



Centre: NICE North East

Adviser(s): Nicola Parkin and Vicky Holbrough

Context

The NICE programme (Next steps In Creative Experience) works across Tees Valley and is based in Middlesbrough. NICE aims to bridge the gap in creative education and engagement for young people who have a desire to explore their potential as arts professionals. The two advisers worked with 6 early stage artists aged between 19-25 years old for six months to help them to develop their skills and confidence as practising artists, using Gold Arts Award as the structure for delivery. The participants ('Nicers') included both recent graduates and those not in education, employment or training.

Approach

NICE was supported by Navigator North throughout the programme, who provided studio space and access to creative contacts and networks within a creative setting - Dundas House, Middlesbrough. Other organisations linked with NICE were East Street Arts, Skimstone Arts, Tees Valley Arts, Bridge North East and Mima Creative Apprentices.

The Nicers received mentoring from professional artists, peer support, shared studio space to develop their practice and learn new skills, networking opportunities and organised visits, professional skills development sessions and support to devise and deliver their own events. They adopted an individual approach to working and documenting their journey. This included online blogging, social media and a variety of portfolio formats.

A successful application to Arts Award Access Fund provided Nicers with the opportunity to visit East Street Arts, a key arts organisation based in Leeds, as well as additional support with Gold Arts Award and a skills development session with a photographer.

Examples of Unit 1 - Personal Arts Development included: developing new skills in sculpture, combining illustration and embroidery and learning complementary printmaking techniques. Nicers also gained hands on experience within participatory settings, work shadowing artists, volunteering and training. Opportunities for debate included organised conversations with similar peer groups such as Skimstone Young Artist Collective, as well as online discussion. The Nicers reviewed key visits and events and explored potential options for future development.

Examples of Unit 2 - Arts Leadership included the design and delivery of inter-

studio critique sessions - CrossCrit, organisation and running of life drawing sessions, programmes of workshops and a curated exhibition.

Impact

All Nicers completed the programme from start to finish and successfully achieved Gold Arts Award. They have since gone on to further develop their practice and become arts professionals in varying degrees within their individual fields.

Paul had previously completed an arts degree but had not found the experience beneficial or right for him for various reasons. During the NICE programme he demonstrated a particular drive and enthusiasm for developing his own practice and learning through Gold Arts Award. Since finishing NICE, Paul has gone on to develop his own professional practice and secured paid opportunities and funding to run arts projects of his own. NICE programme leaders are currently working with Paul in the development of further NICE activity.

Comments



From NICE participants:

'It's been good for finding the ways in and how to be a professional. When I first started NICE I had always struggled to say that I was an artist, where as now I say that I am an artist and really feel that and believe it.'

'Confidence and actual working as an artist is the main thing. I feel like it's accessible again.'

'At the very beginning there was a lot of self doubt, and now I feel like I've got all of the tools to go and work in the industry.'

Advisers' suggestions:

The advisers suggest that *'centres use Arts Award to enhance your activity, but make use of it in your own way to complement what you are doing in the planning and delivery. Ensure that participants can have their own voice and take ownership of their*

own learning. This is usually evident at the moderation stage when looking at their portfolios.'

NICE Portraits grid photo by Jason Hynes