to the power of a particular short story is a cause of great local pride and humour.

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS THE WORD

The fiction 'Julie's Story' was written with the intent of winning over the support of the Fatima Task Force in 1999 (specifically the local government officials, elected representatives and state bodies present) to a proposed new vision of community led regeneration. On the assigned day it was read aloud

and embodied in dramatic style by a local woman and – though a cause of some consternation among the targeted audience – the compelling narrative, the performance and the essential reasonableness of the overall proposition won out.

Looking back one can now fully recognise the seminal nature of this infamous story and the formative influence of the 'Burning the Demons – Embracing the Future' event and other such cultural actions, that combined to create a unique confidence and energy around the community itself becoming the author of its own future. The subsequent publication of '11 Acres, 10 Steps' and 'From Ghetto to Greatest' in 2000 solidified this intent and purpose. What has arisen since is a matter of public record.

THE WORD WAS PARTICIPATION

Most all the achievements of Fatima over the past seven years are as a direct result of shared commitment among residents, local leaders and community workers, to work together in a participative process. A collective process that needed to be at once creative, reflexive and respectful of difference. A process founded on the early recognition that major concepts of regeneration needed to arise naturally from within a deep source of ideas and consensus making within the community. The experience of the journey to date has since vindicated the approach. In truth, the process became more like an art and discipline in itself – a practised philosophy – the efficacy of which far exceeds that of the somewhat technical and limited consultative modes currently in practise within the public sector in Ireland.

The circumstances of children and young people were to prove a particular case in hand – as they were, after all, the largest cohort within the community – and largely unaware of the radical and imminent changes to their physical environment and lives. The need to have them informed and actively involved in such matters was crucial. Fortuitously, one of the measures put in place in 2000 to enable the exploration of such individual and collective concerns, was the long-term arts project – 'Arklink' – which, alongside a set of other carefully designed cultural programmes for young people, proved to be a vital source of inspiration and learning for the community and beyond.

A PARTICIPATIVE CULTURE EMERGES

It was from within such roots as these and a subsequent groundswell of local creativity, that a dialogue arose on the role of the arts, artists and arts practises in helping shape confident and sustainable notions of community. FGU – Fatima Groups United (the representative body of residents and community organisations) provided the leadership required by making the arts a core part of its first three year work plan 2003–2005 and through appointing a full time arts and culture co-ordinator.

Arts support structures, research and planning processes were subsequently enacted – under the aegis of the Fatima Regeneration Board (the successor organisation to the defunct Task Force) – through which a significant financial and infrastructural package was put in place to assist the development of a new concept of local arts provision.

The resulting strategy – completed over an eighteen month period – was published in '8 Great Expectations' the Fatima Social Regeneration Plan, in November 2005. Thereafter a small team of consultants were appointed to devise a comprehensive five Year Arts Plan, aimed at establishing an innovative model of arts provision, to be managed and made sustainable within a community framework. This process took a further year, beyond which a positive decision was taken in April 2007, to fully implement the arising plan for the period 2007 – 2012.

TO CREATE NEW CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

The vision of the Fatima Arts Plan – 'Step Right Up' – is now widely regarded as a realistic and achievable one, particularly insofar as it aims to build upon the strengths present within the community, which among other things include:

- The significant extent of local children's engagement with multiple art forms and the imminent emergence of a new model of out of school arts provision
- The expansion of Arts in Youth Work practises with long-term music, visual arts and drama initiatives underway in a variety of local and national contexts
- The existence of quality Arts and Community Education processes with new developmental projects underway; particularly with women
- The successful conclusion of the first phase of the Fatima Public Art programme
- The range of strategic partnerships and collaborative practises in place with leading national and international arts organisations

The Arts Plan now seeks to infuse new challenges and a range of realisable outcomes; all time-lined; accurately costed and subject to evaluative rigour and other regulating measures. The Plan has put in place a road map to achieving high standards of arts practise and other critical means by which sustainability becomes an in-built characteristic of the overall model. The Plan, while essentially one unitary action, contains many distinct areas of innovation.





FGU – as the chosen implementation body for the Arts Plan – was recently awarded a €800,000 establishment grant and other capital and enabling measures (as direct benefit from the overarching Social Regeneration Plan for the area) and is now poised to drive most all of the seven measures outlined below.

1. A community based Arts Academy

An entry point to the arts as play, education and ultimately as a profession. Open to all residents and the wider Rialto community. It also aims to provide accredited training and post graduate education in participatory arts practises to both artists and people drawn from childcare, youth work and community development contexts.

2. A 'New Circus' performing arts company

An opportunity to fuse the variety of art forms, levels of skills and enthusiasm within the community into a collective form, while providing ongoing training – both technical and expressive – and all the time affirming ideals of community participation and ritual.

3. Purpose built arts infrastructure and facilities

FGU determined that arts specific spaces and facilities would be best located in a new Neighbourhood Centre concept ahead of a separate arts building. In doing so it successfully charged the architects – Metropolitan Workshop – with designing a set of dedicated and multi functional spaces capable of delivering fully on the spatial and developmental needs of both the Arts Academy and New Circus programmes. The Centre is now scheduled to open in October 2008.

4. A long-term Artist Residency programme

This programme is contingent upon a set of units within the regenerated area being owned and operated by the community as combination 'living – work' studios for visiting artists, both national and international, as part of an overall strategy to enable close collaborative relationships, cultural dialogues and arts practises to evolve within the local ecology.

5. Public Art

A commitment to a perpetual Public Art process in which the community is the commissioning body; in which educational and collaborative processes are highly valued and through which new models of leveraging financial and sectoral support are actively tested.

6. Cultural Contracts

A formal mechanism whereby the community contracts directly with professional arts organisations, in a shared commitment to developing specific arts provision, to include clear cultural objectives, carefully defined time-frames, detailed resource plans and fully integrated evaluative and documentary processes. Fatima signed its first formal cultural contract with CityArts – for an initial 5 year period – in June 2007, with two further contracts scheduled to be completed by the Autumn.

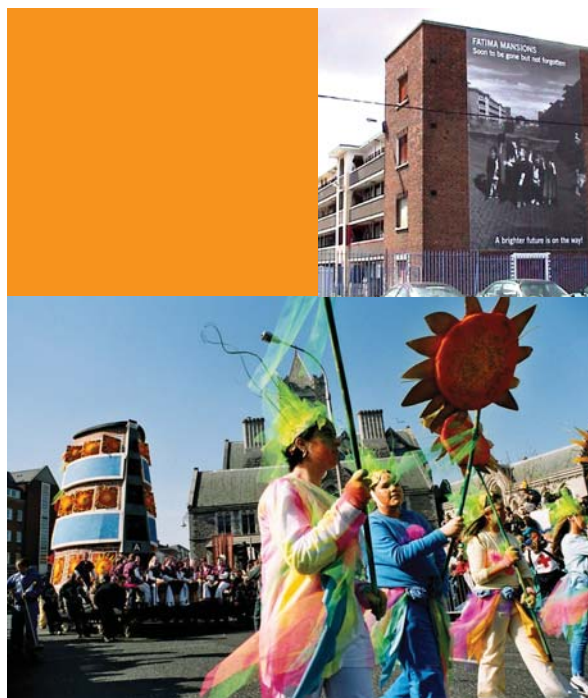
7. Sustainability

A multi faceted strategy to include significant investment in communications and marketing plans; the establishment of a new Community Arts Trust and other measures aimed at developing effective advocacy campaigns and new policy and support measures for the emerging model of practise

FGU is to shortly publish a summary of the Fatima Arts Plan and to launch the first phase of its programming at a conference event in the Autumn of this year. It also aims to have an Arts and Culture Director in post by September and other core staff engaged on a sequential basis over the following 6 months.

The significance of the Fatima Arts Plan given its genesis within a community context; its centeredness on values, processes and relationships; its clear educational and vocational ethos and its emphasis on innovation makes for interesting times ahead.

All those involved over the years – children, young people, adult residents, artists, community leaders and partner arts organisations – have contributed enormously to this breakthrough and it is the hope of FGU that everyone concerned will take heart and continue to collaborate in even more fascinating and exciting ways in the years ahead.



Examples of arts development in Fatima

**Burning the Demons – Embracing the Future**

By 1997 Fatima Mansions and other areas within Rialto had already experienced the worst effects of poverty and social neglect imaginable in Ireland. As a considered response to the crisis at that time, young people and residents of the flat complexes collaborated in the creation of a unique cultural event, that came to be known as 'Burning the Demons – Embracing the Future'.

The event arose in direct response to the outcome of a long term visual arts project – 'Beyond Words' – which had resulted in a large scale photo realist mural, being displayed above the local polling station. The nature of the mural and its imagery provoked a large public response; informed and assisted by a highly effective communications campaign, which in turn led to a spontaneous community ritual being devised, organised and undertaken within a short three week period.

What evolved was a minor miracle as up to 3,000 people engaged directly through a street pageant, outdoor concert and other cathartic happenings on a night of great drama, dignity and spirited solidarity. Most local leaders cite this event as the turning point in the life of the flats; the most exciting occasion in living memory and the springboard from which new creative visions and community activism arose.

**The Mechanical Sculpture**

A particularly innovative project was undertaken in 2005, when a Fatima Public Art commission led to the creation of forty by eight foot metal fabrication, engineered into existence by a large body of young men collaborating with a band of Irish and international artists – over an intense three month period. Together they designed and built a kinetic sculpture, with multiple moving parts and sound effects aimed at recreating the charged atmosphere and experiences of growing up in Fatima Mansions. The international exchange, interdisciplinary and developmental nature of this project has since continued and more recently two of the young men involved in the project secured apprenticeships in metal fabrication and are now currently employed on the regeneration construction underway in Fatima. A further phase of this project is anticipated in 2008. The Fatima Public Art Scheme – unlike the more conventional public art model in operation nationally – is aimed at providing an ongoing source of grant aid and technical assistance directly to local people and groups who in turn devise, resource and commission new works in which an intimacy in relationship building with artists, collaboration and skills development are valued above all else.

**Cinema Fatamiso**

Over the years the children of Fatima have developed significant film making skills and in doing so become very confident and idiosyncratic chroniclers of change and regeneration. They have made many music videos, documentaries and are currently in pre production on a horror film. At a recent Fatima Festival they helped create Cinema Fatamiso – Ireland's tiniest cinema – in which a retrospective of their work, complete with popcorn and sold out audiences were crammed into a cleverly adapted forty foot steel container. On Christmas day 2006 and again this Easter, RTE 1 screened their thirty minute 'On the Block' documentary. The average age of the group is eleven years!

The photographs used with this article reflect work from a range of recent local arts programmes, including: The 'Tower Blocks to Power Blooms' street theatre event; The 'In the Name of Love' Community Festival; The Tower Songs voice and sound project; The Mechanical Sculpture and Ritual of Light process; Chris Maguire's Block B Photo Banner and a series of images of children and young people at work on a large scale mural – now located opposite the Fatima Luas stop on the red line. Photo credits: Enda O'Brien, Chris Maguire and Dave McShane.



Buí Bolg Youth Group: A personal experience and journey

Seamus Redmond from Wexford has been a member of Buí Bolg Youth Group for the last four years. Seamus writes here of his experience of that time and some very interesting journeys.

Buí Bolg Youth Group

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND JOURNEY

Buí Bolg

Buí Bolg is a street arts company, set up in 1994 by a group of graduates from the Limerick School of Art and Design. What essentially began as a cooperative of students with a common vision has grown to an Arts Council revenue funded company which employs seven full time staff.

Buí Bolg provides creative and artistic entertainment to festivals, community parades, international art events, mostly through their signature puppets and other unique props. In 2007 alone, the company has travelled to Taiwan and Singapore, London and Prague. The company was awarded the coveted 'Spirit of the Parade' prize at this year's St Patrick's Festival in Dublin.

A very important aspect of Buí Bolg's work, however, and the element that

most eloquently captures the ethos of the team, is the Youth Group. Youth Group is a free, weekly workshop that teaches performance arts and circus skills to over eighty young people aged thirteen to twenty from throughout Wexford County. Youth Group happens over two nights every week (Junior and Senior nights, otherwise known as The Square Windows and The Gerry-Hat-Tricks respectively) and we're now looking forward to having a specialised performance group where those who want to develop specific skills can undertake intensive training with some of the best professional tutors from around the country.

Getting involved

I myself entered into the crazy world of Bui Bolg at the tender age of fourteen after hearing about it from a friend and seeing one of their performances on the Quay Front in Wexford during one of the Opera Festivals. So, I went along one Wednesday night to see what it was like, and that was it, I was hooked. I was soon learning to juggle, project my voice and other tricks of the trade. The learning experience wasn't too demanding. At first, I was a little shy, not interacting very well, and a bit reluctant to get too involved. Soon though, I got to a point where I felt comfortable in my surroundings and then the learning became fun. At this stage I began to put myself forward for various events and shows. Before long, I was travelling around Ireland with the group, participating in major performances and festivals.



Taiwan

This year has been a pretty hectic year for me. Not only did I have my Leaving Cert to look forward to, but I was also given the chance of a lifetime to attend the 'Global Puppetry Festival' in Kaohsiung, Taiwan in February. A small contingent of just four represented the company (and the country!) at this international event. Under the directorship of theatre veteran Dominic Campbell, (Abbey Theatre, Bealtaine Festival) we travelled to Taiwan with our giant puppets, not only to perform but to see what the people's reactions to us would be. And what a reaction it was. Everywhere we went in our respective puppets, everyone – and I mean grandmother, father, child, everyone! – wanted their picture taken with us. It was amazing.

The first thing we noticed was that our company differed from the rest as our shows consisted of 'walk about' entertainment, rather than a staged performance. So instead of hitting the stage, we hit the streets. One of the difficult things about this performance experience was the language barrier. Even though we had picked up one or two words of Chinese over the days we were there, including 'Happy Valentines Day', we knew from the outset that this would be a difficulty. And so, we based our performance on body movement and interaction with people rather than just trying to talk to them; after all, body language is the global language.

It was an incredible event which puppeteers from across the globe attended. Two couples that we met there were from America and were there to perform their set in front of the Taiwanese. Amongst the acts were traditional Chinese puppet shows as well as Taiwanese traditional shadow puppet shows. It was clear that puppetry is a priority where the culture of Taiwan is concerned. It is certainly a big hit on television in Taiwan, with at least two stations dedicated to this ancient art form.

I will definitely carry with me many memories from my experiences in Taiwan. One of which will certainly be the image of being driven around the city of Kaohsiung on the back of jeeps while we waved like royalty (or fools!) and the people looked on in amazement. As I was the youngest member of the group, and the tallest, I was christened the 'Giant Red Baby', a name which I am still greeted with in emails from Taiwanese friends every now and again.

St Patrick's Day

The Dublin St Patrick's Festival was another huge project this year. The company had been working full-time on the pageant for three months. Our theme for 2007 was Grace O'Malley, the Pirate Queen and we actually had a twenty foot Grace at the end of the pageant, alongside her friend Queen Elizabeth. Over eighty of the Youth Group members took part in the day including my self and once again it was a memorable experience. Our pirates donned their tri-cornered hats and swords, faces were painted, our very own rock band (which was blasting out the song 'Rock the Boat', a song which is still stuck in my head!) miked up on our very own pirate ship and we hit the streets of Dublin. The crowd that turned up was as enormous as always (over quarter a million people) and we spent the day strutting our stuff on the streets of Dublin with our large contingent representing Bui Bolg. A lot of hard work, late nights and long rehearsals went into putting the pageant together and so were understandably thrilled in the end to hear that we had won the Rupert Murdoch 'Spirit of the Parade' award. Later that evening, despite being up at 4.30am, twenty five of us flew first class (note the tone of sarcasm here!) with Ryanair to London to do it all over again the next day. In a smaller version of our Dublin pageant, we entertained hundreds of thousands of Londoners in alternating hailstones and sunshine all the way from Hyde Park to Whitehall! We felt so important! Although not as extravagant as our very own parade here in Ireland, it was a memorable day.



What Buí Bolg means to me

Buí Bolg has played a very central part in my life, the Youth Group in particular. One of the main things for me is the amazing boost in self confidence I have gained. I was once a shy, reserved person, and now it is quite the opposite, I feel like I can take on any task I set my mind to! Along the way, through my years with Buí Bolg, I have made new acquaintances and new friends, some of whom are now friends that I keep in contact with on a regular basis and will continue to do once I'm in college.

Performing has become an important aspect of who I am. It can be nerve-racking at times, but I know that this is all part of the experience. It is an adrenalin-rush, especially in an improvisational situation. In order for this type of performance to have maximum effect, we all must think fast on our feet and establish a bond with our audiences. This can sometimes be hard to do, particularly if, for example, there is a language or cultural barrier. Every single event is interesting and every audience provides a different reaction: this is why a successful performance is so satisfying. One thing I now appreciate is the thought and hard work that goes with performing and creating shows. This is definitely so when you're wearing a mass of latex and foam on your body for hours at a time! The relationship I have with my fellow performers is also vital to a show as these relationships can be projected onto the characters we become. I have found that I have developed strong bonds with my performing buddies. It's obviously more fun when you're working with good friends.

