

What's the point?

Using drama to engage
young people at risk





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Contents

Contents	4	Section 1 Background and aims	12
		1.1 Report aims and objectives	14
Foreword	6	1.2 Project summary and rationale	15
Acknowledgements	7	Section 2 Context and research	18
		2.1 Arts and young people context	20
Executive summary	8	2.1.1 Project partners	20
		2.1.2 Planning and project delivery	22
		2.2 Policy and programme context	25
		2.2.1 Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)	25
		2.2.2 Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) delivery	26
		2.2.3 The Plus Strategy	27
		2.2.4 Arts Enrichment programmes	27
		2.3 Research	28
		2.3.1 Research design	28
		2.3.2 Research criteria and methodologies	29
		2.3.3 Research constraints and issues	31

Section 3 Findings	34	Section 4 Conclusions	62
3.1 Attitudinal shifts in young people	36	4.1 Key outcomes	64
3.1.1 Attitudinal shifts in young people towards key workers	36	4.2 Impact of the logistics of project design	64
3.1.2 Attitudinal shifts in young people towards writing	39	4.3 Key worker involvement	65
3.2 Development of Emotional Literacy skills	42	Section 5 Recommendations	66
3.2.1 Emotional literacy	43	5.1 Key planning and structure factors	68
3.2.2 Communication Skills	44	5.2 Skills and expertise of the arts (drama) facilitators	68
3.2.3 Developing Group Working Skills	46	5.3 Levels of key worker involvement	69
3.2.4 Application of Enrichment materials in relation to Emotional Literacy	48	5.4 Effective liaison and planning between partners	69
3.2.5 Conflict and achievement	48	Bibliography	70
3.3 Key worker attitudes and expectations	51	Appendix	72
3.3.1 Attitudes towards young people	51		
3.3.2 Development of relationships with young people	52		
3.4 How using the arts can meet key objectives within PAYP	54		
3.4.1 Evidence	55		
3.4.2 Practice	56		
3.5 Progression routes and legacy	59		

Foreword

School productions, art classes, playing an instrument, dancing; these are all activities you can love or hate!

Participation is often compulsory with the focus on product rather than process. Barriers around confidence, self-esteem, not wanting to look a fool prevent so many of our young people from taking that first step out of their comfort zones.

There is so much that goes on beneath the surface of any activity associated with the arts: encouraging creativity, supporting mutual participation, learning respect and tolerance for the opinions and ideas of others, developing communication skills, the list is endless. These are the key areas integral to our work with young people.

I am delighted to have been asked to write the foreword for this piece of research. The project proved immensely rewarding to the young people who experienced it and its legacy will benefit

so many, many more. The artists, key workers and participants proved to be sources of inspiration to one another and, through their interactions, learned new life skills beneficial to their ongoing development.

Our young people have so much to offer as they make their way in life. It is for us to explore with them as many avenues as possible to enable them to realise their full potential.

Graham Helm

PAYP Coordinator

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Acknowledgements

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The research team would like to thank all those who were involved with the study for their support and commitment, with special thanks to the key workers from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Recreation and Play Services for their enthusiasm and good humour during the two-week programme. We would also like to thank the drama facilitators from TiPP (Theatre in Prisons and Probation) for integrating the research process so seamlessly into the project delivery. TiPP succeeded in managing the project to meet both the aims of the project partners and most importantly the young people who participated.

In particular we acknowledge the effort and commitment of the young people involved in the programme. The study would not have been possible without their willingness to share their views and perspectives with us.

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a case study of a drama based Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) programme. The programme was delivered as part of the wider Arts Enrichment programme, designed to be used in conjunction with the PLUS strategy.

Background and aims

The overall aim of the project was to stimulate the use of the arts in PAYP regionally and nationally through research, evaluation and dissemination of a demonstration project delivering an Arts Enrichment programme through PAYP with young people at risk. This report assesses the overall effectiveness of the drama programme in engaging socially excluded young people and enhancing the skills they need to re-engage in education or training. The report evaluates attitudinal shifts of participants to key workers and other adults, focusing particularly on communication and group work skills.

Context

The report was commissioned by Arts Council England, North West together with Government Office North West and was carried out by researchers from Liverpool Hope University.

