

Project Dinosaur: Using Arts Award with young people in hospital



The People

Oxford University Museum of Natural History
The Highfield Unit, Oxford
Oxfordshire Hospital School

The Project

The aim of this project was to connect the Museum of Natural History to a group of young people who would not otherwise be able to access its collections. By building Arts Award into the project, it enabled young people to build on their existing skills and gain accreditation during their stay in hospital.

The Oxford University Museums and Collections have been working with The Highfield Unit in Oxford regularly since 2011 – roughly 6 times a year. However, 'Project Dinosaur' was the first intense project planned and delivered as a partnership and it seemed logical to try and include delivery of Arts Award as a beneficial addition for the young participants.

The project was planned and delivered by Nicola Bird (Outreach Officer), Chris Jarvis (Education Officer) and Tina Pegg (Teacher) from Oxford Hospital School. The project ran over 5 consecutive weeks in Autumn 2013. Each week, museum staff created a 'Pop Up Museum' at the Highfield Unit Oxford using handling collections from the Museum of Natural History. The young people were able to directly investigate a number of specimens and worked on artistic and creative responses to these in a number of ways relating to the history and interpretation of the objects.

Staff devised 5 self-contained creative sessions – one for each week of the project:

- Fossils and Formation
- Drawing Cartoon Dinosaurs
- The Colours of Dinosaurs
- The Sounds of Dinosaurs
- Building Behaviour

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Tina Pegg, Hospital School

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Each session began with a 30-minute exploration and discussion of the topic with presentations and handling sessions led by museum staff. There would then be a 60-90 minute creative activity that would develop the ideas from the discussion. Creative responses included: drawing with squid ink, making modroc casts, cartoon drawings, textiles work, recording a Jurassic soundtrack (using recording equipment at the Highfield Unit Oxford) and clay sculpture.

Each session was self-contained to enable the young people to feel a sense of achievement in the completion of a task. This also meant that it did not matter if a young person missed a session because it would be a new topic/activity the following week and they wouldn't have to feel under pressure to catch up or feel left behind.

The young people recorded their work on separate portfolio sheets during each session. This allowed them to work at their own pace and express themselves individually. One member of staff (usually Tina Pegg or Nicola Bird) took charge of recording each session by taking photographs and noting down the progress the young people were making. This enabled evidence to be collected as the project progressed and allowed the young people to fully engage with each session and later on choose which images and evidence to include in their portfolio.

Successes

We were delighted that the project enabled three young people to gain their Bronze Arts Award, and 12 young people to gain their Discover Arts Award. In addition to this, there were a number of successes relating to the young people's wellbeing.

- The project was planned to encourage interaction between the participants and the

young people really benefited from talking to and being able to help each other.

- The project created a really positive 'feel-good factor' on the ward by enabling them to support each other and acknowledge their successes.
- The young people felt a real sense of commitment to the project and were keen to attend as many sessions as they could.
- Their engagement was evident and the young people frequently asked if they could extend their Arts Award work outside of the sessions, asking Highfield staff for additional 'Arts Award time'.
- Originally we had planned to only offer the Discovery Award but three of the young people showed such commitment through the creation of additional work beyond the core sessions that staff felt they could submit a portfolio that satisfied the Bronze criteria.
- This enjoyment and purpose led to an increased feeling of self-worth for the young people involved, which stayed with them beyond the duration of the project. A number of young people expressed interest in gaining Arts Award because it gave them the opportunity to achieve an accreditation whilst they were in hospital that they could build on once they were discharged.
- The Highfield staff were hugely supportive of the project and the Arts Award element and were delighted that after the *Dinosaur Communication* session, the whole group came together to work collaboratively. In the new recording studio, they used a range of different instruments (including voices) to record a *Jurassic Soundtrack* which was then played at the re-opening of the Museum of Natural History in February 2014. This then inspired three young people to team up to write and perform a song for their Bronze Arts Award.
- The success of this project has led to further visits and collaborations and importantly, a further 'intense' project is planned for 2015.