They say travel broadens the mind and I am positive that this is true having travelled to so many locations with Buí Bolg. From Limerick to London, and Tullamore to Taiwan, it's been one hell of a rollercoaster. At this particular moment, with the Leaving Cert just around the corner, there's a lot of stress in my life, so it's nice to have somewhere to go where I can blow off some steam every once in a while. It is a place where I am always greeted with a smile. That's a nice thing to have.

Conclusion

I can see that the arts are a very important thing and mean a lot to me. I have seen many places, tasted many cuisines (including Taiwan's infamous 'stinky tofu', which is only for the iron bellied) and met some amazing people. For any young person art is a very important thing. It is a way of expanding the mind of the individual but in a fun and sometimes formative way. With the drama group, kids come, and they can be shy, and might not want to participate in some of the activities or they might not know many people (if any)! But give them a week or two and guaranteed, they'll be as loud and confident as the others!

Seamus Redmond

The Young Model Project

Linda Hayden is Assistant Education Curator at the Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo. In this article Linda tells us about an evolving project built around some challenging encounters between young people and contemporary arts.

THE YOUNG MODEL PROJECT

Young model is a new initiative from the Model Arts & Niland Gallery education programme. It is about involving young people with contemporary art, film and music. This open-ended, phased youth programme kicked off in August 2006 with a maximum of twelve young people participating in each workshop stage. The programme is ongoing and in its fourth stage now.

What makes this programme different from other youth programmes is the direct contact young people are given with professional artists, musicians and filmmakers who engage with the contemporary art, music and film programmes at the Model. Each block is modelled around the gallery's visual arts or festival programmes.

FORMING YOUNG MODEL...

Last August *young model* was initiated with two taster workshops. The first was looking at art and music, the next art and film. Over thirty youth turned up for both tasters. The young people were informed through various means of contact; over two hundred names had been collected through other youth events held at the Model and these young people were contacted by both email and web text messaging. The call out was also publicised through the gallery's quarterly event guide and other in-house print, the local papers and radio. I met with a number of other youth programmes in Sligo and talked to youth members that were interested in the topics *young model* was investigating. The most important links to contacting these young people were local community workers Marie Brennan who works with Cranmore Regeneration and Geri Bruce from Sligo Leader Partnership Group. Without their direct engagement and their on the ground approach, the programme would not have reached such a large population of young people in the region.

After attending the taster sessions, all youth interested applied through an application form and paid a nominal one-off booking fee of €10. This fee was introduced to ensure a level of commitment from the young people. Then, to introduce the new *young model* members to the variety of the Model's programme, complementary tickets were arranged to Model events if they were interested. Their being interested for me is essential; if the young person is there because they themselves have signed up to it, it is most likely they will stay and really engage with the project.

The *young model* group is about half and half boys and girls with an average age of sixteen. This was interesting because in the past when introducing youth to film programmes the uptake would have been around ninety percent boys to ten percent girls with the average age of fifteen. The *young model* group come from both urban and rural areas in Co. Sligo and Co. Leitrim and some members are from designated RAPID areas in Sligo.

A key member of the *young model* team is lead facilitator Andy Parsons. The artists that work on the programme generally have not facilitated before and some were daunted by twelve teenagers staring at them, so Andy is there to offer support. What is great about having Andy on board is that he is passionate both as an artist and as a facilitator. He has also led a number of workshops during each stage of the programme. Andy's own practice is painting and print making, his practice is not technical but he was as open and eager to learn the technical bits along side the young people. I think it shows that we should not be afraid to work with new technologies. The software is very accessible for all to create with; because you are all apprentices learning together, it makes you more accessible to the young people. As an experienced facilitator, working with *young model* has been a new learning experience for Andy too.

There are a couple of practical things we needed to think about when starting a programme. The typical length of a *young model* workshop was four hours, so a snack was arranged by Sligo Leader Partnership for all participants. Generally food at the model café can be expensive and I knew the young people would not bring a packed lunch so the snack was free. This timeout also encouraged youth, artist, facilitator and coordinator to get to know each other and simply chat.



SO WHAT DID THEY GET UP TO...

Stage 1 – art+music

In September 2006, the art+music project started working with *juneau/projects/* who are a collaborative partnership of two British artists, Ben Sadler and Phil Duckworth. Their work includes installation, video, graphic design, painting, performance and music. This duo is considered amongst the UK's most exciting younger artists.

juneau/projects/ exhibited at the Model in September 2006. This was their first show in Ireland, and some of their earlier works were displayed along with two major new commissions. As part of the show, *young model* worked with the *juneaus* on creating a record shop in one of the galleries, this collaboration was then part of the exhibition. It involved making posters and recording their own CD. By using pre-recorded tracks belonging to *juneau/records* *young model* wrote lyrics to suit their chosen track and recorded the results. The participants worked both in groups and as solo artists. This was part of a larger project called *Saddest Song in Sligo*, where the *juneaus* were looking for, you guessed it, *The Saddest Song in Sligo*. All ages and music styles were welcomed and those selected are featured on a new CD which can be downloaded from their website (see below).

The key priority to highlight at this point is quality; giving young people the opportunity to work with artists who are at the top of their game. The area the artists work in is alive, experimental and now. What's also important is how *young model* are involved at the source of the creativity, they are not creating a reaction to the finished piece of work - they are the work. When deciding on artists to work with, it is favourable that their own work practice is new, fresh and interesting to youth. This is important for a programme that you anticipate will stimulate youth.

The workshops start with the artists talking about and showing their work to the group with a focus on demystifying what the artist does. The work is not dumbed down at any point but put in a context that is relevant to youth culture. Next the artist involves the group in a process they use when making their own work (i.e. recording found sounds) and finally with this material, the group use software to experiment in a creative way with the artist by their side.

Artist Karl Burke worked on the art+music project of *young model*. Karl is a visual artist who fuses art and sound in his work. Karl is also a musician (aka Karl Him) and one of the founder member of the band *A=apple (improvised vibes from Ireland)*. Karl's angle with the group was based on improvised sounds, sound collecting and using found objects to make sounds. He introduced the group to a number of artist/musicians who work in this way. The group recorded a piece called *Stone Orchestra* which can be heard on our myspace site (see below). Karl has met with *young model*



members three times and on his last visit he worked on objects that make sounds, including some musical instruments from around the world. The group familiarised themselves with the different sound objects and choose one they liked best. Karl showed the group a piece of video he was working on which needed fitting sound to accompany it. So *young model* members and Karl collaborated by creating and recording sound for his visuals (this is a work in progress).



Here are a few comments from the *young model* group when asked about contemporary art and music:

"It's an expression of thought or sound through music in which it doesn't follow any rules."

"It's different to conventional music. It's using different types of sounds to make different music. It usually isn't tuneful but that doesn't make it bad."

Stage 2 – art+film

The film and video artist Jaki Irvine was exhibiting her new show *In a World Like This* which had been created during her 2006 Model Fellowship. This multi-projection installation was shot at Eagles Flying, The Irish Raptor Research Centre in Ballymote, Co Sligo. *Young model* now had the opportunity to look at art+film and to work alongside a number of film/video artists including Grace Weir, John O'Connell and film production company Janey Pictures.

Artist John O'Connell works with 35mm film and for his workshop John, like all involved, talked about his work processes and where it fitted into their culture. The group then worked with old 35mm film that had a film previously recorded on it. John showed the group how to write over the film then how to splice and edit the film and show it on a 35mm projector. To have a digital record of their work the group recorded the projection with a digital video camera. The following week they edited the film again digitally, now it was ready for burning. The film called 'scratch' was entered in the Fresh Film Festival 2007 where it was one of thirteen to reach the final. This can be viewed on our myspace site under videos.



Stage 3 – contemporary/experimental music

The third stage directed *young model* members towards contemporary and experimental electronic music, looking to the Model's music and performance programmes for inspiration. Music Fellow 2007 John Lambert and the annual Sligo New Music Festival was the focus for this stage. Lambert is a Dublin based guitarist and producer who records and performs under the name Chequerboard.

John Lambert, Karl Burke and contemporary music composer Donal Sarsfield were the practitioners for this stage. *Young model* gained huge exposure to new music and engaged in critical discussions on contemporary and experimental electronic music while working with each practitioner. John Lambert created a myspace site for the group to present their music and film work. This is also a space for informing each other of new events in art, film and music and just to chat. The space will be co-managed by John and *young model* member Erin. All artists involved in the *young model* programme are encouraged to alert the group to new stuff out there and to initiate discussion.

Stage 4 – yourspace/myspace

The myspace website is stage four in the programme and it involves a risk in that this approach is in uncharted waters. I don't yet know the right balance of input online from the artists and myself. Initially there will have to be some involvement and then it will be left in the hands of the site manager with a contribution from us when they need it. There is also a practical reason for the direction; the budget is small and there are no funds for practical workshops until September 2007. Myspace is a means of encouraging the group to stay interested in the *young model* programme and stay in touch with each other.

And in conclusion...

Over the past seven months, the *young model* group has absorbed a vast amount of information through art, video, music and conversation. The reason for this high quality interaction is to equip the group with a quality experience that they can use as a gauge for future programme ideas. *Young model* participants will be encouraged to take a more active role in the direction

of the fifth stage, *Andy Warhol: The Silver Factory 1964–68*, an exhibition which is part of the gallery's visual arts programme for Autumn 2007. The aim for this stage is to encourage individuals in the group to form a critical opinion backed up by their experiences of the *young model* programme at this point.

Looking back over the last seven months, the group has developed social skills and awareness of art, film, music and technology. When asked what they thought they had learned, they replied:

"Working with new musical programmes on the computer and recording sounds."

"Listening skills, speaking skills."

"Communication skills, I become more confident doing a variety of activities in front of many people."

"Realising its harder than it seems to put music together and make art."

"Listening to everyday sounds that are around me, accepting new kinds of music."

When asked if they would recommend *young model* to a friend, they would tell a friend because:

"It was really fun and you learn cool stuff too and it's not dull or anything."

"It gives you a more open mind towards music and art and educates you about different types of music."

As the group develops and matures, members come and go and new experiences and obstacles unfold (when trying new things). The highlight of the *young model* programme for me is knowing that the group is having a mind-blowing time. They are developing an understanding of the artist, being involved in the artist's process and learning numerous skills along the way. By working with young people more intensely it has kept me on my toes, constantly responding with Andy to their reactions as each workshop is over. As the fourth stage myspace begins, I can honestly say I really don't know if it will work, but hey that's where the excitement is!

Stay in touch and see what happens next... www.myspace.com/sligoyoungmodel

If you want to contact me directly regarding the *young model* programme, email linda@modelart.ie

Websites

Model Arts and Niland Gallery	www.modelart.ie
young model project	www.myspace.com/sligoyoungmodel
young model project CD	www.juneaurecords.co.uk/downloads.htm#sligo
Sligo New Music Festival	www.modelart.ie/events
Jaki Irvine installation, In a World Like This	www.modelart.ie/galleries/past

Artists involved in the project

Andy Parsons	www.azarts.co.uk/andyparsons www.floatingworldbooks.com www.gloucesterroom.com www.rubicongallery.ie
<i>juneau/projects/</i> exhibition	www.modelart.ie/galleries/past
Karl Burke	www.karlhim.com
A=apple (Karl Burke aka Karl Him)	www.myspace.com/aequalsapple
Janey Pictures	www.janeypictures.com
John Lambert	www.myspace.com/chequerboardmusic www.chequerboard.net

The Ideal Homes Show: Activate Youth Theatre

Geraldine O'Neill is Outreach Director with Graffiti Theatre Company and Artistic Director of Activate and Physically Phishy Youth Theatres. Geraldine tells us here about an innovative and unusual project which demonstrates the principals and possibilities of youth theatre.



Graffiti Theatre Company, Cork's longest established professional educational theatre company took up residence in the Chapel of the Assumption in Blackpool, some eighteen months ago. This new premises, given its past life as part of the convent of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, was, appropriately enough, an answer to Graffiti's prayers. At last we had space for all the many and various activities of our company – production, outreach, workshop and performance space. After twenty-two years we were home at last.

Activate Youth Theatre was established twelve years ago as part of Graffiti's Outreach Department and, we are glad to say, is now well established locally, nationally and internationally. We set out

to provide a varied and interesting programme of drama and theatre for young people in Cork. Our membership is in the fifteen to twenty two age group and comes from all over Cork City and County. All members are involved in a weekly programme of drama workshops and participate in at least one major and several minor productions annually. Members are also involved in street theatre, script writing, devising and film-making.

Laying the Foundations

Activate Youth Theatre was now twelve years old, almost a teenager, during that time many of its ex-members have gone on to work professionally in theatre. Our company has sown the seeds and

encouraged the growth of a new generation of professional actors, directors, playwrights, sound engineers, designers, arts administrators, educational and youth theatre facilitators. In celebration of this legacy of young professional theatre practitioners we decided to embark on a project which welcomed these successful professionals back to Activate to work with our members. We were very happy to have Tom Creed agreed to be our director and Ciaran Fitzpatrick our playwright. Tom Creed is one of Ireland's top young directors, and Ciaran was writer and collaborator on the highly successful Soap, Dark Week and Trying Jokes. Julie O'Leary agreed to become assistant director and I acted as producer.

Twelve years ago Activate's membership consisted of a group of young people who lived with both their parents under the same roof and expected to do so for as long as they wished. Today, this situation is radically different, now many of our young people come from two homes, have half-brothers and sisters and stepfathers and mothers. This fact, plus the fact of moving into our company's new home, seemed to bring the topic of home to the forefront. The young people were anxious to look at what it means to be 'home', how the idealization of home still uses the image of the mum and dad and the 2.5 children and how anything other than that model seems to be looked upon as a failure.

We asked the question – Where is home these days? Answers like – "My home is my family / my friends / my country / my mam's house / Area 51 / comfort / a beacon" led to other questions. What does it feel like to be homeless? to be a refugee? to get up one morning and leave everything one knows behind, never to return. What makes it possible for a young person to become a suicide bomber? Where do you go when you are in real trouble? All these questions and many more became the stuff of the play.

The Home project was an innovative and unusual theatre project which integrated professional theatre workers with current members of Activate Youth Theatre in the development of a new script and production. It is based on models used in The New Vic in London, The Barka Theatre in Budapest and the Dublin Youth Theatre, where professional collaboration with Youth Theatre members has been shown to have a great impact on the group's artistic development.

The joys of working with people who understand the artistic philosophy and guiding principles of Activate cannot be over estimated. We were all singing off the same hymn sheet (forgive the religious metaphors – its inevitable when you spend every day working in a church) from the very beginning. They understand the need to encourage and empower the young people as actors, playwrights and artists. They had been through the process themselves and were generous enough to allow space for the opinions and ideas of all the participants.

The Building

It was agreed from the very beginning both the writer and director would be present during the devising workshops. We started the process with a week long summer school in July. We were disappointed that only ten people signed up to the summer school but it did allow us time to

stories of refugees, estate agents and lovelorn teenagers. One particularly moving weekend we followed the story of Fatima and used every nook and crevice in our building to perform elements of her unbelievable journey as a war refugee. We were packed into narrow corridors and shouted at by 'officials' whose language was unintelligible to us. We stood in a dark cloakroom and listened



develop the writing and acting skills of a group of young people who became the backbone of what was to become 'The Ideal Homes Show'. Activate's normal drama workshops last approximately two or three hours but we thought that this would not give us enough time to delve deeply into the subject of home and all its connotations so a schedule of one or two day weekend workshops was drawn up, running from September to February.

By September word seemed to have leaked out about our project and suddenly we had twenty two young people in Activate. During that time we devised and developed plot lines and characters and devoted whole weekends to following the

to the sound of water (in plastic bottles) as it slapped up against the side of our 'boat'. In the background we heard the humming of the Barney song "I love you, you love me, we're a happy family" – strange and moving elements, the sum total of which brought us on an unforgettable journey.

We also laughed, you will be glad to hear, loudly and long, as we played with stock characters and families and recounted stories of how strangers might describe our individual families. The weekend of 'The Lost Remote Control' and its implications was particularly funny and the "Longest Journey of your life" led to the development of some wonderful monologues about first love and first separation.



By January Ciaran had the first draft of the script and it was then that the group truly appreciated the way he had listened to their input. At the first reading you could hear murmurs "That's my piece", "That's me" and "We devised that" but now these formed part of what was to become a well rounded play. The play essentially told five stories: The Refugee Family; the Pregnant Irish Girl; the Estate Agent; the Boy looking for a Girlfriend; the Boy Bomber. These stories were interwoven with the lecture about the mating habits of ducks as opposed to those of swans, the Arts Chat Show and the 'What ifs' of life.

If I hadn't argued with Dad
If I hadn't missed the bus
If I hadn't met him at all
If divorce hadn't become law
If my parents hadn't married so young
If I'd spent less time in the bathroom.