The project works within the following key national programmes and strategies:

- PAYP aims to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour both in the short and long term, support young people back into education or training and help them stay there, by working with those at risk of truancy
- PLUS is part of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Skills for Life strategy, and is funded jointly by DfES, Youth Justice Board and Arts Council England
- a series of Arts Enrichment programmes have been developed as a resource to support delivery of the PLUS Strategy ¹

¹ For information on the PLUS strategy and its publications and Enrichment Training, contact the PLUS Strategy team on 020 3008 8705 or email plusinformation@ecotec.co.uk

Research

The steering group partners acknowledged that data drawn from one small case study could not be presented as statistically significant. The range of identified criteria, the nature of the arts based project, coupled with the needs of the young people participating clarified the need for a range of appropriate and creative qualitative methodologies to be implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of the key aspect of this pilot project.

Findings

The key outcomes of this study are:

- participants' attitudes to key workers and other adults involved in the study underwent a positive change
- participants' attitude to group work improved significantly during the project – by the end of the project a strong group bond had formed
- all participants had contributed to the group process and had worked well with key workers, other adults involved in the study and their peers

- participants enjoyed working with drama, citing their sense of enjoyment and achievement as well as the development of new skills as a main factor
- participants enjoyed the learning of new skills and were proud of their achievements
- participants developed a new confidence in their verbal and written communication skills
- participants began to develop strategies for coping with stressful or challenging situations
- key workers developed a growing understanding of and respect for the young people they were supporting
- positive working relationships were developed between key workers and participants
- participants were left with feelings of being 'let down' and missed taking part in a structured activity when the project finished
- most participants were keen to engage in follow up activities immediately after the end of the project

These outcomes reflect and reinforce the findings of other major studies into this area of work by, for example, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Recommendations

The findings of this case study research suggest the following factors need to be considered and implemented for the effective use of arts projects within key programmes targeting young people at risk, such as PAYP.

Key planning and structure factors

- careful consideration is given to all aspects of delivery in the planning and design of projects including timetabling of activities, location, availability of food and refreshments, workshop design and delivery
- progression routes for participants are identified during the project
- follow up sessions are built into the design of the project to allow young people to debrief and reflect upon their experiences
- key workers and young people should ideally have had previous experience of participating together in a project

Skills and expertise of the arts (drama) facilitators

- the skills and expertise of the arts facilitators in delivering the Enrichment programmes and their specific experiences of working with young people at risk are essential to successful project delivery
- arts workers and facilitators have undertaken relevant training in the delivery of arts for young people at risk
- arts workers and facilitators have undertaken relevant training in the sectors they are working in for example, education, youth work, youth justice

Levels of key worker involvement

- the level of key worker involvement is central to the project's overall success
- the levels of commitment and active involvement by key workers supports and reinforces the commitment of the participants
- key workers taking part in intensive programmes of work with young people at risk need to be given additional and specific training and support

Effective liaison and planning between partners

- liaison and planning between partners prior to the project commencing is essential for all of the key elements to be truly effective
- liaison and communication between the delivery partners during the project is also crucial for the effective delivery of the agreed outcomes



Section 1

Background and aims

Section 1 Background and aims

This report summarises the findings of case study research into a drama based, Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) project with a group of young people at risk in Blackburn, Lancashire. The report is divided into five sections:

- Section 1: Background and aims of the report
- Section 2: Context for the research and outlines of research methodologies
- Section 3: Findings
- Section 4: Conclusions
- Section 5: Recommendations

1.1 Report aims and objectives

The findings of this report focus on a small cohort of young people during a two-week intensive programme of work, assessing the contribution of specific drama based arts enrichment activities to the delivery of PAYP aims and objectives.

The evaluation findings described in this report examine the contribution that arts based projects can have in building key skills essential to support learning, re-engage in education or training and the development of positive relationships between key workers and young people.

While it is acknowledged that data drawn from a small case study cannot be presented as statistically significant, the report provides strong indications of the effectiveness of such a model in meeting the key aims of PAYP.

The report draws some conclusions regarding the effectiveness of arts based programmes of work in engaging socially excluded young people and enhancing the skills they need to re-engage with education and training.

The report makes recommendations for best practice in arts based projects within the context of PAYP and other national programmes with young people at risk.

