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Young Lives Production – Multi-media project

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Adfam is the national charity working to improve life for families affected by drugs or alcohol.

Our vision

We want anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use to have the chance to benefit from healthy relationships, be part of a loving and supportive family and enjoy mental and physical wellbeing.

Our mission

Drug and alcohol use can threaten and ultimately destroy family relationships and wellbeing. We empower family members and carers, support frontline workers and influence decision-makers to stop this happening.

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Others: Zahra Maalow (manager) and her team at Forest Gate Youth Zone, Jamal Khan (Spoken Word Artist) and Salmagundi Films

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Find out more at alcoholchange.org.uk.

Opinions and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors.

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Executive summary

Original aim –

To produce a high-quality on-line support resource for children and young people affected by parental substance misuse. The resource will be developed, and produced, with the engagement and involvement of young people.

Amended aim –

After consultation with Fotosynthesis (a participatory photography organisation), and meeting young people in Newham, it was decided a photography project may not be suitable as the young people did not feel comfortable creating work related to parental substance misuse. We decided against this approach as the programme lacked flexibility. It will take time to build rapport with young people, and encourage them to commit to the project.

Although we aim to recruit young people affected by someone else's substance misuse, we are also mindful of other factors that may impact them. For example, cultural barriers, exam pressure, physiological changes, relationships (families, friends & professionals) and so on. Finding ways of communicating, processing and dealing with life's complexities has been valuable in allowing the young people to find a positive outlet for their issues and showing them that creative activities can be a valuable outlet for troubling thoughts, feelings and challenges. Additionally for many young people substances have become normalised and they are desensitised to them being 'problematic', so focusing on dealing with issues they feel relevant has developed their generic coping skills, communication skills, confidence and resilience.

We therefore decided to go with Salmagundi Films as they are a local organisation based in Newham. They seemed familiar with the issues, and the dynamics of the area.

Salmagundi Films is a not for profit arts organisation founded in 2004 by Zoe Flynn and Bo Chapman and based in Stratford, Newham. They have worked with people of all ages and abilities and those at risk of exclusion, using film and stop-frame animation as a platform for creative expression - to give people a voice. Their approach seemed fluid, creative and modern which would appeal to the young people

Method

Young people will be using iPads, and filming equipment to create their own movie. The first 4 sessions will be on introducing techniques and familiarising with the app. This includes creating self-portraits. If a member drops out, a new member can attend without missing out on anything. This also gives young people flexibility. The second 8 sessions will be used to create a movie. These sessions will require commitment. In between the sessions there will be discussion groups to explore topics of interest, and poetry sessions to encourage creative writing.

Findings

- 1 A larger number of young people engaged with sessions when commitment was not required. The most popular sessions were discussion groups whereby the main focus was on issues young people felt passionate about. This included hierarchy within schools, not feeling respected, women's rights, men's rights, unisex toilets (lack of privacy, having to wait to go home to use the toilet, period shaming), bullying, and mental health and so on. Other popular sessions included poetry with a 'Spoken Word' artist. Young people created poetry on domestic violence, racism, inequality and family relationships.
- 2 The self-portrait sessions with Salmagundi films went down well but the young men in the session found it difficult to focus. Gradually the young men in the session dropped out, only the young women continued to participate.
- 3 9 young people continued with the filming sessions – learning techniques, and created short clips.
- 4 An incident took place at the venue resulting in the venue temporarily being closed down. Therefore a different venue was arranged to continue the sessions. Unfortunately, 3 more young people dropped out due to the change of location.
- 5 6 young people completed majority of the sessions, and were able to create a movie. They have named themselves 'Young Lives Production'. A film screening event took place on 19.02.19. There were 55 people in attendance (20 adults, 35 young people).