Throughout February, Ciaran worked on the second and then the final draft of the script. Tom and he worked with the actors to refine the script and to rehearse the play. The structure started out as a promenade performance all over the building then that changed into a two-location production which then changed into the main auditorium being divided into two locations.

Whenever I read descriptions of projects like these I always end up muttering to myself "They must be made of money!" Well, though the artistic side of the project worked wonderfully well, the money side was a nightmare. Initially the entire eight month project was costed at €22,500. This included set design and construction; stage manager and assistant; lighting design; sound engineer; costume designer and costume maker; technicians; publicity and printing etc. Not only had we planned to employ ex-Activators to carry

out these tasks but we also designed a mentorship programme for all aspects of the production which included workshops and practical sessions in all these areas.

We applied to Cork City Council for Special Project Funding but were turned down. This was a real disappointment but we were now passionately committed to the project and we decided to cut back drastically on our costings and the whole project ended up costing us €8,500 in money and about €3,000 in kind. We had no set, no special costumes, we even made do with using domestic lighting as we could not afford to hire in. We received a huge amount of support in kind from sound designers, graphic designers and printers and we were helped in all sorts of ways by friends and colleagues.

The icing on the cake was receiving a once-off project grant of €7000 from the Arts Council in early March. This was a terrific learning experience for all involved but we sometimes wonder how fantastic it might have been if all areas of production had been honoured equally. Why is it that our young people are denied the opportunity to experience the highest standard of artistic endeavour at first hand?

Bringing it Home

The show opened with the cast dressed in smart clothes, complete with clipboards and questionnaires, trays of cheese and grapes on cocktail sticks, welcoming the audience into the Ideal Homes Show. The audience then moved into the auditorium and the main body of the play commenced. It was very well received and was completely booked out. It got a five star review in the Examiner and Mary Leland of the Times praised 'A large cast with sharp individual roles while also blending into an orchestrated ensemble which merges from teenage angst (which is also extremely funny) into darker and more threatening areas of what is now considered normal life.' We ran the show for five nights the final night being a celebration of Activate's 12th birthday and the audience consisted of invited ex-Activators some of whom had taken part in Activate's very first production.



This project marked a coming of age for Activate and a coming together of the twenty two young people who invested their time and energy in it. Of the original twenty two we lost six along the way due to exams etc but their voices were still present in final script. During this project the young people have become expert at devising and improvising, ensemble and individual performance, they have become playwrights and actors with clear voices and strong opinions. They discussed, disagreed, inspired and conspired, loved and hated, they became a family and Activate became their Home.



Home the place where one lives/ the country or area of one's birth (Collins English Dictionary)

(Definitions of home – Activate Youth Theatre)

Home is not just the normal notion of home. Home can be with other people, people who are not your family.

Home can be the happiest and the saddest place in the world.

Home can be the place where you are happiest and most content at any moment. Not necessarily where you live.(Being at home with yourself).

What happens when your sense of home collapses?

At home can be 'on a dig' or 'in a play' or 'on a team'

Home is the place you can go to to escape from reality (mentally or physically).

Home is where you are powerless.

Home is within yourself and can you spend too much time within yourself. Does that become depression?

Home is where you can do the maddest thing and people just accept it.

Quotes from participants

"The rehearsing schedule was tense-the final draft of the script wasn't finished until six days before the first performance! On the whole, I would have to say that working on the Ideal Homes Show with Activate has been the high point of my (quite short) acting career. It was great fun to, as a performer, be brought directly into the creative process, and I developed a great deal of confidence in my own acting abilities".

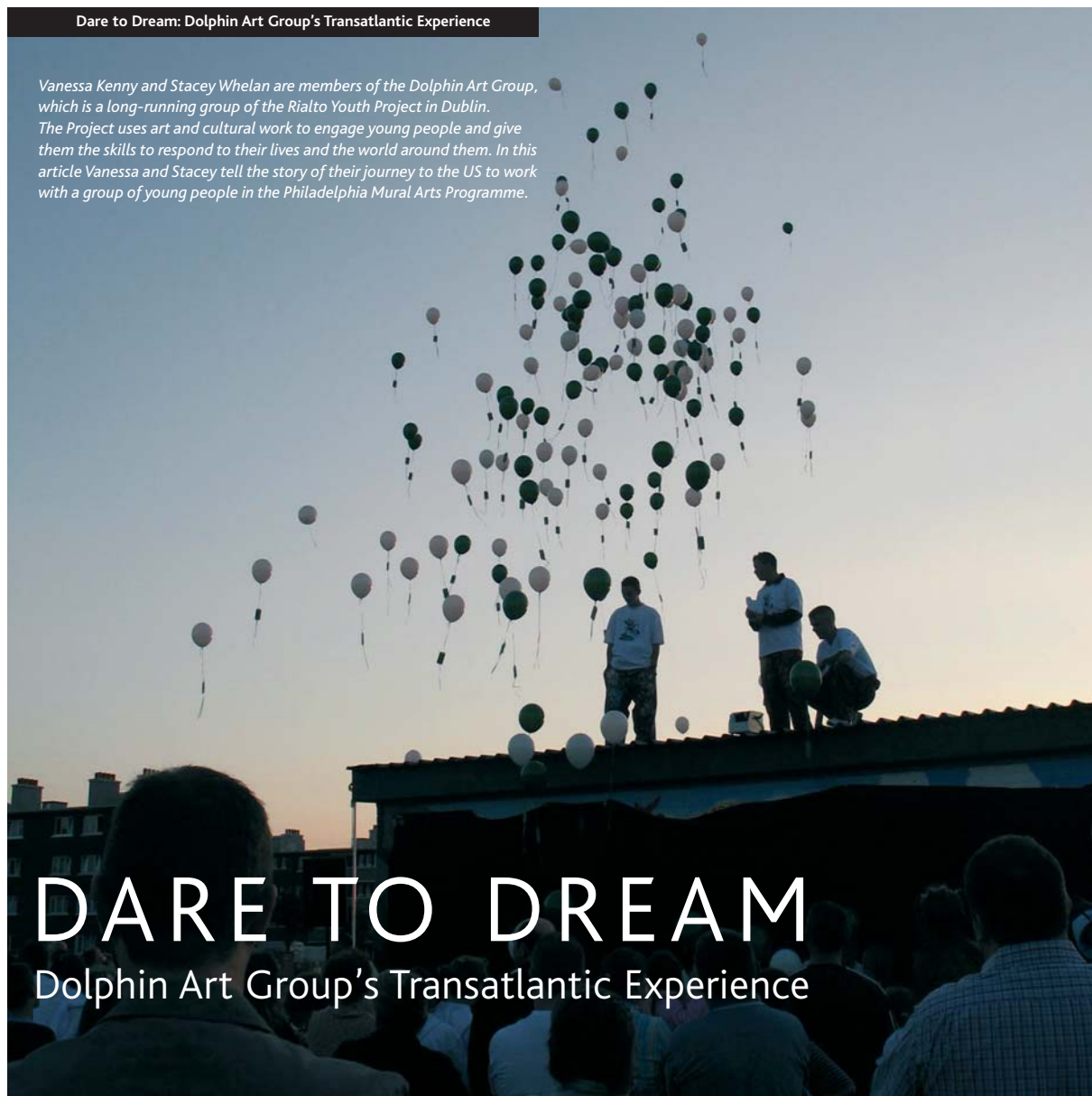
Justin Scannell

"It is a fundamental objective of youth theatre to be self sufficient, in that older members help newer members and gain experience in order to become leaders etc and Activate's last project did just that, with ex-youth theatre members – who now work as professionals in the industry – returning to work on the project. There was also a large cross-section of experience in the group with more experienced members helping younger and less experienced actors with their roles".

Stefanie Preissner

Dare to Dream: Dolphin Art Group's Transatlantic Experience

Vanessa Kenny and Stacey Whelan are members of the Dolphin Art Group, which is a long-running group of the Rialto Youth Project in Dublin. The Project uses art and cultural work to engage young people and give them the skills to respond to their lives and the world around them. In this article Vanessa and Stacey tell the story of their journey to the US to work with a group of young people in the Philadelphia Mural Arts Programme.



DARE TO DREAM

Dolphin Art Group's Transatlantic Experience

Introduction

We're the Dolphin Art Group. We've been together for the past three and a half years. There are six of us in the group, four girls and two boys. We are: Vanessa Kenny, Stacey Whelan, Kellie Ashton, Nicola Whelan, Jonathan Myers and Jamie Hendrick. We're all sixteen or seventeen years old. We work with an artist Fiona Whelan and youth workers Irene O'Donoghue and Micka Byrne.

Stacey:

I was in another art group called the mapping group, then that group finished up. We heard about this art group. It's something to look forward to during the week. I enjoy what we do.

Vanessa:

It gives me something to do. I liked the people who were in the group. The first big project we did was to paint huge portraits of some of the workers that were leaving. I was curious to see what it was like to work with an artist.

The next big piece we made was a 3D model of the flats where we lived. We had an exhibition and we interviewed local people and made a DVD about it. This DVD won us 1st prize in the Young Art Reporters competition. We made postcards out of images of the model for people to say how they felt about the flats. We also made Go-Karts, which were a good laugh, racing them till they fell apart.

During this time we used to work in the artists studio in St. Andrews Community Centre. We used to write on the walls of the studio, we did all these mad feelings, how we felt about where we lived, our ideas and dreams.

We knew we wanted to do a big piece of work to give to the community. Fiona then came to us with an idea to do a mural. The mural ended up being about our dreams. Some people in the group said that your dreams can come true if you work hard enough, and some of the group believed that because of where we lived, your dreams could never be real. The image we came up with, was of a boy reaching up to try and catch bubbles, which represented dreams.

We got a lot out of doing the mural. We learnt practical skills around painting. We also realised that we could make something that was really good. It was good to have something to be proud of, that we put there. We were disappointed when about a year later it had to be moved, because they were adding portacabins. Although part of it was put up on another wall, I don't think it looks as good.

Where the idea of America came from

Vanessa went on a shopping trip with her ma to New York in Christmas 2005. When she came back the group was curious to see what it was like. A few months on we were doing planning to see what we would work on next and we started talking about going to another country. The leaders didn't say no, they said there were always possibilities. During that time Fiona went to Mexico to a mural conference and made some useful contacts for our group. This is how our journey began...

Getting to America

The youth project and Fiona made links with the Philadelphia Mural Arts Programme, who had a group similar to ours. We now had something real to work towards.

Once we had this, we put a time frame in place for when we would go and what different things would have to be done to get there. Obviously we had to convince Jim Lawlor (Rialto Youth Project team leader) that we could start planning to go there. Even though we had written it on paper, I don't think everyone still believed we would really get to go.



THE IMAGE WE CAME UP WITH, WAS OF A BOY REACHING UP TO TRY AND CATCH BUBBLES, WHICH REPRESENTED DREAMS.

For a while we all did separate projects, like a board game about where we live, a video piece, a model of a stadium, a project on fashion comparing American and Irish. The one thing we came up with was that we preferred to work as a group, more than on our own, as it was more fun and you can achieve more.

As the time got closer we had to come up with a budget and a fundraising plan that had to be presented to Jim and the management committee of the project.

Our group started fundraising by doing portraits of people. Anything people wanted really. The portraits took up most of the time as a lot of skill, work and effort was put in to them. Anyone that got a portrait was very pleased with them and so were the group. We painted

around twenty portraits. (These are still available to people. For more information phone Rialto Youth Project and ask for anyone from the Dolphin Art Group.) We also packed bags in the Ashleaf shopping centre. We sold 'spot the balls' for weeks.

Along with the youth project we organised a big fundraiser, a comedy night. We convinced Des Bishop to do a show for us, by painting him a portrait; he then got two other comedians, PJ Gallagher and Eric Lalor to do the gig. We all sold tickets for the night and sold raffle tickets. Along with all the money raised by the youth project, we now had enough money raised, and we really started to believe that we were going.

One of the things we had to do before we went was to prove we could work together as a team and be trusted away together. So our group went to Belfast on a training weekend. We did some photography workshops and we did drama workshops. The aims of the project were to work with another group and build relationships with young people from different cultures. We went on the trip to do some junior leadership training, so that we can help out in the summer projects and groups.

Stacey:

The morning of the Belfast Trip, I didn't want to go, I was really wrecked, and I didn't want to go for the weekend. When Irene called up to see why I wasn't ready, I told them I wasn't going. I changed my mind when they said it would really affect my chance of going to America. I ended up going to Belfast and actually enjoyed it.

Another part of going to Philadelphia was to build relationships with the other group before we went. We did this through email, Bebo questionnaires and comics. We wanted to get in touch with the other group so we could get to know them before we went over. We emailed them and we each made a comic book which profiled us. Each group filled out a questionnaire and swapped them, they were about your heritage.

The next step was to design an image. The theme picked for the mural was heritage. We had to brainstorm this idea to come up with our design for the mural. We used the idea of a time capsule, and what we put in it that would represent us and means the most to us. This helped us come up with some of the images that make up the design. We looked at the similarities and differences between us, and living in Ireland, and what it might be like for the group living in Philadelphia.

We were very happy with the image we came up with, and how it was included in the overall mural in Philadelphia. Our original design has a couple of strong images which were important for us:

The Runners on the Lines: Which is something that we see a lot in the flats, it represents some of the negative things that happen here.

Balconies: Where people talk to one another and share the gossip.

Washing lines: Where people hang out the washing in the middle of the block, representing the closeness of people in our community, and sharing space.

Pigeons: People always throw out their leftover bread to the birds as they sit on the roofs of the flats. They are always around.

Balloons: They were used because they are a symbol of our dreams and hopes and were also a part of our last mural and mean a lot to us as everyone has a dream or goal which they would like to achieve.

Coming near the departure day we were in the youth project nearly every day! Organising the trip, going into town to pick up passports, and emailing the

group. Other young people in the project were probably a bit jealous that we were going to America, and wanted to join our group. But what we said was that our group has been together for the last three years, meeting every Wednesday and doing big projects. We felt that we had done a lot of work to get to this position.

The morning of the trip

Stacey:

We had to meet at the Rialto Youth Project at 4 o'clock in the morning! Fiona rang us to make sure we were up, none of us had too much sleep, we were too excited! Micka came over with the bus driver and collected our bags. People who were only coming home from town were saying have a great time, and that we were really lucky!

Vanessa:

I didn't sleep all night, I was too excited, I woke all the girls up, ringing them. We left with loads of time to spare, lucky because when we got to the airport the queue was huge! My case got ripped in the bus, and I had to stick it together with cello tape.

On the airplane, I was sitting beside Jamie, I had my shades on, the leaders were calling us Angelina and Brad! The flight was really long, we had to go to London first, then change terminals to get the plane to Philadelphia.

When we finally got to the hostel, I thought it was horrible – it looked scruffy! The rooms turned out to be ok though.

Stacey:

I thought it was crawling! But the hostel turned out to be ok. They had pool, internet and DVD's. It was hard to believe we were actually there!

Highlights of the trip

The first day with the other group was mad. It was a totally different experience than what we've ever had before. The group were very easy to talk to and were very down to earth, which made us feel very welcome. Painting the mural was a different experience to the one we did before, as we were working with another group. We mainly paint on wood, or directly on a wall. In Philadelphia we painted on a material called parachute cloth which is then glued directly on a wall.

As well as painting with the group everyday we spent time together doing social stuff, like bowling and playing basketball. We went on a trip to see different murals in Philly. They were different from any of the murals we had seen. People and nature were the main themes. I didn't like the way they treat the homeless; they walk by as if they don't exist, which I found very rude.

On the last day we each wrote down our dreams. We tied these to the end of balloons and let them go. We also had a last meal together which everyone enjoyed. Stacey was the only one who managed to climb the fireman's





pole as the restaurant was the in the building of an old fire station.

We also taught the Americans some Irish words. We shared some of our culture with them and they did the same with us too. They used to laugh when we'd say we're going the shop, as the shop is the store, when we asked for a drink it was a soda, if we went shopping and we bought runners they were sneakers, they called shopping centres the mall.

At the weekend we went to New York to sightsee, and shop. One of the best things we did was to go to a Baptist Service in Harlem. One of the pastors there was an artist called Tim Rollins who invited us there for Easter Sunday. Before we went to America, we thought New York was going to be the best, but most of us preferred Philadelphia, mainly because we were with the group.

Near the end of the week we went to their school which was good, but different to our schools. They have school police and metal detectors. If they feel like they don't want to go to class they go and hang out in the halls and teachers just pass them by which is very unusual for here as you just get put to the office if you don't want to learn in the class. Sometimes they just hang out in the gym which is the school hall and they'll play basketball which is very popular in Philadelphia. We also went to a game of basketball which was very entertaining for us. In the stadium a group of dancers were having a dance off which was great. One of the fellas ran up the wall, it was very good.