1.2 Project summary and rationale

It was envisaged that a well resourced, small-scale case study could provide valuable learning for partner organisations, artists and youth workers involved in the project as well as for other agencies and individuals engaged in work with young people at risk.

The project focused on a small cohort of young people during a two-week intensive programme of work, assessing the contribution of specific drama based arts enrichment activities to the delivery of some of PAYP key aims and objectives.

A 10-day pilot programme was facilitated by two workers from TiPP (Theatre in Prisons and Probation) over a two-week period. The project involved nine young people, aged between 12 and 17, identified and referred to PAYP, including the support and active involvement of three key workers.

The involvement of the young people's key workers was seen as an essential assessment element in relation to the attitudinal shifts of the young people participating. A range of qualitative evaluation methodologies was seen as fundamental to assessing this creative and arts based approach to engaging hard-to-reach young people.

PLUS arts enrichment programmes are designed to provide engaging and creative projects for young people, aged 12-18, who have low levels of literacy and numeracy attainment. All programmes contain embedded literacy and numeracy activities and offer an opportunity for learners to demonstrate their understanding and application of the skills they are developing.

The particular skills that arts programmes most usefully deliver to participants in criminal justice settings are skills related to listening and talking, decision making,

planning, reflecting and recording, understanding the viewpoints of others and negotiating. By using activities which centre on participants' expression of personal experience or feelings through the arts, the likelihood of sustained engagement is increased.

The Drama Enrichment programme is a suite of exercises, which aims to develop personal expression, together with story-boarding skills. Drama provides a natural vehicle for developing speaking and listening skills and team-working ability. The Drama Enrichment programme was developed for PLUS by Manchester based TiPP.

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Recreation and Play Services are contracted by Government Office North West to deliver PAYP activities and key working. The Referral Order Panel process is used to identify PAYP as an appropriate pathway for young people,

with the panel preparing an assessment report, which may identify the lack of positive leisure activity as a risk factor towards offending.



Section 2

Context and research

Section 2 Context and research

2.1 Arts and young people context

The project was initiated as part of a wider strategy by Arts Council England, North West and Government Office North West to embed the use of the arts in PAYP through the development of opportunities for young people, combined with professional development for artists, research, and advocacy.

2.1.1 Project partners

A steering group was set up to oversee the planning and delivery of the project and its evaluation and consisted of the following partners: Arts Council England, North West, Government Office North West, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and TiPP.

Arts Council England, North West

The focus on young people at risk of offending is part of a wider strategy for children and young people and the arts. The Government's new framework for services set out in the Children Act (2004)

and the Green Paper *Youth Matters* (2005) provides a context for this policy. Arts Council England published its three-year strategy *The arts and young people at risk of offending* in October 2005. The strategy is being implemented nationally and regionally through partnerships with artists and arts organisations, youth agencies, local authorities, Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) and the youth justice system.

The strategy sets out seven priority areas to which Arts Council England is committed:

- forging local and regional partnerships
- supporting progression routes for young people at risk of offending through which they can develop their interest and skills in the arts and engage with education, training and employment
- building the evidence base for this work
- raising awareness among artists and arts organisations, policy makers, the Government and the wider public about the potential impact of arts activities

- supporting professional development opportunities for artists and arts organisations
- resource development
- encouraging the establishment of professional networks to share effective practice

Government Office North West

There are nine Government Offices (GOs) in the regions carrying out work for a number of central government departments. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) agenda within Government Office is focused on putting policies for children and young people into practice. The Children's Green Paper *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* was published in 2004 and aimed to ensure every child and young person has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and that no child slips through the net. To achieve this requires both organisational and cultural change across all top tier local authorities and their partners. The Government Office's role is to support the change process and

ensure the aims set out in the Children Act are met.

Lancashire Connexions Service

The contract for PAYP delivery in the North West is held by Government Office North West. Lancashire Connexions is the lead delivery agent who contract Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Recreation and Play Services to deliver PAYP activities and key working. Key workers from Blackburn with Darwen Recreation and Play Services were invited to participate in this project.

TiPP (Theatre in Prisons and Probation)

TiPP, an independent arts organisation based at the University of Manchester, delivers a range of drama projects and programmes with people of all ages at risk of offending both in secure institutions and within the community. TiPP is increasingly developing its work with young people at risk of offending. TiPP project managed for the steering

group and provided facilitators for the project.

