



Centre: Staffordshire Libraries

Adviser: Liz Gardner

Level: Explore

Context

This Explore project took place at Cannock, Rugeley and Norton Canes libraries, which ran Arts Award Clubs for children aged 7-10 years alongside the Summer Reading Challenge. In order to complete Explore, Club members had to attend three activities, go on a trip and attend two support sessions across the summer holidays.

'I liked it that you could choose what workshops you wanted to do and you didn't have to do all of them and they were spread out so my mum and dad were able to bring me and it didn't mean I couldn't do it because my brother had to be somewhere or we were away or anything.' (Alyssa, 9)

The Arts Award Clubs were run by Liz Gardner and Lisa Dyke, Library Development Officers with Staffordshire Libraries. Library supervisors and assistants in the three target libraries developed and delivered some activities with additional arts practitioners bought in to provide enhanced activities. Some sessions at Rugeley Library were developed and delivered by Young Volunteers as part of their skills development in project management. The enthusiasm of library staff and volunteers is always key to getting the children involved in the Summer Reading Challenge and they were equally strong in their advocacy of the Arts Award Clubs.

'Running Arts Award at Explore level alongside the Summer Reading Challenge helps to engage the 8-10 year old age group in completing the Summer Reading Challenge - by this age many of the children will have done it two or three years in a row and are not interested in it. As part of their Arts Award work it has relevance again to them' – Arts Award adviser Liz Gardner

Approach

The Clubs were marketed to schools, Looked After and home educated children. 12 places were available at each Club in order for the libraries to have enough time and attention for each child. Over 500 children were interested and the libraries worked with the schools and other agencies to ensure places were given to children who would most benefit from them.

The project started with an introductory session about Arts Award Explore and what they would be doing. There were a range of free craft and reader development activities available to all local children as part of the Summer Reading Challenge, and Arts Award Club participants took part in at least three of these as well as a trip to Shirehall Gallery, Stafford and a cultural excursion for families to the Southside Outdoor Arts Festival in Birmingham (funded by the Library Ambassadors scheme, through Birmingham Hippodrome).



For Part A, **inspire**, the children took part in a Dragon Creation workshop with artist Lisa Westmorland and a drama workshop with Take A Hint Theatre. With Lisa they learned to use mixed media to create collages, making a dragon collage for the library window, and how to make junk modelled dragons and fantasy creatures to take home.

'All the activities were great and not confusing like at school sometimes. I wasn't afraid to ask about things and they always made me feel proud of what I'd done. I really liked it and I want to do Bronze when I'm old enough' (Alexander, 10)

For Part B, **explore**, Club members explored the library as a cultural organisation. This involved a tour of the library and an exploration of what it offers – more than just books! – and culminated in the creation of individual collages for their arts logs. The young people were asked to see how many times they could spot the logos of partnership organisations during the summer so that they could see how the 'cultural web' of different arts organisations fitted together. The group also visited the Rob Pointon exhibition at Shirehall Gallery in Stafford and explored the architecture of the listed building.

Liz and Lisa wanted Club members to feel a personal connection to the artist they chose to explore. Some chose to focus on Rob Pointon, while others focused on artists whose work they already knew, including Van Gogh, singer Ella Fitzgerald and Staffordshire sculptor Michael Talbot. Others found artists that mattered to them during the activity programme, for example local artists Julia Jowett and Michael Knowles, and cabaret performer Christopher Green, who the group worked with in his guise as pensioner rapper Ida Barr at the Southside Outdoor Arts Festival.

Families were encouraged to support Part B and the library also offered additional support sessions if required.

'It was weird having people wanting me to say what I thought about things and talk about what I'd been doing and making. It was good to be able to and not have anyone make fun of you or tell you to shut up and that they listened.' (Jack 10)

The children used the techniques they had learned in Lisa's workshop and inspiration from the drama workshop for Part C, **create**. They thought up their own story based on local myths and legends, then worked together to create a mixed media and wire tree to depict the key themes of their story. They were then supported to perform their story to a group of friends and family. The key to this part was to make sure the young people were developing and demonstrating their own artistic skills as a team and that there was minimal adult interference in the end product.

Part D, **present**, was completed through 'end of project' mini exhibitions / celebration parties at the end of August at each of the libraries involved. The Club members brought along all the work they had created during the summer and anything else they wanted to showcase as part of the project, such as photographs and audio or video clips of the activities they had taken part in or their reviews of them. They decorated their own table on which to display their work and wrote on large cards three words that described their Arts Award experience.

Visitors to the library, family and friends were invited to see the exhibits and talk to the young people about their Arts Award experiences. The Club members provided feedback on each other's work and all visitors were encouraged to provide written feedback comments for each table which were then used as log book evidence.

Young people were encouraged to share their work with their teachers and class mates at the start of term to get additional feedback and showcase their summer achievements.

During the first two weeks of the new term, Club members were invited to a final support session to make sure that their log book was complete and to tackle any areas that lacked enough evidence, and the libraries had set a log book hand-in date in advance to allow time for assessment.

The project was part funded through the Arts Award Access Fund, which covered artists' costs and travel to Shirehall Gallery.

Impact

Being a member of Arts Award Club and achieving Explore increased the children's self confidence and belief in their own abilities, which were further enhanced through achieving a qualification:

'I don't like school and don't do well so I didn't want to do this but my teacher said I should so mum agreed and I came along. I've had loads of fun and made new friends and I got a qualification! It's going to be cool to show my dad when I next see him. He says he's proud of me.' - Owen 8

It also had an impact on some children's attitude at school:

'It's different at school now I've done Arts Award. I listen more and I think more and I say what I think more. I know that I'm not stupid now and other people do too. My teacher says my work is better and she is pleased that I ask for help now when I need it instead of getting angry or messing about' - Harry, 9

Arts Award adviser Liz Gardner highlights the importance of engaging the families as well as the children so that they have a whole family experience, which can also have knock-on effects:

'My mum wouldn't bring me to the library before but she brings me and my brothers every week now and we love it. I come to Lego Club every month now and if there's stuff on at the library we can come. She reads with us more too and we do more making stuff at home together.' - Jack 10

Here is some advice from Liz for advisers thinking of offering Arts Award:

- Have a strong structure for the Arts Award project and be clear from the outset what is involved so that parents / carers can make informed decisions with their children about taking part. This doesn't mean you have to be regimented or restrictive, just that you have a plan so that all the young people involved stay on track.
- Work with schools and other agencies to get children involved who are from hard to reach or difficult to engage families so that your project really makes a difference. Keep the schools engaged when term restarts so that they can also provide support.
- Put in place plans for progression routes - the children in our group who were 10 have now turned 11 and are working on their Arts Award Bronze. The younger children have taken part in other reader development and cultural projects and continue to be offered these opportunities with their families.
- Factor in time at the end of the project for one-on-one and group time with the young people to complete their log books. This is especially important when they may not have much support or input at home.
- Give yourself a realistic timetable for getting the log books finished and back with you and plenty of time to complete the assessment.

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