Learning

We learned how to paint on parachute cloth, and we improved our painting. We learned to work together as a group, and sometimes it was hard, because we spent all day and night together.

We learnt how to work with a group which we never met before. We thought they were going to be very different from us, as they were all either African American or Hispanic, but we found out that we were very alike, and enjoyed the same stuff, we had a great time together. We are still in touch with some of the group through email.

It was hard coming home at the end as we really connected with the group and became good friends over a short period of time. We achieved a lot of trust from the youth project as it was very far from home and no other group in the history of the project went to America. It gave us some confidence in travelling without our parents even though Irene did most of our work! But it was totally different experience than going away with our parents as we were more independent with managing our own money, and making decisions about what to do.

Future Plans

We plan to keep in touch with the other group. We would love to go back over to see the finished mural which we didn't get to see because we only



had a certain amount of time and it would have been impossible to complete the overall mural as it was huge (200ft). We are also doing training residencies with a group from New Lodge in Belfast. We painted a small mural on our last residential in Glencree. We are hoping to work together to achieve skills but also to complete a mural.

Chris Maguire, a local artist, came with us to document the trip through video and photographs. We are hoping to make the footage into a short video piece.

Before we went, some of the group had written a song with two other youth workers about going to America, they are supposed to be recording the song.

Conclusion

We were very lucky to have the chance to go to Philadelphia, it was a great experience that we'll never forget. We did a lot of work to get there, which was all worth it. The group we met were great craic, and it would be great to meet them again and to see the finished mural. Not many people can say that they made a huge piece of public art in another country. We hope to go on making interesting pieces of art.

We would like to thank Irene, Fiona, Micka and Chris for all their hard work in getting us to America. The Youth Project for letting us go, and supporting us to achieve our dream....

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We would like to say thanks to all the organisations and individuals who supported and believed in this project.

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inz issue number seven, winter 2005, carried articles on emerging youth art practice in Rialto and the National Youth Arts Programme's Young Art Reporters Competition, featuring the work of Dolphin Art Group.

The Mapping Art Project, mentioned in the article, was a five year arts programme carried out in partnership between Bluebell, St. Michaels and Rialto Youth Projects, Common Ground, IMMA and artists. A report on this programme 'Mapping Lives, Exploring Futures' is reviewed in this issue by Ed Carroll of City Arts

The Art of the Possible

[Continued from page 5]

To Learn

Regarding young people's engagement with the arts and our shared belief that this is 'a good thing'⁴, what is the meaning or place of the term 'youth arts'? Should we now be moving on from this concept of arts practice by, for and with young people, no longer framing it as a separate realm or a distinct art form, but rather part of the continuum of our potential engagements with the arts over a lifetime? The nature of one's engagement with art is not defined by one's age – there are learners and experts at every age. If we see youth arts as a place somehow outside or 'other than' mainstream art, rather than as the incubation, fledgling phase of an ongoing engagement throughout life, aren't we not only limiting the opportunities for young people but also limiting their own vision of the possibilities? If art is presented as an ongoing engagement that can continue throughout life, it makes possible any or all of several trajectories – towards a career in the arts, towards the arts as a hobby, or towards active participation as audience, collectors and supporters of the arts – opening up all kinds of possibilities that may never have otherwise occurred to those young people.

To return to the sporting analogies, confining young people to 'youth arts' as a separate process, is akin to encouraging kids to kick a football around the street every week, without ever introducing them to the rules of soccer, or watching a football match on TV, or getting to know anything about professional footballers and their careers. If we want to facilitate a sustained interest in and appreciation of the arts amongst young people, we must provide the same networked structure, opportunities for continuous progression and higher levels of attainment, heroes to inspire and model the way, as can be found for young people in the realm of sport. Yet, to some extent, we expect

'youth arts' to operate without these supports – with little or no reference to contemporary art practice, high-profile professional artists or a disciplined training in technical skills and their application. Again, this has to do with the confidence, experience and resources of those adults responsible for implementing arts projects and activities with young people, and that related problem Picasso identified, of how to remain an artist in spirit once we've 'grown up'. While courses such as the Certificate in Youth Arts can go some way towards professionalizing arts practice within the youth sector and raising ambitions, these ambitions cannot be realized fully without adequate and sustained funding; access to and partnership with relevant arts expertise and artistic stimulus; and crucially, a recognition amongst those leading youth and community organizations that arts practice should be an integral part of youth work practice, operating at the core rather than at the periphery.

To Grow Together

It is time to move on from limiting definitions and categories. In its current configuration, 'youth arts' is a fragile commodity, dependent on how those who determine its future view the arts in general. Youth workers are already expected to be multi-skilled and multi-tasking; it is unrealistic to expect them all to be expert artists too. If we are serious about building the structures needed, then we must commit to real partnership between those in the service of young people – not just within the arts and youth sectors, but also the formal educational sector, and other stakeholders that currently indirectly finance and support youth arts practice. This is the only way to ensure that young people's cultural and artistic experiences are the best they can be and are integrated with and relevant to their other experiences in life.

Much progress has been made in this regard over the last decade. However, it continues to be driven largely by individuals working at ground level. Where organizations are working together, this tends to be as a result of their own interests and priorities at a given time, rather than as a consequence of a concerted effort at government level to join forces and develop integrated policy and provision across the relevant departments and the sectors they support. Thinking around interdepartmental working and partnership takes time to mature and as a result, change is gradual. That change now needs to accelerate in order to realize the full potential of the arts as an artistic, cultural, personal and social experience for young people; one that enhances their holistic development and participation as citizens.

There have been some important recent developments aimed at bringing the arts and formal educational sectors closer together. In September 2006, the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism established an Arts and Education committee to advise the Arts Council on how best to align its strategies for the promotion and encouragement of the arts within the formal education system. The Irish Museum of Modern Art, the Heritage Council and The Ark cultural centre for children have also joined forces to develop strategies for children and young people across the heritage, arts and formal education sectors. The non-formal educational sector is not explicitly included in these initiatives, highlighting the inherent difficulties of joined-up planning with a sector that is currently only in the process of professionalizing and standardizing its own work practices and quality standards. When the Youth Work Act 2001 and the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007⁵ are fully implemented, the youth sector will be in a better position to look at how it can align with and

complement both formal education and the arts sector. In the meantime, the current Arts Council plan 'Partnership for the Arts' states that it will 'engage with government departments and agencies, and with the voluntary and private sectors, to ensure that the arts are central in society.'⁶ In practice, this is to include 'co-operation with those involved in non-formal education to make a strong case for the arts to be included in lifelong learning policies and initiatives'⁷ and in relation to creating better opportunities for young people to experience the arts, the same partnership model is proposed.⁸ During 2006 and 2007, the Ark, IMMA and NYCI all published books documenting their own pioneering long-term youth arts initiatives involving partnerships between the youth and arts sectors (see reviews elsewhere in this issue) demonstrating that there is a willingness within both the arts and youth sectors to collaborate, reflect on the experience and apply mutual learning.

While many youth work organizations use the arts in their work with young people and some have accumulated vast experience in this area, there are still gaps. Links with valuable sources of artistic expertise could be improved. We also need to place the right to cultural participation for young people – with the resources and facilities that requires – firmly on the youth agenda along with other issues concerning young people. There are some excellent examples at a local level of what can be achieved when the links between the arts sector and non-formal education are strong (see articles 'Dream Depot', 'Lift Off' and 'The Young Model Project' in this issue). However without formal structures in place that would allow this to happen across the board, it relies on locally formed relationships between like-minded and passionate individuals. Some of these relationships have resulted in excellent models of organizational collaboration (see IMMA's

publication, reviewed in this issue, for a guide to this based on their experience) which could be applied elsewhere. Third level institutions that train youth and community workers have an influential role to play in highlighting the value of arts practice within this sector; NUI Maynooth has shown commitment and leadership in this regard by ensuring that students complete modules in arts practice and by accrediting the NUI Certificate in Youth Arts. To achieve coherence of awareness, understanding and expertise, this should also be happening across all third level courses that relate in any way to collaborative arts and/or young people.

In relation to advocacy and the youth agenda, the acceptance within the youth sector that using the arts 'works' now needs to be given teeth through representation within the decision making structures that exist, such as social partnership and the National Youth Work Advisory Committee. Both the current social partnership agreement⁹ and National Development Plan¹⁰ recognise the importance of arts and culture to the wellbeing of communities, as does the National Youth Work Development Plan and the recently launched National Recreation Policy¹¹ for young people. With the appointment of regional Youth Officers as part of the implementation of this National Youth Work Development Plan, there is an opportunity at local level to create links and partnerships with the relevant parties, such as local authority arts officers, to strengthen and enhance youth arts. NYCI, as the representative body for voluntary youth organizations and a social partner with a strong advocacy function, can play a leading role in forwarding the sector and will be identifying appropriate ways of doing this as part of its current strategic planning for 2008–2012.

[Continues on page 58]

New Youth Arts Festivals in Profile

In this issue of in2 we are profiling two new youth arts festivals, both of which are only in their second year. These events have emerged in quite distinct places in terms of geographical location, community context and funding opportunity to date. Consequently, they look quite different in terms of shape, scale and duration.

They also however, share many common features and similarity of approach: they are community based events which rely on local support and the active engagement of young people and are trying to reach inclusively into their respective communities; they involve young people in enjoyable new experiences and also provide a platform to celebrate and promote ongoing local youth arts initiatives; they are seeking a long term sustainable future as part of a local cultural calendar and are open to ideas on how best this might be achieved.

We look forward to watching their continued development in coming years.

New Youth Arts Festivals in Profile

Lift Off: A Week in Ballymun

Mark O'Brien is Local Arts Development Officer with axis Ballymun. Mark tells us about the week when film screenings, animation workshops, art exhibitions, urban art workshops, hip hop dancing, African drumming, critically renowned youth theatre and more was available to the young people of Ballymun.

Lift Off: A Week in Ballymun

The Back Story

Lift Youth Arts Festival is an initiative of the Ballymun Festival Steering Committee, an organisation made up of representation from axis arts centre, Dublin City Council, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource, Ballymun Youthreach, Ballymun Regeneration Ltd and the wider Ballymun Community.

The Steering Committee has been in operation for eight years. Throughout those years it has organised a series of events to provide a focus for creative engagement for and by young people and the many local youth groups, chief among these is the annual Otherworld Festival culminating on Halloween night. In 2006, Lift Youth Arts Festival was added to the calendar to showcase the work being undertaken in youth arts in Ballymun and to develop the skills and availability of expertise and new experience in this area.

The last number of years in Ballymun has seen great change with the demolition of the signature tower blocks and the regeneration of a community akin in size to Sligo Town. The Otherworld Festival began nine years ago as an alternative to anti social behaviour on Halloween night. This event has grown hugely over the years and now six months preparation and workshops goes into the night itself, when up to three hundred young people, one hundred adults and two thousand spectators take part in the outdoor extravaganza. Last year an outreach project saw artists and youth workers go into Ballymun's estates and engage with the public in building signature pieces for the evening's parades.

Lift was developed to build on the success of this project and was launched in April 2006 with a programme of workshops and events across all art forms. The festival targets in particular, ages twelve upwards but also runs programmes to integrate the younger age group from eight to twelve to develop the festival for the future. The festival is situated mainly in two signatory buildings, axis arts centre and Ballymun Regional Youth Resources' Reco centre, with the addition of several site-specific projects.

The aims of the Festival Steering Committee through both Lift and the Otherworld festival are:

- To raise and broaden the cultural experience of young people in Ballymun through real access to creative opportunities
- To specifically target high-risk groups, including young people involved in projects that attract older adolescents and young people not attached to support or resource structures
- To prioritise young people's engagement throughout the process in order to deliver a programme that is truly of interest to them
- To maintain and develop community support structures around the programme.

Lift 2007

The Festival Steering Committee established a festival team in early February 2007 with me in the role of co-ordinator. A project assistant was then taken on to assist in the logistics of the festival. Colm Downes worked tirelessly in this role and his skills base was a huge asset to Lift 2007. This year also saw Dublin City Council Arts Office come on board as partners in Lift, both with their funding of the festival workshop programme and the invaluable presence on the festival programme team of Ann Marie Lyons, Dublin City North West Area Arts Office. The run up to Lift 2007 started in late February with a soundscaping project with young people from Ballymun Animal Carer's association and artist Sean Ronan. The participants sourced sound from the Ballymun stables and other working environments which they then shaped into a sound installation.

The festival opened on Wednesday evening 28th March with 'Baby Girl' a site-specific Roundabout Youth Theatre production that took place in a flat on Shangan Road. This innovative and entertaining work was testament to the talent of the young people involved and was rewarded with full houses and critical acclaim.



A Packed Programme

Thursday morning began with a packed screening of *Bend it Like Beckham* and *Little Mun*, a short film made by transition year students with Dogmedia productions and the Darklight Festival in a project developed by axis in partnership with Dublin City Council Arts Office. (The films screened over the festival were in association with Access Cinema and targeted the secondary schools in Ballymun and the wider areas). This was followed at 6pm by the official launch of the festival and an exhibition of projection art by the Plough and Whiteacre Youth Projects in the axis gallery. Axis was packed to the rafters as Munch Samba Band marked the beginning of the festival with great noise and colour. This was followed by a screening of *The Incredibles* where youth leaders, young people and the general public enjoyed a high spirited and fun filled opening night.

Friday morning saw another film screening and preparations began for the rest of the festival and in particular the workshop programme. The workshop programme was developed to encompass art forms that are already being explored by groups within Ballymun and also give opportunities to try out new skills. In this year's festival there was over two hundred places available in workshops over the six days. Of these, over eighty percent were taken up.


This year also saw the integration of a newly commissioned art installation from Ballymun Primary Healthcare facility. *Still Here*, a video installation by artists Denis Connolly and Ann Cleary was engaged with by dancers from Balletmun and jugglers and performers from Roundabout Youth Theatre in a beautiful performance in both axis and the Civic Centre.

On **Saturday** an urban art project took place in the courtyard of the Reco, where artists John Duffy and Thomas O'Connor worked with twelve young

people in developing a large scale artwork in mixed media ranging from abstract painting through stencilling to spray. This work was exhibited for the month of April in the axis gallery and garnered huge interest and acclaim. There was hugely positive feedback from this project with the participants expressing their finding of how to make 'art out of nothing'. This work was developed to compliment existing work of BRYR groups, Youthreach and the Job Centre.

Also on Saturday animators Mark Flood and Benny Kenny worked with two groups over the course of the day to develop a piece of animation, guiding the young people through all stages of the process. There was great celebration on Saturday morning also when a rave review appeared in the Irish times for Roundabout Youth Theatre's *Baby Girl*.

Monday morning saw the launch of the main workshop programme which took place in both axis and the Reco. Over the previous three weeks the front of house staff of both organisations had worked tirelessly in coping with the huge demands for registration forms for all the workshops. These workshops spanned a wide array of art forms; African drumming, hip hop dancing, rap, drama, art, and sound recording, all building to a showcase event on Tuesday night where the public and the other participants got to witness the fruits of the young peoples labour. This was a very special evening where a packed audience and all the groups shared and performed their work. The evening closed with two hundred people involved in an interactive drum circle facilitated by David Day. David is one of the many artists who worked on the festival who had previously worked in Ballymun on projects such as *Spark* (axis arts in education) and the Ballymun Regeneration LTD's summer programmes. The development of the relationship between the artist and the community is an integral part of the work undertaken by the committee and further by my own wider work in arts development in axis.



Lift into the Future

Lift's festival programme doubled between year one and year two and the aim is to develop that growth into its third year. We are now beginning to engage with youth groups with a view to developing the ninth Otherworld Festival for this October and our aim is that these groups would aid in the shaping of Lift 2008 programme.

Next year we are looking at the use of Bebo and text messaging services to market the festival and to build on the direct marketing to schools and ways of developing linkages into their needs. Throughout the festival young people are linked into existing resources in the arts in Ballymun. These relationships can then be developed through axis arts centre arts development work, Dublin City Council Arts Office, Ballymun Regional Youth Resource, the local schools, Youthreach and the fantastic work undertaken by the community and voluntary sector in this area.

People like Stewart Dowie of Community Arts Factory, Brian Mongey of DCC, Helen Barry formerly of BRYR and Eileen Doyle of Whiteacre have been at the core of the committee's work for the past years. Indeed it was Helen Barry, now visual arts programmer at the Ark who co-ordinated the first year of Lift in 2006. It is this community and inter-agency collaboration that sits at the heart of the committee's ethos and our aim both now and in the future is to mirror this sense of collaboration through all aspects of the festival.

The committee in the future will look to develop further involvement from young people in the process of developing the festival. This will be done through consultation with schools and youth groups. This will enable the participants see how valuable their contribution can be and also allow contact with local youth workers to be reinforced and developed. The by-products of this are manifold and include increased artistic experience and learning, building of confidence through new experiences and allow the wider community see young people engaged in positive activities thus increasing their positive profile.