2.1.2 Planning and project delivery

The 10-day project was facilitated by two TiPP workers over a two-week period. Nine young people, aged between 12 and 17, took part in the project with the support of three key workers.

The design and structure of the project, which gave careful consideration to all aspects of its delivery, took into account the current circumstances of participants and made efforts to create conditions ideal for the project's success.

During planning, careful consideration was given to all aspects of the project that could contribute to participants' success and sense of achievement including:

- training
- time management
- location
- availability of refreshments

- selection of key workers
- workshop structure and delivery
- lead-in times and follow up activities

Training

The PLUS Strategy Development Support Team has developed a two-day programme for arts practitioners, which combines the one-day Effective Practice Unit Award (EPUA) with the one-day PLUS Enrichment Implementation workshop. Training is considered an essential requirement for access to the Arts Enrichment materials.

Before the project began, project partners and researchers took part in the one-day PLUS Enrichment Implementation workshop. The day also provided an opportunity for project planning and for key workers to learn more about the proposed programme of work.

Time management

Most of the young people selected for the project were identified as needing one-to-one support within PAYP as they had been out of education or training for some time. It was felt that participants would therefore find it particularly challenging to adhere to a typical school-day timetable. The PAYP coordinator therefore suggested that the working day should begin at 12pm and finish at 5.30pm, which would mitigate against substantial participant drop-out rates.

Location

A theatre venue was chosen in Blackburn. Thwaites Theatre, located centrally in Blackburn, is a community based arts centre, used by community groups and run by local volunteers. The steering group agreed that this would provide an ideal space for the project as it was a neutral venue and not identifiable with habitual youth work activities. It would also add value, and

possibly status, to the young peoples' experiences as they would be making theatre in an identifiable theatre space.

Availability of refreshments

On the advice of PAYP coordinators, the working day began with a communal lunch, in part to create an informal, relaxed and sociable atmosphere, but also to ensure that all of the young people had eaten properly each day. From past experience, PAYP coordinators felt this would have a positive impact on focus and concentration.

Selection of key workers

The steering group agreed that key worker involvement was essential to the success of the project. Key workers were selected by the PAYP coordinator on the basis of their suitability and enthusiasm for the project. Suitable key workers were identified as those who recognised the added value that the arts could bring to PAYP, not necessarily those with any

direct experience of arts delivery.

Workshop structure and delivery

The Drama Enrichment pack is structured into 20 individual sessions, which can be followed individually or adapted to suit the needs of each programme. TiPP decided to base each day's work loosely around two sessions from the pack, although planning would be done on a day-to-day basis to respond to participants' needs. TiPP drama facilitators requested that there were no observers in the workshop sessions and recommended that anyone present be asked to participate. TiPP's experience is that support staff in a purely 'observer' role can negatively affect the group dynamics and prevent participants from fully engaging in the sessions.

It was also agreed that a final performance should not be part of the project outcome as this would create pressure to work towards a final product, at the

possible expense of the quality and flexibility of the day-to-day processes.

Lead-in times and follow up activities

A week before the programme began the PAYP coordinator scheduled a session for key workers and participants to meet informally.

A follow up session was also scheduled by TiPP workers in order for the group to debrief about their experiences, as well as to watch a DVD of their project. TiPP identified this as a vital stage in the project as it would allow an opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences, say goodbye to the session facilitators and to consolidate the relationships they had formed outside the intensive structure of the project.

2.2 Policy and programme context

This project is placed within key programmes and current strategies for young people at risk, namely:

- Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)
- The PLUS strategy
- Arts Enrichment programmes

2.2.1 Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP)

The Positive Activities for Young People programme (PAYP) is a targeted programme providing a broad range of constructive activities to young people at risk of social exclusion. PAYP aims to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour both in the short and long term and to support young people back into education or training and help them stay there. The programme engages young people in activities to develop their interests and talents during the school holidays and out of school hours throughout the year. ²

This cross government initiative builds on the success of previous school holiday programmes such as the Youth Justice Board's Splash and Connexions' Summer Plus and is supported by departments and agencies across government. They include the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), The Big Lottery Fund, the Home Office, Youth Justice Board (YJB), the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), represented by the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU).