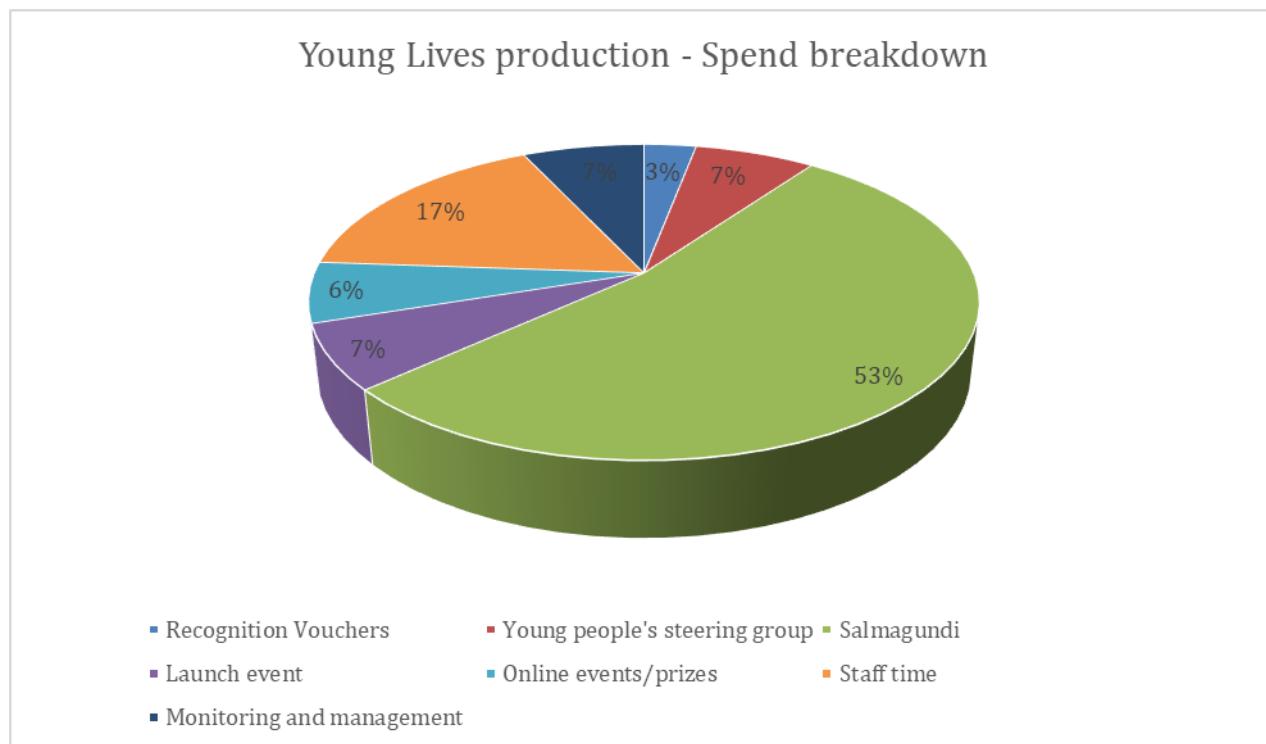
Conclusion

The sessions were more successful when kept open, and did not focus on 'substance misuse'. Many young people shared their experiences naturally when a 'label' was not mentioned. This may be due to young people feeling 'desensitised', and substance misuse being 'the norm' in the area due to high gang and knife crimes in the borough. Others perhaps out of loyalty for their parents. Once the label 'substance misuse' was removed, young people engaged well. However, they were not able to commit for difference reasons, which included: having to return home at a certain time, change of venue, or preferred other activities (e.g. football, going to the park). One of the main reasons also identified was when a friend did not want to be part of the group, and laughed at the one that did resulted in both young people leaving. There also seemed to be a gender difference. The sessions started off mixed male and female but as the sessions went on only the female young people remained. However, prior to starting the session having a warm meal around the table and engaging in general conversation made young people feel safe and comfortable. Refreshments was also an incentive that encouraged young people to engage in the session.

However, the young people who committed to the project enjoyed the creativity and learning new skills. After the project ended young people have stated they will continue to write poetry to express themselves, and will explore other creative platform such as

music and drama. Young people were provided notebooks with a positive quote imprinted on the front to encourage them to continue writing

Finances



Recommendations

Young people (aged 11-16 years old) demonstrated stronger engagement when using a creative approach. By creating an environment where young people feel assured they can speak freely without repercussions led to more fruitful conversations.

Here are a few quotes from the young people:

"My favourite part was getting into me more, putting everything together and then watching it all in one piece" [YP aged 14]

"Best bit was basically being with people that have turned from strangers into family....really brought all of us together" [YP aged 15]

"It's inspired me, and made me learn" [YP aged 14]

"Got to think outside the box" [YP aged 15]

"This group has inspired me to dream big" (YP aged 12]

Conclusion

Our weekly youth club encouraged young people to express themselves in creative ways. Formal discussions tended to make young people more cautious, whereas creativity encouraged young people to express themselves more naturally. Being creative also helped identify young people who were affected by a loved one's substance misuse but were not aware due to being desensitised, and normalising their situation.

'Substance misuse' was a label which young people did not relate to. The most popular session was a discussion group focused on different issues young people felt strongly about such as racism, unisex toilets and not feeling heard so on. Young people were sharing their views with one another, and occasionally debated. At the end they either felt like they learnt something new, or reassured by other young people's views were similar to their own. Creative writing with a 'Spoken Word' artist helped put those views into words. Young people were provided with notebooks with positive quotes imprinted on them to encourage them to continue to write. Finally, we utilized Salmagundi's services to create movies based on the poems using stop-frame animation.

References

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