Lift as a project is only in its fledgling state but the possibilities for its growth are very exciting. Over the next number of years the aim is to not only engage with young people of Ballymun but through this work, link the area with wider Dublin.

Mallow Youth Arts Festival: A Day in North Cork

Until last year, it had been a long time since the town of Mallow had seen a summer festival. In this article young participants, Karen Long, Alex Sheehan and Hollie Stovell, award winners in last year's Inquiring Mind competition, tell us what happened in the inaugural youth arts festival. Lorraine O'Donnell, Youth Arts Officer with Avondhu Development Group, then takes up the story and tells us of this year's plans and hopes for the future.

Mallow Youth Arts Festival: A Day in North Cork

2006 – The Circus Comes to Town

The youth arts festival was started because Avondhu Development and the County Council felt that there was a need to do something special to bring the youth in the community together and get us involved in something really worthwhile and good for the town. It was also for us to show off our talents.



Preparations began and meetings were held. There was a committee including: Marian Hasset (of Avondhu Development) who was the festival director; Finbar Sheehan, PR; Cian O'Sullivan, local artist; Regina Glynn who is involved with Arty Crafty classes who took part in the festival parade; Angela Sheehan who is involved with Lightbulb Youth Theatre; Bernie Prisener who organised the art on the street; Deirdre Ryan of Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services (cdys) and Bobby Ward from Youthreach who had paintings on the street.

We also attended the meetings, they were very interesting. We got an insight in to what was going to happen and we were amazed by the organising and all the jobs that had to be done. All the time that was put in by all the volunteers was amazing. We were also involved with the festival with our drama group Lightbulb Youth Theatre.

The festival took place on the fifteenth of July and mainly happened in the main street. The theme of the festival was 'The Circus'. In the morning the committee and volunteers set up the stage for the groups who were performing there that day. At twelve noon the parade began and went through the town then at twelve thirty the opening ceremony started. After that the Fermoy Youth Band played followed by performances on stage including: Centre Stage School; Pyramid Acrobatics and Gymnastics; Kiely-Walsh Academy of Dance; Bounce School of Dance; Cuisle Avondhu, who play traditional music; Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services and Mallow Youth Choir.

While all this was going on, other clubs and groups did their pieces along the street. These included Lightbulb Youth Theatre; Pepple Art; Youthreach, who had interesting paintings along the street; Johnny Bongo's Drumming and Cian O'Sullivan who drew portraits. There were also stilt walkers, mad potters, jugglers and street statues.

We all thoroughly enjoyed it and all our hard work paid off. We loved the festival and everyone else we were talking to agrees that the town needed something like this to bring the youth community together and have some fun!

Karen Long, Alex Sheehan and Hollie Stovell





2007 – Myths and Legends in North Cork

A review of the one day event in 2006 showed that all involved in the organisation felt it had been a great success and that they had begun a process that should become an annual event. In addition to the enjoyment of the day, there was also a trickle down effect in stimulating and building an awareness of youth arts in the area. Avondhu Development Group is a social inclusion partnership that works in North Cork. Our policy regarding youth arts is equality of access, to bring high quality arts projects to those at risk of disadvantage. We see the festival as an important development for our community.

Organisation of this year's festival, held on 21st July, began in February. Marion Hasset, the key instigator, has moved on but once again a committee made up of active community members is hard at work, this year knowing a bit more what to expect. The group includes Avondhu Development staff plus volunteers from a range of local cultural, sport and youth perspectives. It's a diverse bunch of people which makes the work more interesting and easier to reach most aspects of the community.

Again this year the festival will begin with a parade of performers led by local concert and pipe bands. Half the main street will be closed off for this. This will be followed by performances on the main stage plus street theatre and art workshops. One of the objectives set down last year was that the festival would actively seek to involve young local people by placing them at the heart of the festival. This year there are two new initiatives which address this objective; we are trying to involve older teenagers more by organising a 'Gig Rig' where local young bands can play and we are holding open auditions to give young people not attached to any group, the opportunity to perform on the main stage.

As befits a developmental project, the festival is growing and evolving and this year, as well as engaging more young people, we are endeavouring to

include our newer community members. To that end, the theme this year is 'Myths and legends from around the world'. A Polish jazz band, Poles Apart, will be performing and with the help of local integration officers, the word is being spread that this will be an event to attend.

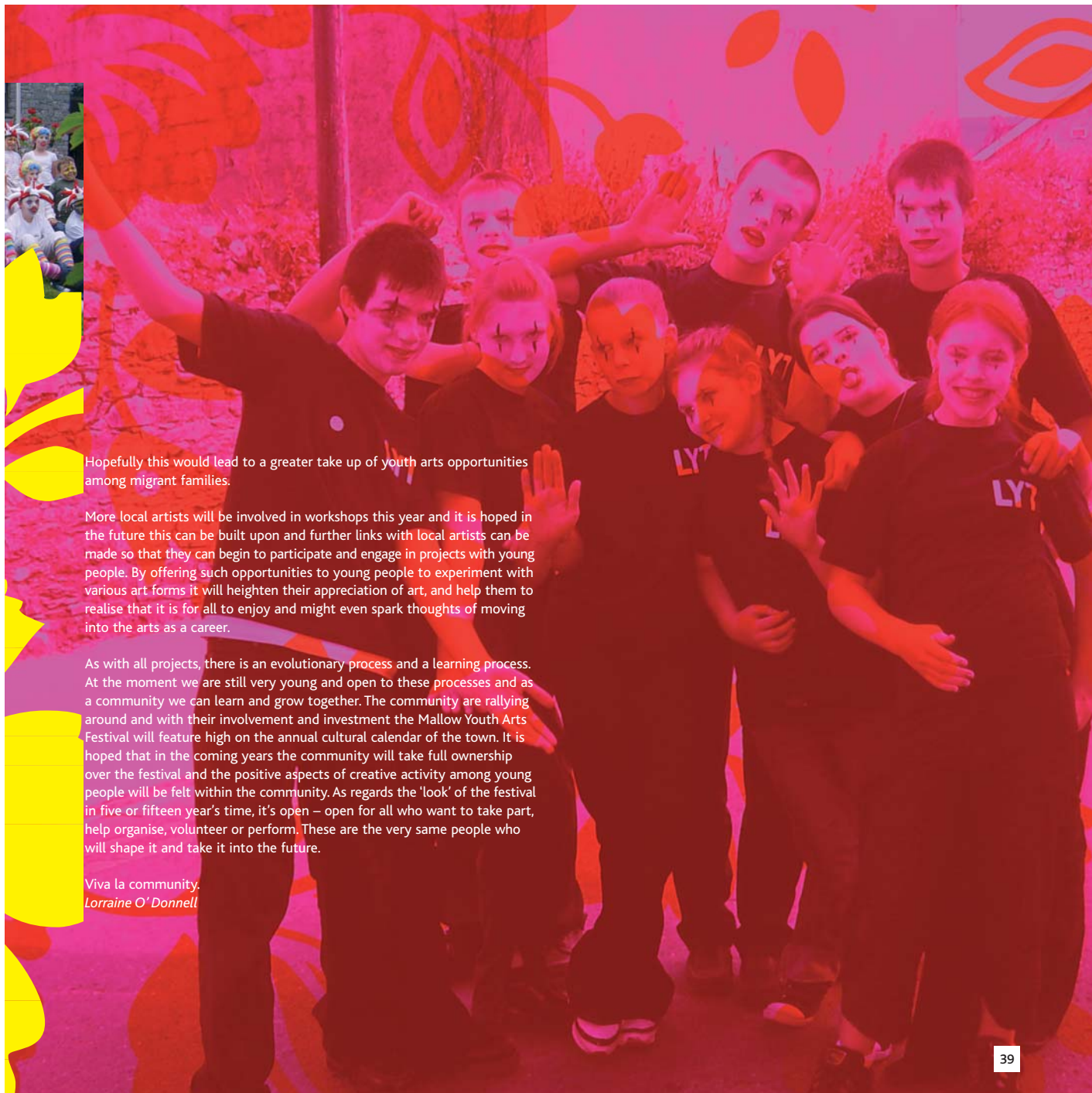
As with all new projects there are teething problems and with this one, like many others, funding is limited and fundraising and local generosity is crucial. However, a positive aspect of this is that it makes us more resourceful and we approach challenges with more creativity.

In the run up to the festival, Avondhu Development Group's interagency work is proving beneficial and by utilising the links already in place, local youth groups are in full preparation mode to participate in the festival. It is hoped that this year will be as successful as the last but we can't guarantee the same scorcher of a day that we had last year. Regardless of the weather, the day will still have lots of colour, music and young performers on the streets of Mallow.

Hopes and visions...

There will not be so many performers bought in this year. This is in part due to financial restrictions but mainly because it is felt that the notion of 'local community event' should be cultivated further and nurtured throughout the coming years.

Feedback from young people last year led to the addition of the Gig Rig and open auditions. Consultation will continue and hopefully lead to more engagement of young people in participating and helping to plan the festival. There is also a need to engage more with the migrant community living in Mallow. There have been some steps taken this year and it is something that will be developed for the future by building mutual awareness.



Hopefully this would lead to a greater take up of youth arts opportunities among migrant families.

More local artists will be involved in workshops this year and it is hoped in the future this can be built upon and further links with local artists can be made so that they can begin to participate and engage in projects with young people. By offering such opportunities to young people to experiment with various art forms it will heighten their appreciation of art, and help them to realise that it is for all to enjoy and might even spark thoughts of moving into the arts as a career.

As with all projects, there is an evolutionary process and a learning process. At the moment we are still very young and open to these processes and as a community we can learn and grow together. The community are rallying around and with their involvement and investment the Mallow Youth Arts Festival will feature high on the annual cultural calendar of the town. It is hoped that in the coming years the community will take full ownership over the festival and the positive aspects of creative activity among young people will be felt within the community. As regards the 'look' of the festival in five or fifteen year's time, it's open – open for all who want to take part, help organise, volunteer or perform. These are the very same people who will shape it and take it into the future.

Viva la community.
Lorraine O'Donnell

Artist in Youth Work Scheme

Artist in Youth Work Scheme

The Artist in Youth Work Scheme has been in existence since 2004, when the Arts Council first approached the National Youth Council of Ireland with the idea of allocating funding to support the development of high quality arts practice with young people in the non-formal educational sector. It began as a pilot programme providing the following four organisations with funding to engage professional artists, who then led collaborative art projects with groups of young people – Ferns Diocesan Youth Service, Wexford; County Wexford Youth Theatre; The Base Youth Centre Project, URBAN Ballyfermot, Dublin; and Curranabraher Youth Development Centre, Cork.

Since then, the scheme has developed and expanded, allowing organisations nationwide to implement a wide variety of artistic projects involving young people. In 2005, a new funding award was introduced, to support research and development projects aimed at establishing sustainable local partnerships for the development of youth arts. Initially funded entirely by the Arts Council, the scheme is now match funded by the Department of Education and Science, Youth Affairs Section, which has added significantly to the overall fund available for projects. The commitment of both agencies shows recognition for the complementary educational and artistic functions of youth arts and this is also reflected in the projects funded, balancing artistic excellence with personal and social development.

Ten organisations around the country were awarded funding in 2006. Two of these – Kildare Youth Project and West Cork Arts Centre – report on how their awards were used in the articles to follow.

Artist in Youth Work Scheme. Dream Depot: Kildare Town Youth Project

Dream Depot: Kildare Town Youth Project

The Background

Kildare Town Youth Project (KTYP) is one of six Youth Projects run by Kildare Youth Services. These projects seek to engage young people aged 11 to 25 years, using a Youth Work approach to assist them in their personal development and identify issues affecting them in their daily lives. KTYP currently engages with over 50 young people identified by the staff team as being in need of the project. The participants attend in age appropriate groups.

As part of the Project's development work in building relationships with young people who attend, the team use a diverse range of methods to encourage reflection, trust and confidence in expressing opinions within a group setting. One method used in the project is drama. It was because of this that a group of participants who had taken part in some drama workshops to prepare for a DVD project with me, approached me and asked whether it would be possible to do more of this kind of work without it necessarily being issue based.

I set about trying to create an opportunity for the group to do some kind of arts project and to develop links with an artist interested in working with young people. Through a notice in Youth Arts News (the monthly email bulletin posted by the National Youth Arts Programme) I made contact

with Fiona Whelan, an Irish artist based in Holland who was developing an idea for an international youth arts project called Dream Depot. I subsequently made an application for grant aid through the Artist in Youth Work Residency Scheme (an award provided by The Arts Council and administered by the National Youth Arts Programme) to fund a consultation phase with the group of young people in Kildare Town and this application was successful.

The Idea

Dream Depot is an art project for young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and areas in the Netherlands, Ireland and Kenya. The project has evolved from Fiona Whelan's interest in working with these young people, and the artistic and educational methodology that she has developed in her years of practice as an artist and educator. Dream Depot gives young people the opportunity to research their own identity and the influence their environment has on their behaviour, and as a result widen their horizon and challenge their boundaries. The project will be developed and implemented together with a professional artist and youth organisation in each country. A youth worker from each organisation will be deeply involved in the project.

In the first part of the project, the different aspects of their living environment are researched and processed into an artwork. On one hand it is about developing creative competencies: learning to work in a practical way with art materials, equipment and new media. And on the other hand, it is about developing a consciousness about themselves. Although the group is directed by an artist, they have a substantial influence on how they collaborate.

In the second part of the project, the artworks that have been developed by the different groups in the each country are further developed to be exchanged on the Dream Depot website.

From Idea to Reality

After discussing the Dream Depot idea with participants of Kildare Town Youth Project, 10 of them decided to attend a briefing with Fiona for further information. Ultimately, eleven young people participated in the group, 9 boys and two girls, aged between fifteen and eighteen years.

The concept of Dream Depot was to stimulate the target group of young people to question the amount of direction they could give to their own lives and to address the ways that they could influence their own thoughts and behaviour. Dream Depot used an artistic process which did not focus on the outcomes but on the experience of working together to explore and create an artwork. The first phase of the project consisted of 16 sessions in total, each 2 hours in duration, broken down into the following activities:

- Week 1** Introduction to the project
- Week 2** Writing and drawing with large paper text bubbles
- Week 3** Role play and sound recording about creating their own identity and where they hang out
- Week 4** Played game with sound recording about the impact of stereotyping, behaviour and attitude

- Week 5** Devised and played a TV interview set-up and then began to develop ideas for a mobile hang out unit (The Gaff)
- Week 6** Drawing and model-making on a small scale
- Week 7** Drawing out their mobile unit in full scale in the space using masking tape
- Week 8** In small groups making life size models of the Gaff
- Week 9** Discussion and adjustments around small scale final model and technical drawings, using photos, photocopying and stencils to creating personal icons to decorate the Gaff
- Week 10** Introduction to and discussion with local carpenter about how he would help the young people build their gaff, making of a working schedule, video diary
- Week 11** The young people learning while constructing their mobile gaff with the carpenter Jim and Fiona
- Week 12** The group worked together with Fiona and Jim to complete their mobile gaff

Early activities and discussions with the Dream Depot group focused on creating a group dynamic that would allow participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences of being a young person in Kildare town. During this stage they were guided by Fiona and I to address and tackle issues such as their place in society and the segregation and prejudice that they themselves experience and show to others.

The consultation phase began by getting the young people to work with printed photographs Fiona had taken and with text bubbles to start a visual dialogue. The young people did not feel comfortable writing and drawing; however the conversation that grew from this was very interesting. They talked about their own identity and how they were different to the young people living in the next town. They said they were commonly referred to by others as 'scumbags'.

At this point, the group expressed a wish to work

with sound recording equipment as they felt this was an easier way of relaying their thoughts and opinions. This they felt would be a lot easier and more interesting than just writing things down. This really is where the group began to take ownership of the process and the fact that it happened so early in the project was seen as a hugely positive development. Before leaving, they were given disposable cameras to take photos of the locations where they like to hang out.

The group was then divided into two. I led one group and Fiona led the other. Each group had to instruct their leader on how to behave and dress like a 'scumbag'. Fiona and I then had to come together and act out being 'scumbags'. The young people were then asked to describe themselves in a positive way. They were asked to describe in words where they hang out and this was recorded on tape (sound only).

The following week I led a game about role playing. The group discussed how they had felt to play a particular role and how stereotyping, behaviour and attitude were used to judge people and put them into boxes.

Everyone then listened to the sound recording that was made with them the previous week. We talked about what they had said during that conversation and if they still agreed with what they had said on tape. They discussed the different negative comments which were recorded about where they live and hang out, and the negative impact this had on them.

In order to move things forward and involve the group in a practical art making process, Fiona decided to bring an idea to the group that they had been discussing in workshops around where they hang out in the town. The idea was to explore, develop and build a mobile hang out unit for the young people. The group liked the idea very much. They thought it was very much in line with how the research had been developing to date and was very relevant to the issues which were arising from their opinions.