A core objective of PAYP is to achieve reductions in crime involving young people. School failure is recognised as a major risk factor of future offending behaviour with a number of identifiable causal factors including social deprivation and family unemployment, and poor literacy skills. However, early intervention in the lives of young people and their families to improve commitment to

education, through basic skills programmes, for example, can be instrumental in diverting young people from future offending behaviour. (Connexions 2005)

PAYP programmes therefore aim to:

- ensure young people have access to quality arts, sports and cultural activities, and allow those with an interest or talent in any area to continue after the programme has ended
- bring together young people from different geographical and ethnic communities to help break down prejudice and misunderstanding
- encourage young people to contribute to their communities through volunteering and active citizenship
- give young people opportunities for personal development including the development of self-discipline, self-respect and self-confidence, enabling them to communicate more effectively with a range of people and work successfully in a team

² www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/PractitionersPortal/PreventionAndInterventions/PAYP

2.2.2 Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) delivery

The programme is administered by Government Offices (GOs). The GOs identify the areas where the programme will run and then contract the most appropriate delivery partner. Key partners are Connexions Partnerships, the Youth Service, the Youth Offending Teams and Local Education Authorities (LEAs). These key delivery partners working with at risk young people are responsible for identifying and referring the target group of young people to the programme.

It is recognised that identification and referral is a two-way process, with the delivery partners having a key role in identifying the young people in their area who are exposed to relevant risk factors and who, ideally, need to be engaged. Strong links and lines of communication between PAYP coordinators and the local strategic and delivery partners are seen as vital for effective targeting and delivery.

2.2.3 The PLUS strategy

PLUS is part of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) Skills for Life strategy and is a partnership between DfES, the Youth Justice Board and Arts Council England. The PLUS strategy is designed to target those within the youth justice system who have a record of poor achievement in literacy and numeracy.³

PLUS aims to re-engage these young people in education and enable to break the cycle of re-offending by giving them the skills they need for the future.

Having originated within the secure estate, PLUS is now being used across custody and community, including with young people engaged in PAYP programmes.

Within the community, PLUS aims to support Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in achieving the target set by the Youth Justice Board, to ensure that 90 per cent of young offenders supervised by YOTs are in suitable education, training or

employment during and at the end of their sentence by the end of March 2006.

By assisting youth justice practitioners in their work with strategic partners – Connexions, LEAs, Arts Council England, Learning and Skills Council, training providers – PLUS can help to improve their capacity to support young people at risk of offending or re-offending. As a result, PLUS will help contribute to improved quality assurance and inspection outcomes for providers, and greater achievement and progression for young people.

³ www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/PractitionersPortal/EducationTrainingAndEmployment/PLUS

2.2.4 Arts Enrichment programmes

PLUS offers opportunities for young people to engage in a range of creative activities, while also developing their basic skills. A series of Arts Enrichment packs have been developed embedding literacy and numeracy within arts and environment projects.

High quality learning materials combined with guidance and training are available across key artform areas: digital music, Sounds Good: virtual band, drama, visual arts, Style Yourself: fashion and design, poetry, storytelling, Viewpoint: digital photography, circus skills, alphabets, letters and words, dance (being developed). (see appendix 1)

The material drawn on for the content of this project was taken from the Drama Enrichment programme. The resource pack comprises 20 self-contained drama sessions, each with specific aims and objectives focusing on particular aspects of literacy and numeracy. The framework can be followed as a programme of work or adapted by practitioners to suit individual groups and contexts.

2.3 Research

The research was commissioned by Arts Council England, North West and Government Office North West, as part of a wider partnership to develop an evidence base for the effectiveness of engagement of young people at risk in the region in arts based activities.

The research was commissioned in August 2005 and data collection was carried out for the two-week duration of the project, with follow up sessions and interviews taking place in October and November 2005.

This section covers:

- research design
- research methodologies
- research constraints

2.3.1 Research design

The steering group acknowledged that data drawn from one small case study could not be presented as statistically

significant. The range of criteria identified below, the nature of the arts based project, coupled with the needs of the young people participating clarified the need for a range of appropriate and creative qualitative methodologies to be implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of the key aspect of this pilot project.