I really enjoyed the Arts Award. It was fun and gave me motivation to draw and to be able to teach someone else something I'd learned.



A young participant

One of the most rewarding aspects was seeing students helping each other and teaching new skills to their friends.



Tina Pegg, Hospital School

Challenges

- It can be difficult to plan a project working with young people who at times may be too unwell or unable to participate. Equally, some young people were well enough to be discharged during the project and could not complete many sessions. Working in partnership with the Hospital School staff helps manage these situations and enables young people to participate as fully as they are able to and achieve their Arts Award certificates.
- Museum staff needed to do additional planning in order to enable young people to achieve a Bronze Award. The young people were unable to make a conventional visit to the Museum of Natural History so they accessed the online virtual museum tour and a leaflet for the 'Pop Up Museum' to satisfy this element of the Award.
- The certificates take a long time to arrive from Arts Award and this means that the momentum of the success the young people have achieved is disrupted. It would have been great to round off the project by presenting the certificates to all the participants together and celebrate their learning by doing so.

Learning – influence on future approaches

We learnt a huge amount from delivering this project and will build our learning in to future projects and delivery. Nicola Bird shared the project as a case study at the Arts Award in Health Care Settings seminar on June 19th 2014. Our key learning points were as follows – we hope this might act as useful insight for others carrying out similar projects:

- This project benefited from having self-contained sessions so every participant was able to feel they had been successful and completed a creative task.
- Working in partnership with the Highfield staff was crucial to managing the project. Highfield

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Chris Jarvis, Education Officer & Arts Award adviser

staff were able to help young people complete their Awards by providing extra time and resources and enabling young people who had missed sessions to continue to feel involved in the project.

- It is easy for young people to miss out recording evidence clearly. Highfield teaching staff helped gather evidence for portfolios by interviewing students and ensuring that evidence was written down outside of the weekly 'Pop Up Museum' sessions.
- Whilst planning the content of each session it is necessary to plan what evidence needs to be collected for Arts Award. Having a clear plan of how evidence will be collected makes creating portfolios, which meet the Arts Award criteria much easier.
- Having a member of staff who focuses on collecting evidence each session is crucial.

What's Next?

Nicola Bird (Outreach Officer) and Tina Pegg (Oxford Hospital School teacher) are already planning a future Arts Award project linking the Ashmolean and The Highfield Unit Oxford. The project will focus on the work of the artist Manet and will look at painting, creative writing, fashion and digital art inspired by his work. The project will be longer in duration (lasting between 10-12 weeks).

Each week, Nicola will work with young people at the Highfield Unit Oxford for half a day and half a day of PSHE time (or equivalent) will be devoted to the project. The project will include at least one visit to the Ashmolean and culminate in an exhibition of the young peoples' artwork in Spring 2015. The aim is for all young people involved to receive their Bronze Arts Award, but if some are unable to do this, we plan to collect evidence for a Discover or Explore Award.

Quotations

“Students who struggled to engage suddenly found an interest and a motivation that really aided their recovery. As their interest increased, they started to ask for extra sessions to work on their Arts Award. One of the most rewarding aspects was seeing

students helping each other and teaching new skills to their friends. The sessions with the museum really created a buzz of excitement. Students even arrived on time!” – Tina Pegg (Hospital School staff member)

“I really enjoyed the Arts Award. My favourite part was the cartoon drawings of the dinosaurs. I enjoyed it because it was fun and gave me some motivation to be able to draw something spectacular. Also I taught the cartoon drawings to Tom – it went really well and I did a step-by-step guide and it was an amazing experience, to be able to teach someone something you've just learned.” – A young participant

“The project made a great impact on our reopening. Underneath our T-rex, the public were treated to the amazing dinosaur noises, which the Highfield students produced as part of their Arts Award, at full volume. The reaction was fantastic.” – Chris Jarvis, Education Officer & Arts Award Adviser.

Credits

Written by: Miranda Millward, Arts Award Coordinator for Oxford University Museums

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Edited by: Laura J. Smith
Artswork
laura@artswork.org.uk

www.artswork.org.uk