In tandem with this, a game was devised in reaction to a comment made by one of the young men the previous week about who he would be when he would be 25. The group I led took part in a mock television interview show. The young people had a hard time imagining being 25 years old. A discussion after this game helped the young people to put their thoughts about the future into perspective in relation to how having no hopes or aspirations can affect people as they get older.

After a break, Fiona showed the young people examples of portable and temporary spaces both realised and conceptual. They liked this very much. In a discussion it became clear that their initial ideas – although very diverse – were not very practical (one young man wanted to dig a tunnel).

Fiona showed the group images of portable spaces again to refresh their idea of where the project was going. She also presented a list of questions to the group about requirements and practical limitations to be considered when building a mobile hang out unit. The group added their own practical considerations and wishes to this list. The young people were then given paper and model making materials and tools and were guided in making a drawing and a small model of how they would like their mobile hang out unit to look like and to be named. They could choose to work in small groups or individually.

The group divided themselves into three sub groups and each sub group designed a life size shelter from cardboard which included features decided upon by the group themselves. Once this process was

complete the participants came together and agreed to combine designs to create one mobile gaff which Fiona made a scale model of. It was seen as a piece of art in itself although this was not the original aim of the consultation phase. The hope is that the group will continue to develop the themes of negative perception and lack of facilities through the second phase of the project which is due to commence late October 2007.

In one corner of the youth centre, the young people were guided in drawing a plan using masking tape on the floor and walls, of an imaginary hangout place which should compactly house the four of them. They sat and lay around inside this drawn out space for 20 minutes or more to see what it felt like. The group then discussed how it felt to be contained in a space that size and they discovered that the more time they spent there the more they tended to spread out, so the space became too restrictive. They then started adding lines of masking tape to expand the space. Each group worked as a unit to make a life size model of their portable hangout space. This began completely frantically with lots of chaos and enthusiasm. It soon settled down, with a very constructive atmosphere remaining where everyone was very busy and involved.

When they were finished they measured the spaces they had built and we took photos for reference. Fiona and I decided to focus the workshop on how the young people would paint or decorate the 'gaff'. Fiona showed them images she had downloaded from the computer showing examples of street stickers, and graffiti characters. The group

were given stencil paper and asked to draw their name or create an icon or logo for themselves. They concentrated very well and enjoyed drawing.

While this was going on, I set up a video diary room in a walk-in cupboard. The idea behind this was to enable the young people to record each other on video camera while voicing their opinions about how they experienced Dream Depot. It was also used as a way to evaluate the process.

I then contacted a carpenter, Jim Smith, who was willing to work with the group to build the mobile hang out 'gaff'. The group themselves had identified that they need additional support in the construction of the mobile gaff. Fiona had a meeting with the carpenter just before the workshop to discuss a plan of action. She had prepared technical drawings for him and the final model. Jim was very enthusiastic about helping out. He liked the idea of the 'Gaff' and said he did not want to be paid for helping as he wanted to help the group out and give something back to his community. The group showed a very real and visible respect for this attitude.

The workshops progressed by looking at the drawings and the model with the young people and Jim and Fiona explained how the whole thing was going to be put together. Jim asked someone to volunteer to demonstrate how to begin. They began to take it in turns to work with Jim. Each turn was long enough for them



to get the hang of what they were doing so that they were waiting enthusiastically for the next turn.

Because the group were becoming more confident and skilled with the different tasks involved in making the 'Gaff', the work became more efficient and organised. The young people were able to work simultaneously on different tasks with less supervision. This resulted in a stimulating, productive and fun atmosphere. As the 'Gaff' was being assembled, the young people were able to test it and make clear choices. They recognised what was missing and what the next step should be. When the 'gaff' was completed we discussed how and where they would use it. I talked briefly about the next step in going further with using the 'Gaff'.

In an evaluation meeting, Fiona and I agreed that the impact of the Dream Depot pilot was very substantial, on both the young people and the Kildare Town Youth Project in general, evidenced in the growth in confidence we had observed during the workshops. It also gave all parties, including myself, a clear understanding of what is required for Dream Depot phase 2 (The Artwork).

Brian (17) said, *"I think the best thing about the project was that I learned a little bit of carpentry, I didn't have the chance to do that before. I don't really think it was an art project because we built something that we can use."*

Dean (15) said, *"I think we did do an art project because we came together with an idea and now we have something that represents that idea."*

Danielle (16) said, *"It was just good to have something to do with the lads on a Wednesday evening, some of the planning stuff was boring but it was good craic being here."*

Kelvin (15) said, *"I think we all worked well, I hope we do something with the gaff and that it just doesn't stay sitting there."*

Tommy Lavelle,
Project Leader, Kildare Town Youth Project

INTO THE FUTURE

As mentioned, in the second part of the project the artworks that have been developed by the different groups in the each country will be further developed to be exchanged on the Dream Depot website. For example the group in Kildare Town will develop and build a game with the Dublin based artist Glenn Loughran in the coming phase which is due to begin in October 2007. This actual game will be modified to become an online virtual game for the final part of the project. This game can then be played on the Dream Depot website between the groups of young people in each country. This will be directed by Fiona Whelan and the artists and youth workers in each country involved. On the website the youth see and interact with each others artworks and see the processes involved, allowing them to exchange and learn about each other.

West Cork Arts Centre Youth Arts Development Plan and Youth Event *Handle with Care*

In November 2006 West Cork Arts Centre (WCAC), in Skibbereen, Co. Cork embarked on a development project, partly funded by the National Youth Arts Programme, to research youth arts needs in West Cork and develop a Youth Arts strategy. With the development of a new purpose built building allowing more space for educational and community programming in the pipeline, a consultation into youth needs was well timed. We hope not only to fulfill our own remit to provide access to the arts for all sections of the community, but also to enable youth groups, and those working with youth throughout the area, to deliver their own youth arts programmes.

The research is being carried out by an external consultant, Chris Black with the support of WCAC's Schools Coordinator, Alison Trim. Partnerships have been formed with various organizations throughout the region including Bantry Youth Café, West Cork Foroige and WCAC Youth Theatre. These partnerships proved to be invaluable in linking up with rural regions throughout the area.

Through questionnaires, visits to youth groups and schools to talk directly to young people, case studies of successful youth arts programmes in other regions and the setting up of a working group, including artists, youth workers and young people from across the region, to discuss the issues that arise, a picture of West Cork's youth arts needs is beginning to emerge.

Some of the comments that arose during the first meeting of the working group:

"It's gotta be cool!!!"
 "We don't hear about what is happening."
 "Can we make other places Arts Venues?"
 "We ask young people what they want to do, but they just don't seem to know."
 "We need support in applying for funding for arts activities."
 "Music is something most young people enjoy, the youth café gigs always sell out."
 "Its about how you describe things – call it dance and only a few will turn up, call it a hip-hop workshop, it will be full in 5 minutes."
 "Information sent to schools just isn't getting through."

Whilst this research took place, we were also planning the annual Youth Arts exhibition and event. This is the main focus of the WCAC's current youth arts programming, and includes projects leading up to an exhibition and workshops during the exhibition. This year's event was named *Handle with Care* by our Friday night youth arts group. Although the numbers involved in the group were low (7 participants began the programme in November and only 4 remained dedicated throughout) the young people worked very hard and produced attention-grabbing work of outstanding quality. They designed the flyer advertising the exhibition and event, a strong design on which many people commented. Two second-level school projects also contributed to





the exhibition, including 5 schools and one Youthreach centre. The connections made with the visual art teachers and transition year coordinators through these projects were useful contacts for further research within the schools.

By the opening event in March, our research project was well underway and links made with young people and youth workers to raise awareness of the WCAC youth programme made the promotion of *Handle with Care* much easier. Attendance at the opening event was good. Jess Mason, a youth worker at Bantry Youth Café, one of our partners in the Youth Arts Development Plan working group, offered to set up a *Bebo* (a social networking website) website for us, as they found this to be an effective way of keeping in touch with their members. The *Bebo* page was up and running before the *Handle with Care* event began and was officially launched that day, a direct outcome of the research programme already put into practice. Three 'instant' drop-in workshops ran on the opening day and a film screening completed the evening. Bantry Youth Café hired a minibus to bring some young people down from Bantry. Young people from Skibbereen and a few from other areas also came, many of whom either had work on display, or had been involved in the Youth Arts Development Plan working group.

"Handle with Care was based on the theme of hands, fingerprints and individuality. The name Handle with Care was a message that caution

should be taken when dealing with young people and their ideas. It also explored the concept of the hand's role in constructing art. The work consisted of a large sphere made from inflated surgical gloves hung from the ceiling, several monochromatic drawings of fingerprints and large red banners with rows of human hands, some open, some clenched fists. The red banners in particular have a very stirring effect on the viewer. They put one in mind of Communist banners and the many hands invoke a sense of unity between human beings."

A description of the Handle with Care installation by Jess, a young person from the Youth Arts Development Plan working group who came to the exhibition and opening event.

"On entering I have no idea what to expect, as we enter the door we are offered drinks at reception and told where everything is and what's happening throughout the evening. Back past reception and out the back is the graffiti sessions and instant dance. As I enter the open yard, there is a strong smell of spray cans and the sound of chatter as others wait for a turn to have a go at graffiti on the two colourful boards lined up against the wall. In the instant dance room you can sign up to have a go at making dance music on the computer."

Liana, who travelled to the opening event with Bantry Youth Café, describes her experience.

The youth event programme also included a six-week series of junk art workshops, the results of which went on display recently. However, generating interest proved difficult, even with the assistance of our new contacts, and we became aware of the need to consider the timing of our events more carefully in relation to school holidays and exam times. The workshops ran on Saturdays, a day that the research project has shown does not suit many young people. There are definitely administrative lessons to be learnt from this, however the four dedicated participants had a fantastic experience and the work they produced was excellent. Its display outside the WCAC has attracted a lot of attention from both regular users of the centre, the general public and the crowds of young people who pass the arts centre each day on their way back from school. We couldn't have asked for a better advertisement of the youth programme.

The Youth Arts Development Plan and youth event programme have fed into one another at all stages and the awareness raised within the community of young people and youth workers has been significant. The youth event programme provided the research project with specific examples to refer to, and contacts with schools. The research project provided the event with input into content, and a raised profile of the programme amongst young people. For example, young people we spoke to recently through the research project had seen the Junk Art sculptures outside the



centre but were unaware that they were part of a youth arts programme, and young people interviewed in a school setting said that putting up posters in school was the best way to let them know about youth arts activities, until their teacher challenged that assertion by asking how many of them had noticed the *Handle with Care* posters from a month previously (none of course).

The research has also made us aware of the need for better facilities, which will hopefully be fulfilled within the new building project. Many of the activities that were regularly mentioned by young people involved either new technologies or equipment that we do not currently have access to. These difficulties were also addressed within the Youth Event programme; the 'instant music' workshop required the use of computers, a stumbling block that was resolved by the loan of a second-hand computer from a local shop.

The Junk Art workshops required more workshop and outdoor space than usual to go ahead. This was resolved by gaining permission to work in the site of the new building project, currently a disused space. This example shows how the issues in discussion as part of the Youth Arts Development Plan often echoed the practical issues of running the youth event programme. One of the most important needs to emerge is the necessity of an outreach programme.

There is very little public transport within West Cork and young people are often dependent on their parents for travel arrangements. Using the partnerships already formed to provide outreach programmes in different areas will be an essential recommendation of the research, and with further funding could become a reality.

The Youth Arts Development Plan will be completed this summer and the resulting document will lay out a youth arts strategy for the coming years.

This strategy will inform next year's youth programme as well as having wider uses within the youth work community. Already many of the lessons have been learnt through experience, and through communication. The enthusiasm created by the Youth Arts Development Plan, and the recommendations it makes will help to create a sustainable Youth Arts programme for the young people of West Cork.

For more information on the West Cork Arts Centre Youth Arts Programme check out our website at www.Youth-Arts-WCAC.bebo.com or contact Alison Trim at Tel: 028 22090 or email: alison@westcorkartscentre.com

Enquiring Minds

Introduction

This award was established by the National Youth Arts Programme in 2005 to encourage critical engagement with the arts by young people. It was felt that, while opportunities for young people to have practical experience of making and viewing art were becoming ever more varied and plentiful, the space for young people to interpret and reflect on meanings and ideas in art, outside of the formal education system, was not fully occupied. It was, in a sense, new territory to be explored. New territory brings new challenges – talking about art and thinking about art brings young people into new environments with their own peculiar languages and customs! There can sometimes be hesitation on the part of adults working with young people to enter this new territory – it's less about doing and more about thinking through opinions, reactions and the coded communications that are the arts. However, what has been striking, and gratifying, about the entries received from young people is their willingness to directly navigate these environments with apparently minimal need for adult intervention, and the palpable enthusiasm they have shown in doing so.

In the two years the award has operated, we have been surprised and impressed by the response from those young people who have taken part by submitting reports, documentaries, photo-stories and interviews about artists and projects they have taken part in or viewed. These critical reflections have been thoughtful, curious, open-minded, enthusiastic and articulate. Two previous award-winners, Erin Fox from Sligo and Michelle Tuite from Dundalk share their own artistic discoveries in the interviews that follow. You can also read excerpts from an entry by young people involved with Lightbulb Youth Theatre in the article on Mallow Youth Arts Festival elsewhere in this issue.

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Enquiring Minds: Extracts from an interview with Patti Smith by Erin Fox

Erin Fox first encountered the work of Patti Smith at the Model Arts and Niland Gallery Sligo in May 2006 and her subsequent article about the impact of this encounter won a travel award in the 2006 Enquiring Minds competition. The full transcript of this follow-up interview with Patti Smith conducted by Erin at Vicar Street, Dublin in May 2007 can be found on NYAP's website.

EXTRACTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PATTI SMITH
BY ERIN FOX

After thirty three years since the release of her first album 'Horses', Patti Smith still performs as determinedly, strongly and beautifully as ever. Following her performance at the Model Arts and Niland Gallery in Sligo last year, Patti Smith returned to Ireland as part of her world tour. This time at Vicar Street, Dublin... I was fortunate enough to receive the wonderful opportunity to interview her before the show that night and ask her a few questions about her influences.

EF: Welcome back to Ireland, it's nice to have you here again.

PS: Thank you, I'm glad to be here.

EF: How do you feel about coming back to perform?

PS: Well I always loved coming to Ireland because I love Ireland and I also have Irish ancestry. I have family from Cork and it always feels very special, especially coming back after playing in Sligo, we had such a beautiful time so it's always nice for us. My bass player Tony Shanahan is Irish, his parents are from Ireland so we always feel a special connection.

EF: What inspires you most in life?

PS: Well something that inspires me is of course being a mother to my son and daughter. My daughter is going to be twenty and she's an activist and a writer. And my son is playing with us, he's a guitar player. And one wants to be positive for the sake of their children and they are in ways what energise me. And truthfully, just the thirst for knowledge inspires me and learning new things, what people are doing historically. Today I visited Trinity College because Oscar Wilde and so many writers went to Trinity College. I went to the Writers Museum and saw Samuel Beckett's glasses and Brendan Behan's typewriter and these might seem like very small things but I find them very inspiring to see so sometimes it's just very small things that inspire me. Sometimes it's just the weather; the way the clouds are, so there's always something that gets me going...

EF: Has having a family had an influence on your work?

PS: Well it's probably inspired certain things but I don't think it's an influence on my work as much as my work process. When I first had my children I had less time, but that doesn't make me any less of an artist. I just had to reorganise my time. For instance when they were sleeping, I'd get up at five in the morning and write from five to eight in the morning when they woke up, instead of just writing whenever I felt like it. I had to organise my time differently so having a family influences how I work but I wouldn't say so much my work itself, except that having a family, one does want to be more humanistic and less self-centred.

EF: You've lost a lot of people, both family and friends who are close to you, how has this affected your work?

PS: Well that's absolutely had an affect, because the people that were alive they inspired me in different ways. One of the ways that I keep them with me, because I can't have them physically, is by making them a part of my creative process. When my husband died, I did the album 'Gone Again' in his memory. When my friend Robert Mapplethorpe died I wrote the phrase, a long phrase poem called 'The Coral Sea'. And when my mother died I wrote 'Mother Rose'... I notice that when I'm performing and singing I have to opt for certain emotions. I have a wider range of emotions to draw from. If I'm singing a sad song I have a lot of sadness that I've experienced, it doesn't mean I'm sad all the time. It just means when I sing a sad song it goes very deep...

EF: When you create something, how does that make you feel?

PS: I think that one of the great things about being an artist is that one of the frustrating things is that an artist is never satisfied. You know, you write a poem and for a while the process makes you feel so connected with it. It could be God or some universal force, or some cosmic force or the most articulate part of one's self, and that's a very ecstatic feeling. But then soon after, one gets dissatisfied or feels like – well I wrote that poem but I can write a better one, oh there's another one – I think that's part of the writer's process. It's like peeling an onion, you peel one skin and you think – ah! there it is! – and then you peel another layer, you keep peeling layers, and it's one of the things that keeps one going.

EF: You're an inspiration to other artists, why do you think that is?