The participants were involved in a range of conventional methodologies as well as in the use of more creative methodologies such as video diaries, a graffiti wall and text messaging. The key workers were also involved in the full range of methodologies, as well as supporting the participants in their abilities to engage in the evaluation. The researchers were framed as 'participant observers' and established contact and trust with the young participants prior to the evaluation processes being implemented.

2.3.2 Research criteria and methodologies

Key objectives and appropriate methodologies were identified that provided both qualitative and quantitative data. Data was gathered by two researchers throughout the project and the findings subsequently grouped under headings corresponding to the intended key outcomes:

Attitudinal shifts in young people

- towards key workers
- towards writing

Development of Emotional Literacy

- communication skills
- group working skills

Key worker attitudes and expectations

- towards young people
- relationships with young people

Arts meeting PAYP objectives

- evidence
- practice

Objective	Approach and methodology
The difference between pre-project expectations and perceived experience	Pre and post-project questionnaires Key worker diaries to be kept in cars Daily feedback sessions with research team, TiPP and key worker team
Perceptual shifts of participants to key workers and other adults	Individual interviews Questionnaires
Attitude to writing	Participant workbook/diary Assessment of informal use of writing skills
Development of communication skills	Participant observation Response analysis including use of graffiti wall and text messaging
Attitudinal shifts of participants to group work	Participant observation Focus groups Private vox pops diary
Attitudinal shifts of key workers	Pre and post-project questionnaires Individual interviews
Attitudinal shifts of participants to liking learning	Participant observation Ranking exercises Attendance registers
Attitudinal shifts of participants to engaging in arts based project	Pre and post-project questionnaires Diaries Focus questions Text messaging
Application of Arts Enrichment materials to Emotional Literacy	Simple Likert scale ⁴ questionnaire analysis Ranking exercises Diaries Focus questions

⁴ (Likert 1932) – typically respondents are presented with a series of statements and asked to say how far participants agree or disagree with each, using five response codes ranging from ‘agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

2.3.3 Research constraints and issues

Key constraints were revealed during the research and evaluation process. In some cases, the flexibility of the programme allowed the research team to respond to evident problems and adjust research methods accordingly.

The key areas were:

- completion of workbooks/diaries
- effect of researcher participation on ability to record observations
- effectiveness of the graffiti wall
- effectiveness of the video diary
- responses to text messaging

Workbooks/diaries

Young people were, initially, unwilling to use workbooks/diaries. Participants were constantly encouraged to make notes on dramatic scenes and characters as an individual and private memory aid, and as the project progressed, participants gradually became less resistant to their use. Although this provided little initial written evidence for analysis, it served as

evidence of a key research finding (discussed below); that engagement in a drama based programme of work can contribute to a change in participants' attitudes to writing.

Effect of researcher participation on the ability to record observations

The research team were active members of the group and participated fully in every session they attended in order to minimise the effect of their presence on group dynamics and participant engagement in the process. As a result, observations were principally noted on reflection, during breaks or at the end of the day. Daily feedback sessions were held with the TiPP facilitators and went some way to providing detailed records of the process. However, some details and observations were inevitably lost.

Effectiveness of graffiti wall

A graffiti wall consisted of large sheets of paper posted on the walls of the workshop space with the purpose of providing a space for participants to comment spontaneously on the daily process. This was less successful than expected, as participants took the idea of a graffiti wall literally, and some used it to practise their graffiti signatures, rather than making written comments on the workshop process.

As an alternative, the group were invited to spend five to 10 minutes during each session focusing on a specific question posed by the researchers. A volunteer scribe then recorded group responses on the wall. This approach was much more successful and produced responses to the project. By the end of the process most participants were happy to volunteer as scribe.

Effectiveness of the video diary

A video camera was set up in a separate room to allow young people to comment privately on their experiences during the project. Initially, participants were reluctant to use the video diary and it became clear through comments they made that they were unsure of what was expected of them. The research team therefore devised a series of daily focus and interview questions, which proved to be more successful in eliciting responses.

Text messaging

During the planning process it was decided that young people would be set a series of tasks to complete in response to text messages. The aim was to assess their level of engagement and commitment to the project and also to encourage them to communicate with workers through a medium with which they were comfortable and familiar. This approach was abandoned during the project, as the assumption that all participants would have access to mobile phones was proved to be erroneous.