PS: Well... you'd have to ask them (Patti laughs)

EF: Well, have they had an influence on you?

PS: A lot of artists have, artists throughout time, whether it's Walt Whitman or William Blake or Arthur Rimbaud, Bob Dylan, they've all taught me things, they've inspired me. You know when I look at myself, I mean the first writer that inspired me was Louisa May Alcott. She wrote a book called 'Little Women' and when I read that book when I was very young, one character Jo was like me, you know a tomboy, climbing trees, eating apples, or reading books all the time and writing stories. And she became a writer and she was my first real role model, I wanted to be like her, and write books and climb trees.

EF: What do you think of music today?

PS: Well right now I think we're in a big transitional period musically but I think for a new generation the new guard are doing really interesting things.

I like that the new generations are challenging the music industry, that they're creating their own music, putting it up on websites exchanging music with each other because I think in a way the music industry has sometimes failed in and it's so corporate and so big. In America, things are so corporate, the idea of alternative radio, alternative music is so blurred, everything is blurred and I think that new generations are reinventing how people listen to music... and I look forward to when they really understand that not only do they have the power to shift the music industry but also the power to make political change. Especially since technically there's so many possibilities of global unity... There's so many things happening in our world that we're accepting as normal that isn't normal. For instance when I left America, there are two big stories in America that people are ignoring. One, there's a terrible disease been found in some of the most important lakes in the Midwest that are killing the fish. The other is millions and millions of honey bees are dying from a fungus. It's all environmental. And people just sit around and think 'Oh you know, it's just a lot of propaganda' People are afraid to do something but you don't wait until these things are over. When you see the signs you think, 'ah! we have to do something now'.

EF: So would you say that everything you've just said relates to your song 'People Have the Power'?

PS: Oh absolutely! people have the power, I always will believe it. People say 'Oh I can't do anything because the government just do whatever they want'. The fact of the matter is we can make things, we have to all make things, we have to overwhelm the government. The government serves the people, people do not serve the government and with the power of our numbers we could do anything. It's just with the people it's either too much effort or they just don't believe it. We can do whatever we want, a lot of it is just simple boycotting. For instance, if a certain company is polluting your neighbourhood, then nobody buys goods from that company. It's amazing what we can do just by boycotting. Sometimes it's just simple things like that that can make a change.



Enquiring Minds: An interview with Sandra Meehan by Michelle Tuite



INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST SANDRA MEEHAN – MICHELLE TUIE

I was interested when I saw what looked like a text message on the walls, windows and arches of our local Dundalk train station. Even though I knew there was some message in the text I could not understand it. The first thing I noticed was a poem at the entrance on the glass doors of a waiting room. It is called 'Time Passing on the 2.15' by Nessa O'Mahoney. I think it is about a train journey in which the poet is looking at other travellers and maybe they are observing her. She writes about people fidgeting and trying to avoid eye contact. The snippets of conversation within the poem remind me of all overheard talk I have experienced on my train journeys. Everyone seems to be aware of everyone else. During the day they see landscapes flying by and at night you can catch your reflection in the mirrored darkness of the windows. I think that this is a very true account of a train journey.

The artist Sandra Meehan took lines from this poem and other works by Nessa O'Mahoney and installed them at various points of the station. When you buy your ticket you walk along a corridor which has metal arches, there is a question 'your gaze fixed longer than you meant it to', among other pieces of text. I noticed that a lot of the texts had a reference to looking and looking away.

I decided to interview local artist Sandra Meehan to try figure out what it was all about. I met her at the station on the 4th of July.



MT: Why did you use text? I thought most artists used paints or sculpture?

SM: People's idea of what art is changes all the time. Artists have used different materials and ways of expressing themselves throughout history. Cave people drew animals using dyes and paints because that was what interested them and those were the materials available. Renaissance artists worked onto fresh plaster. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling was a new way of working at the time. We are very familiar with text so I wanted to use a medium that everyone could relate to.

MT: Why didn't you use pictures?

SM: I did. Originally the corridor was lined with close-ups of eyes. They were enlarged to create a big impact. It has been said that the eyes are the doorway to the soul. I can give you some 'eye catching' images for your project.

MT: It sounds scary having a corridor of big eyes.

SM: I meant it to be slightly unsettling. You know when you are being watched it isn't always nice. Also you are watching others. The great thing about these images is you can stare all you like and build your own story about the faces beyond the eyes. Are they amused, angry, inquisitive, sad or happy?

MT: Most artists, I thought put their works in galleries. Why didn't you do that?

SM: I have had exhibitions in galleries which are very convenient. The spaces are designed to show off work to its best. Many modern artists, however, think that galleries can be elitist and that people are often put off going to them. I wanted to make my work available to as many people as possible

and a train station is an ideal location. I am very privileged to have that potential audience.

MT: How did you stick up the letters?

SM: I had lots of help from the station staff. It was very cold during the winter and they helped me with ladders and hot cups of tea. I stuck the vinyl lettering, which was adhesive backed, onto smooth surfaces where I could properly fasten them.

MT: Did you like working with the poet Nessa O'Mahony?

SM: It was a great learning experience for me. I like the way she uses her words so carefully. She has great insights and observations about people. I have a photo of Nessa with some text, taken in the ladies restroom, for you.

MT: Thanks for meeting me and all your help. Would you like a cup of tea Sandra?

SM: Ok, let's go to café Loco.

Publications

Step by Step

Educational Drama, a cross curricular use of Drama in the Primary classroom

by Joanna Parks and Sarah FitzGibbon

Published by the National Association for Youth Drama (NAYD)

Reviewed by Jacinta Sheerin who works as a drama facilitator in both schools and youth clubs.

As a drama facilitator working in schools and youth work, I have often been asked to recommend useful drama publications. The problems that I always encountered were that available books were full of interesting drama exercises but there were no explanations of how to link them. There are few if any books that demonstrate and guide the reader through a whole drama workshop session, from beginning to middle to end.

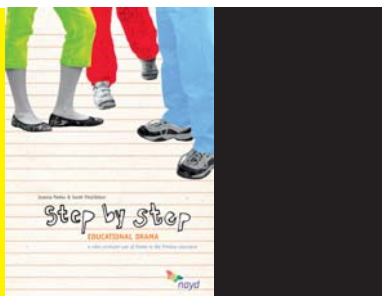
It was refreshing then, to read Step by Step as it is an extremely helpful guide for any reader. It does exactly what it says on the tin; it brings its readers on a step by step journey. It begins with what could be described as a map – the simple tools you need before you embark on your journey through the drama session: from the space you need; to drama terms explained; to how to run your first session. The book then offers you options of sessions according to age group and what subject the session corresponds with, for example History or English. Then you are brought on a colourful, imaginative, and safe trip through process drama.

However, while this resource is described as being for use in the classroom, it would also be a useful tool for introducing process drama into a range of other non formal settings. The workshop plans stand on their own, separate from school curriculum and would provide a helpful structure to investigate issues and themes of your own choosing.

One of the main blocks for teachers or youth

workers trying drama with children is the finding the confidence to start. I'd recommend this spinal bound book as a tool which would be empowering for any teacher or youth worker to pick up and begin.

Step By Step costs €20 plus €5.70 postage and packaging. It is also available at a discount rate of €15 plus €5.70 post and packaging to NAYD members. For more information on Step By Step, contact Rhona on 01-8781301 or e-mail rhona@nayd.ie
More information on the National Association for Youth Drama website at www.nayd.ie

**Young Adults & Voluntary Arts Workpack**

A handy guide to starting up and running your own arts group

Published by Voluntary Arts Ireland

Reviewed by Kevin O' Connor, Artistic Director of Co. Cavan Youth Drama who also works on a freelance basis on both sides of the border

This work pack is described as 'A handy guide to starting up and running your arts group', and it does exactly what it says and much, much more. This is an invaluable resource for anybody thinking of starting up a youth arts group or indeed anyone already in a group. The workpack takes you through all you need to know in relation to establishing a group, fundraising, marketing and evaluation.

It is divided into ten distinct sections: Getting started; Constitutions; Planning; Fundraising; Is it legal?; Marketing and advertising; Running an event or project; Monitoring and evaluation; Recognising resources and a useful Contacts listing.

Each of the above chapters is divided into four sections: Explanations, including ideas and advice; Further reading, with links to VAI resources available free from their website; Additional resources, which give a comprehensive register of additional relevant information including books resource packs and downloads from different sites and Worksheets, which you can copy and use. While the majority of the additional resources are Northern Ireland or UK based there are enough Republic of Ireland based materials to keep everybody happy.

The work pack is available in two formats: it can be purchased on CD as a PDF file with the worksheets included as a separate Word file for printing off whenever you may need them; you can also buy it as an A4 folder to include the printed workpack, the worksheets and the CD version. Both represent extremely good value, but for the budget conscious the CD represents the best value, it has all the print version has to offer and you can open links to the VAI site directly or indeed to any of the other recommended sites listed in it's comprehensive glossary. But be warned, you may end up, like me, surfing to a host of new sites I hadn't come across before, and spending much longer on-line than I had anticipated!

This helpful workpack will be of use to anyone working in the youth arts field regardless of whether they are just starting out or a long established group.

The workpack can be ordered from:
Voluntary Arts Ireland, 12 English Street,
Downpatrick, BT30 6AB.
Tel: 028 44839327
Email: info@vaireland.org
Web: www.vaireland.org

It is priced at €15 for the CD and €35 for the A4 folder (print & CD) with discounts for registered supporters (voluntary groups may register free)

Mapping Lives, Exploring Futures The Mapping Art Project

Published by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Bluebell Youth Project, Rialto Youth Project, St Michael's Youth Project and Common Ground

Reviewed by Ed Carroll, Community Programmer with CityArts

Recently, I met a youth group just back from an international arts exchange involving six young people from Dublin working with artists and young people in Philadelphia. Among the group was a young person whose first experience of arts and cultural work began ten years ago in a project called Mapping. The Mapping Art Project or The Art Club as it was called by the young people involved from youth projects in Bluebell, Rialto and St Michael's, Inchicore, Dublin took place from 1997 to 2003. It was a unique project also involving the Irish Museum of Modern Art and Common Ground which enabled young people to engage with artists and artworks and focused in very positive ways on young people deploying arts and cultural work to engage with their own experience and lives.

A new book Mapping Lives Exploring Futures tells the story of this seven year initiative and illustrates what happens when youth workers and artists work collaboratively. The book contains a hundred and forty nine pages of drawings, sketches and photographs; eighty eight pages of short, punchy stakeholder texts; practical guidelines and sample templates. To my mind it is an essential reference book for any organisation, project, teacher or student interested in work with children and young people. This publication tracks how arts and cultural organisations at a particular time made real their commitment to young people which meant at times redrafting their maps of youth work and young people. The book points to a world beyond the traditional school interface and confirms the position of the artist and youth worker as an important

resource for the growth and development of the young person.

I'm refreshed by the honesty of the book and the complexity of the questions that arise when youth workers and visual arts practitioners engage together. One of the most important things that connects art, community and youth work practice is the building of relationships. Sometimes by making art not life the issue, it can happen that youth work and that essential relationship building gets left behind. There is a danger that youth workers feel somehow deskilled. Mapping Lives Exploring Futures reveals the extent of negotiation and relationship building which lay at the heart of the project.

Finally Mapping Lives Exploring Futures is a plea to policy makers to allow our youngest citizens experience the conditions whereby they can not only be participants but also co-artists and producers themselves. The publisher's recommendations direct responsibility to create a funding home for arts work with young people and children in youth work to the Arts Council. Brave work indeed. Bravo to all!

Mapping Lives, Exploring Futures is available from the bookshop at IMMA and can be downloaded at:
<http://www.imma.ie/en/downloads/mapping.pdf>



The Butterfly Effect
An Arklink Retrospective
and
The Butterfly Lands
Learning from Arklink

Published by The Ark

Reviewed by Eleanor Phillips, a visual arts practitioner who works primarily in a community context, and a Board Member of Signal Arts Centre in Bray

The Butterfly Effect and The Butterfly Lands are two publications that reflect on an arts programme for four to twelve year olds run in Fatima Mansions in a partnership between Fatima Groups United and The Ark, with funding assistance from the Irish Youth Federation and the Atlantic Philanthropies. It had been initially conceived as a three year programme but subsequently ran for five years.

The Butterfly Effect is a catalogue of work by the children, which culminated in an exhibition in the Ark in 2006. It also contains a DVD of a film the young people made. It is beautifully produced and contains comments from the children, resource workers, artists and parents. It is packed with ideas and gives a brief outline of the general themes that the children worked on over the five year period. As an aid to generating ideas for both children's organisations and artists it is very good, but first and foremost it is a beautiful and inspirational book.

The Butterfly Lands is a booklet produced by Arklink, the Ark's outreach programme, which is intended to pass on some of the learning gained and to make it available to those considering similar projects. It is a brief explanation to what must have been a well resourced programme not just in terms of people but also in terms of time. It does outline well the necessary requirements to setting up such a programme and gives weight to the time and effort needed to be

given to establishing the inter-organisational dynamics which will sustain the partnership. It talks a good deal about 'quality artistic practice' and explains the importance both of linking the children's activities with the adult world through community events and festivals and ensuring that artists should work primarily as artists, in other words be facilitated in doing what they do best.

I have to say I was green with envy when reading these two books. In my modest experience, some projects involving children or young people can be short term, poorly thought out, and make few if any links with their wider community. Rarely do they have such a key resource as a Project Manager dedicated to the role of over-seeing, understanding and facilitating both the community organisation and the artistic concerns. What is clear is that this programme could not have worked so effectively without such a resource.

These are invaluable publications for any organisation concerned with the well-being of its community and cultural democracy. If I have any criticism it is that I would like to see a broader explanation on the key qualities needed for the resource workers who get involved in such a programme. From an artist's point of view there is nothing more debilitating than working with community organisations who do not understand the value of arts work or the role of the artist in such work. Clearly this was

not the case in Fatima Mansions and I hope that these publications inspire people to create programmes like these across the country.

To purchase copies of both publications, please contact:

The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children,
 11a Eustace St., Temple Bar, Dublin 2.
 Tel: +353 (0)1 6707788



Work in Progress:**Case Studies in Participatory Arts with Young People**

A book published by the National Youth Arts Programme, NYCI

Margot Kenny, National Youth Arts Programme
Co-ordinator

'Work in Progress: Case Studies in Participatory Arts with Young People', a publication critically evaluating arts practice with young people in non-formal educational settings, was published by the National Youth Arts Programme in June 2007 and made possible through funding from the Irish Youth Foundation.

The idea for this book began early in 2005. The Certificate in Youth Arts was then nearing the end of its second year in operation and a number of issues had become apparent through conversations with students. Firstly, it was very difficult if not impossible for students to find relevant resource material describing youth arts practice in Ireland. This had been remedied to an extent through the creation of the Youth Arts Library at NYCI, but it was still painfully obvious that much of the excellent and imaginative youth arts practice happening around the country had not, at that time, been documented and published or if it had, had not been widely disseminated. Secondly, it was clear to me that the students themselves, all professional arts or youth workers, represented an untapped resource in terms of documenting good practice. Students are required to complete an art project with young people as part of the course, and amongst more than 30 projects completed at that point, all of us involved with the course were impressed by the artistic ambition and quality demonstrated in some of these, as well as an honesty and openness to learning shown by others. I wanted to initiate a project that would capture the exhilarating sense of creativity permeating this work, and at the same time provide a resource for others that

spoke to the Irish context for this work. So began what was originally conceived of as a report documenting a selection of projects completed by Certificate in Youth Arts students.

In the two years that followed, the project grew and metamorphosed into something richer and more inclusive than anticipated. Twenty people – representing diverse values, methods, art-forms, work contexts, client youth groups and levels of experience – were involved in the writing of this book. Other contributors, not associated with the Certificate in Youth Arts, were invited to write pieces for the book, so that further aspects of youth arts – the administrative and policy dimensions, the need to engage with new communities of young people, and the challenges of working in partnership – could be included. Co-editors Dr. Maurice Devlin of the National University of Ireland Maynooth and Deirdre Healy of Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts, ably guided and unified these voices. What has resulted is a collection of 10 case studies documenting the experiences of youth arts practitioners working in Ireland today.

'Work in Progress: Case Studies in Participatory Arts with Young People' is aimed at inspiring professional artists, youth workers and others who want to begin or develop their practice in using the arts with young people. It recognizes the value of arts education outside of school and of opportunities for young people who otherwise might not have that chance, to engage with the arts in a meaningful way. Here's a taste of some of the cases studies included:

• **A Day in the Life! Arts Work with Young Asylum Seekers** explores a video and photography project with young asylum seekers and refugees by Louise Walsh, a practicing artist and a lecturer at the National College of Art and Design and artist Christopher Harrington.

• **Tumbledowntown** by Owen Boss and Louise Lowe describes a major site-specific multimedia project by members of Roundabout Youth Theatre in Ballymun. This project won the Spirit of the Fringe award at the Dublin Fringe Festival.

• **Dreamtime** by Rosie McDonnell engaged a group of young boys involved with the Helping Agatha's Youth (HAY) organisation in Dublin's North Strand in a visual art project that looked at their dreams and ambitions for the future, using a range of media.

• **Rap it Up!** by Rachael Long and Melissa Monks and **No Limits: A Hip Hop Youth Arts Festival** by Eileen Vaughan and Liz Burns look at various approaches to supporting young people's avid interest in hip hop, in a way that goes beyond derivative imitation of hip-hop stars.

• **Hear No Words, See No Words, Speak No Words: A Community Youth Dance Project** by Lucy Bell and Vijaya Bateson charts the challenges of introducing contemporary dance practice and choreography to young people in Co. Kildare.

• **Alliances** examines artist Carol Kavanagh's experience in bringing together her artistic focus on horses with a desire to work with young people, which resulted in a photography project with young mothers at Cherry Orchard Equine Education and Training Centre in Ballyfermot, Dublin.

To order a copy of the publication at a cost of €10, please contact:
Deirdre Brady, National Youth Council of Ireland, 3 Montague Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 4784122, Email: Deirdre@nyci.ie

Watch This Space

Integration as Fun

IntroArt's Youth Outreach Projects

IntroArt

IntroArt is a registered charity working to support youth and adults with disabilities into their local mainstream community services. Established in 1996, IntroArt works on a nationwide basis to create awareness and understanding of the need to make services fully accessible. Statistics have indicated there are around 150,000 youth with disabilities in Ireland and the majority have to travel outside their community for education and social services.

We believe that all youth with disabilities have a right to participate and explore opportunities which are available to their 'able-bodied' peers at local level. At the core of our work is the principle of defining people by their 'ability' and 'personality' and ending marginalisation. The mainstream youth services have considerable potential to create an inclusive society where youth with disabilities are treated as equal peers.

Youth Outreach Projects

One aspect of our work is supporting youth outreach projects whose main focus is on integration. In these projects, able bodied youth and youth with disabilities have fun working together on arts activities over a number of weeks.

For example, we are currently working on projects in north inner-city Dublin and Mallow, Co. Cork. In the Macro Centre, Dublin, a facilitator is working on a children's photography project with four after-school groups. Some of the work has already been exhibited. In Mallow, the project with the Avondhu Development Group is focusing on a range of visual arts experiences. In the near future, information will be available on the outcomes of these projects.

Organising youth outreach projects is dependent on finding funding for the costs of an arts facilitator, materials and end of project event. To date, this has been sourced for example, from local authorities and HSEs. We are always available to talk to groups about our work and the issues involved and are happy to give advice and support on how a new project might be realised.

If you are interested please contact
Anthony Newsome or Aiden O'Grady at IntroArt.
Email: introart@iol.ie
Phone: 01 872 7930

Young Arts Creativity Co-operative Project

Voluntary Arts Ireland

The idea for this project arose from our work on an earlier pilot project, Young Adults & Voluntary Arts, which offered assistance to existing voluntary arts groups wanting to increase the numbers of young people in their membership. This new project is about young people having the skills and support to take the lead in establishing their own arts future – whether career, creative industry or personal development.

Young Arts Creativity Co-operatives will be youth-led, arts information and support organisations which give young people a means to engage with all areas of the arts and to represent themselves and their peers in arts policy development. The Co-ops will be shaped and run by young people. Voluntary Arts Ireland will provide training and support to help young people to set up their own Co-op.

This project is funded by the National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and will begin with a pilot in the North East of Northern Ireland with the aim of linking Co-ops to community planning initiatives. This pilot will run from late 2007–2009 and we hope that this will be a model that can be repeated in other areas.

We have established an Advisory Panel to ensure that we work alongside existing provision and reach out to all young people, especially those who are most marginalised. At the time of writing, we are consulting with young people about how the Co-op might be shaped. We hope to be in a position to support young people in the formation of a steering group to work towards setting up the Co-op later in 2007.

If you are interested in young people developing their ability to speak out and the art world's capacity to hear them, you can keep track of this initiative via our website, www.vaireland.org where there is a dedicated page – Youth Arts CC. Alternatively, you can find out more by contacting Pauline Matthew, Project Co-ordinator at Voluntary Arts Ireland. Telephone: 0784 355 6290 or pauline@vaireland.org

Voluntary Arts Ireland
12 English Street
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olive@vaireland.org
028 / 048 4483 9327

inBetween (working title)

an in2 briefing on youth arts training

As mentioned in the introduction, in2 is an annual publication which tries to reflect experience across the widespread and developing practice of youth arts and is consequently limited in exploring specific themes. However, we will shortly be periodically publishing briefing documents which enable us to investigate some areas of interest in more depth.

The first of these will look at initiatives providing training for youth workers, volunteers and artists. Developing out of current research into youth arts training, this briefing will feature past and present examples of training programmes and their impacts as well as looking at some of the related lessons and ongoing questions.

If you feel you could contribute your experience or opinion towards this first inBetween or have a suggestion for subsequent issues to focus on, please get in touch by contacting the National Youth Arts Programme at 01 4784122 or email arts@nyci.ie

Research

What is the value of participation in the arts to young people?

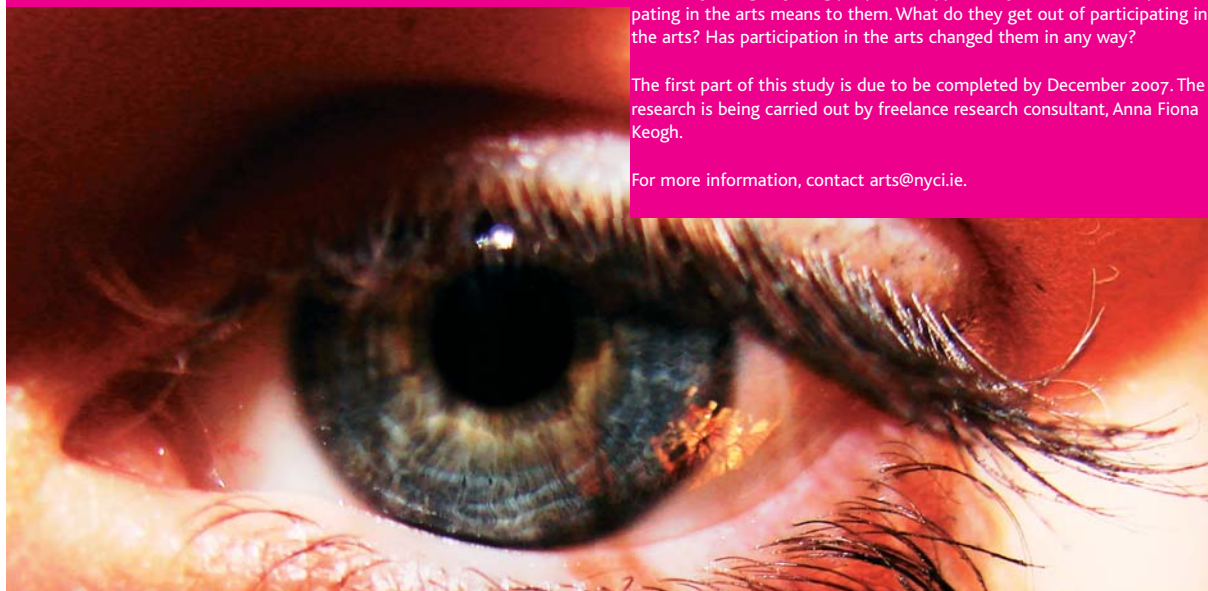
The National Youth Arts Programme has commissioned a research study involving 6 youth arts projects nationwide. 'Young People, Creative Action and Social Change' aims to assess the value of participation in the arts to young people, and to demonstrate how participation in arts practice impacts on the individual and at a societal level.

The study involves conducting in-depth research with approximately fifty young people, between the ages of ten and eighteen, involved in youth arts projects or programmes. The projects are being selected based on a number of criteria including diverse art forms and geographical location. Also, we aim for a sample which reflects the views of young people from different social backgrounds. Data collection is operating on a number of levels and includes questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews with young people and adult workers on the projects or programmes.

This study will give young people the opportunity to discuss what participating in the arts means to them. What do they get out of participating in the arts? Has participation in the arts changed them in any way?

The first part of this study is due to be completed by December 2007. The research is being carried out by freelance research consultant, Anna Fiona Keogh.

For more information, contact arts@nyci.ie.



Read all about it

Youth Arts Library

The Youth Arts Library has found a new home! The Library is a collection of reports, publications and periodicals compiled by the National Youth Arts Programme over the years as a means of supporting professional development in arts practice with young people. It has been used by students, researchers, youth workers and artists looking for specific information on youth arts practice and policy in Ireland and abroad or generally seeking to find out more about this kind of work.

Previously only available as a reference library at NYCI's offices, the library has now been relocated to the Irish Youth Work Centre (IYWC), an initiative of Youth Work Ireland, based at the Youth Work Ireland offices, 20 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin 1. The Centre provides an information, library and training supports service to youth and community workers throughout the country. It acts as a one-stop research and documentation centre developed to respond to the varied information, research and training support needs of those who work in the field and is the leading information and resource centre for youth related issues in Ireland.

Becoming part of the IYWC means that publications within the youth arts library will now be available on loan to members of the Irish Youth Work Centre. Members can borrow up to four items on loan for a period of two weeks. For members outside of Dublin, items can be posted out with the members incurring the charges if significant. The Youth Arts Library publications will be included in the searchable database and online catalogue available on the Youth Work Centre website at <http://www.iywc.com/indexa.htm> allowing members and others to check what is available before visiting or contacting the centre. For those who don't want to become members, the library is also accessible through the IYWC Research & Study Facility which is run in conjunction with the IYWC library and provides an ideal location to access reports, publications, government legislation, training materials & periodicals within the peaceful surrounds of a modern study area.

For further information on how to become a member of the Irish Youth Work Centre and/or access the Youth Arts Library please contact Fran Bissett or Gina Halpin at Tel: 01 8729933, Fax: 01 8724183 or Email: fbissett@youthworkireland.ie and ghalpin@youthworkireland.ie

The Art of the Possible

The Art of the Possible

[Continued from page 31]

In Freedom

Setting aside the weighty work of professional development and policy making for a moment, what do we actually know about how young people currently engage with art and culture, particularly outside of formal education? Research data indicates that young people in Ireland participate widely in the arts through attendance at events and recreationally as a hobby.^{1,2} Currently, there are no statistics on how many young people participate regularly in the arts through non-formal education, although anecdotal evidence appears to show that it is significant in scale and growing.

It is interesting to note how many young people list music and art as their hobbies, reminding us that participation in the arts can be a very personal and private activity, not dependent on adult organized and directed activities. Many young people are actively involved either through their own personal interest and initiative, or as a result of parental influence, family activities, private classes etc. We mustn't forget about this, obvious as it sounds. Young people are engaging as consumers and/or producers, without any special adult intervention to mediate or direct their experience of the arts. This is evident in the proliferation of bands and young people who write, paint, make films, etc. alone or with their friends. Through websites such as Youtube, Myspace and Bebo, they can display their work and share interests with others, without the need for adult approval or permission. It is important that we don't disregard this free range activity, because freedom to act independently and according to one's own inner voice is an essential part of the artistic process. Imposing rigid structures that 'legislate' for arts risks contradicting its very purpose and nature, and stifling what is essentially an activity that breaks boundaries. Structures need to be flexible and responsive to change, in order that creative freedom can flourish within them. Embracing the right to freedom requires a shift in culture which may be more challenging than we are prepared to admit. This is possibly less due to the sharing of power with young people it suggests and more due to the release of judgment it demands. Yes, we may not like those homemade horror videos or teacher/parent parodies, but if we mean what we say about encouraging creativity and listening to what young people have to say, we may just have to stomach them... to begin with, at least!

Accepting that young people are capable of independent action and responsibility, that they may need to process feelings and ideas without censoring them, and that with the advent of the internet and mobile phones they can subvert and sidestep adult control anyway, is not something that we can easily be comfortable with, especially when we are professionally involved in educating and directing young people, and/or the services that are provided for them. Regardless of what we adults put in place, young

people will find ways themselves to be creative, and this creativity may take irreverent forms that we would not have devised ourselves. Yet we must still consider how to support and guide that freedom of thought and action, both within and outside of the structured and organized educational activities and programmes that exist. For example, we could extend the timeframe for arts projects so that young people's creativity can unfold naturally, with integrity; we could allow young people direct access to funding; we could invite them to programme activities in buildings and spaces they share ownership of; we could let them speak for themselves in places where they will be heard, rather than speaking for them; and crucially we could take care to see that we act in their best interests not ours, with whatever additional headaches that may entail!

Possible?

If you have been dipping in and out of other articles in In2 while reading this, and I hope you have, you'll have noticed how many of them in their own way illustrate the issues and challenges I've been talking about.

The first challenge is to stay connected to our own inner artist and personal creativity. That requires constant feeding of our artistic self, through keeping in touch with what is happening in the arts, attending events, learning new skills, meeting artists, finding things we can enjoy. Some of the articles written by young people, such as Seamus Redmond's account of his experiences with Bui Bolg and Michelle Tuite's interview with artist Sandra Meehan, remind us how exciting this can be and what can be gained from it.

Connecting with our artistic self brings a second challenge which is to remember what art is for and why it's relevant. Meaning is a personal matter that will be different for everyone, but without a belief that the arts have some inherent value, and clarity on what that value is, we cannot

convince others to take part in or support the arts. The article 'Mansions of the Imagination' and Erin Fox's interview with Patti Smith outline some inspiring individual perspectives on meanings and purposes for art.

In reconsidering our definition of 'youth arts', and how that either limits or expands what we can do with it, many of the articles here demonstrate new and fresh approaches. We need to be ambitious for young people, to present participation in the arts as something that can progress all the way to professional level activity, and not take an 'anything will do' attitude. For an account of how this is being done in one organization, read 'The Young Model Project'. We also need to recognize that 'youth arts' is something that can be independently led by young people. 'The Ideal Homes Show' piece highlights how the youth drama model fosters this independence, preparing young people for professional artistic careers.

But the most pressing issue right now is agreeing where we go from here and how we can make that journey together. Strengthening connections between various sectors to enhance provision has already begun and with further integration and crosscutting, will significantly improve what we can offer young people. Possibly all of the initiatives reported in this issue of In2 rely on effective partnerships and communication between stakeholders with widely differing agendas, to succeed.

Finally, without listening to young people and respecting what they bring to us, the notion of 'youth arts' is inauthentic and potentially meaningless to those it is meant for. Connecting back to young people regularly, paying attention to how they are engaging and what they need and want, is at the heart of this work and must drive our decision making processes. Everything is possible, if we truly believe it and translate those beliefs into actions.

- 1 See 'Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning', ed. Edward B. Fiske, Arts Education Partnership, 1999, a major research study carried out in the US. Download it at <http://aep-arts.org>
- 2 The Public and the Arts, Hibernian Consulting, The Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Dublin, 2006
- 3 Ibid, p.4-5
- 4 "Most of those consulted (30%) when asked their priorities for arts spending, gave as their first preference Arts programmes and facilities dedicated to working for and with children and young people. The two other main options chosen by people related to local, amateur and community-based arts, and programmes targeting areas of social disadvantage." Ibid, p.7
- 5 Youth Work Act 2001, download at http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/act_42_2001.pdf?language=EN National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007, published by the Stationery Office, 2003. Download at http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/ya_nydp_03_07.pdf?language=EN
- 6 P.16, Partnership for the Arts Strategy, The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Dublin, December 2005
- 7 Ibid, p.17
- 8 Ibid, p.21
- 9 'Towards 2016 Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015' can be downloaded from <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=181&docID=2755>
- 10 'National Development Plan 2007-2013' can be downloaded from http://www.ndp.ie/docs/NDP_Homepage/1131.htm
- 11 'Teenspace: National Recreation Policy for Young People', Office of the Minister for Children, September 2007. Download at http://omc.fusio.net/documents/publications/TEENSPACE_Report_ENG.pdf
- 12 'Young People's Views about Opportunities, Barriers and Supports to Recreation and Leisure', Dr. Áine de Rúiste and Ms. Joan Dinneen, Department of Social and General Studies, Cork Institute of Technology, a research report on behalf of the National Children's Office, December 2005. Download at http://www.omc.gov.ie/documents/publications/Summary_Recreation_ResearchFINAL.pdf

TUNE IN2 THE NEXT ISSUE

- Do you have something to say on youth arts?
- Have you been involved in youth arts project that we can profile in in2?
- Are there any particular issues or themes in2 should examine in future editions?

Or, if you just want to respond, challenge, debate or generally comment on any of the articles or opinions expressed in this issue, then contact us at: in2@nyci.ie

in2 is the annual publication of the National Youth Arts Programme. If you would like to receive the next edition, please complete and return to:

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www.youtharts.ie**

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