

A diverse group of approximately 12 young people of various ethnicities and ages are posed in three rows in front of a red brick building. They are smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a brick wall with windows and a small boat on a canal to the right.

Young people's advice to arts and cultural organisations

Listen, be clear and transparent, offer value, give us a challenge

Many cultural organisations want to reach out to more young people and deepen their engagement into a long-lasting connection.

This resource has been created with Arts Award partner [Upstart Projects](#) to offer advice and recommendations about how to build sustained and successful links with young people which move beyond 'taking part' to leading activities, sharing decisions and sometimes paid employment. The reward for arts organisations are the fresh ideas, skills and contacts young people bring to the organisation, as well as many hours of voluntary time and energy.

Upstart Projects interviewed young people who have done an Arts Award with a cultural organisation where they felt fully engaged and where participation often led to a longer commitment. Read their views below.

We talked to a group of 10 young creatives who have moved from participation to representation in their organisations - they have worked as volunteers, taken on leadership roles, been ambassadors, joined advisory groups...and sometimes gained employment. Although they brought experiences from different art forms and parts of the UK, they agreed on five key messages.



1. Listen

'Listen to us! Even if only one of our brilliant ideas is viable, please take that and run with it. We know what we want but we're willing to compromise and we'll help you make that idea work.'



2. Be clear

'What are your expectations and what do you want from a young person? What roles will we play and how much time will this take? What responsibility are you giving us and what decisions can we make?'



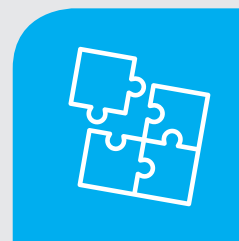
3. Be transparent

'Are there any hidden costs or will you cover our expenses? Would someone else be paid to do this role? If so, is there a benefit for the young person that replaces pay? What will he or she learn? How will this support their aspirations?'



4. Offer real value

'Make sure young people are recognised as part of the team by all paid staff. Offer various levels of participation to suit different young people. Provide supervision and support for both big and small roles. Keep in touch with young people and ask for feedback.'



5. Give us a challenge

'We're ready and we can probably achieve more than you think. Set us a brief, give us responsibility, let us lead, provide support. We'll surprise you!'

Listening to young people is definitely the first step, but there are also some practical tools that you can use to strengthen your participation work.

A participation model can help you to plan

There are some helpful theoretical models which enable you to analyse your current provision and map out your next move. 360 Participation offers a [useful summary](#) including the well-known Hart and Treseder models. Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation suggests a linear process where you decide which rung you want to reach. Or you may find Phil Treseder's Degrees of Participation more sympathetic, where you define the type of youth participation which is most appropriate for individual projects. Using diagrams and language can help you to clarify what you're trying to achieve.

Create a recognisable role structure

The next step might be to create defined youth roles in your organisation - ranging from 'attender' to 'volunteer' to 'group leader' to 'board member' etc. Giving a young person a named and recognised role can build confidence and define their position for other staff members. It's also easier to work out what training or support each role needs and who is responsible.

Make space for young people

Young people sometimes complain that venues do not appeal to teenagers and are either adult or family-oriented. Ask a group of young people to assess your venue - give them a simple questionnaire with questions about reception, the café, the art on display, your programme, the workshop space. Run a separate exercise about your website and social media channels. These activities will help you see your organisation through youthful eyes.

Run Arts Award

Offering a recognised qualification can appeal to young people and also provide you with a framework for deepening engagement. [Arts Award](#) can enable young people to contribute directly towards your organisation's aims; at the higher levels young people take on a challenge, lead others and plan projects. Arts Award builds young people's confidence, communication and professional skills as well as their agency and voice.

Long-lasting connections



We asked four young people to tell us about their experience of working with organisations over many years, including achieving Arts Awards. What did those organisations offer that kept their interest and built their commitment? It seems that leadership, decision-making and attention to individual interests are the key.

BHAVESH



Bhavesh moved from taking part in workshops to running them with Peshkar Productions, Oldham, between 17 and 21 years. He is now 25, working in media and a trustee on Peshkar's board.

'What I appreciate most from my time at Peshkar is that they treat you according to your strengths and interests and, more importantly, keenly suggest specific challenges that you would benefit from. They encouraged me to take on community arts leadership roles at a point when I definitely would not have characterised myself as a leader! In just a few months I led my own workshops and was involved in a national Arts Award youth network.'

ELSPETH

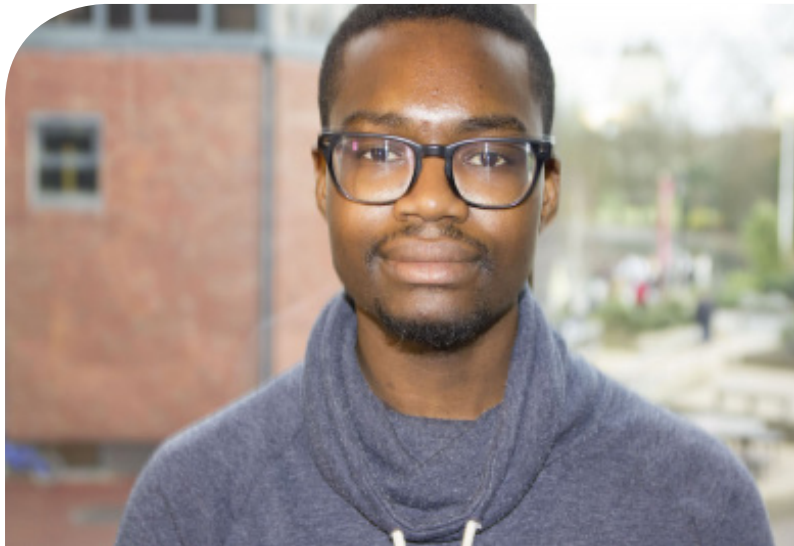


Elspeth has been involved with Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT) since she joined the youth theatre at 12 years old. She's now 24 and works as their Learning, Education & Participation (LEAP) Officer. Here she explains this long association.

'The reason I have kept such a long connection with CFT is that they are consistently giving new opportunities to young people both within their youth theatre and beyond it. CYT's learning team is respected both inside and outside the organisation. They genuinely value young people's voice and create opportunities for them to be involved across the theatre.'

'In my time I have volunteered at the opening Gala performance of the revamped theatre, performed multiple times on their stages, been an ambassador for their 16-25 scheme, sat on a panel with Lenny Henry, received training as a young practitioner and sat in the audience as our current youth theatre members performed for the Queen. I have always been offered career advice on a 1-to-1 basis and the theatre has become like home! Now I work here too.'

IDRISS



Idriss is 26 and a film-maker and trainer. He worked with Work in Progress (WIP) who use Arts Award to engage children and young people in arts and culture in Birmingham.

'What I like about WIP is that they encourage young people to take on a leadership role, whether in deciding what to do at an event or how to run a workshop. It's very inclusive. I really enjoyed gaining experience leading arts and media activities with young people with learning difficulties.'

'I would advise organisations to bring on board young people as they'll offer you different perspectives and fresh ideas but make sure you get them involved in production roles so they gain experience, develop skills and can take over in the future. It's a two-way process.'

SIENNA



Sienna is 17 and has worked with the National Trust and the Cambridge Museum Service as an active participant and volunteer (often in role as a Victorian maid!) Recently she became involved with the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and feels they offer a great model for any organisation which wants to deepen their engagement with young people.

'The National Children's Bureau is an exemplary example of engaging young people in order to achieve their aims as a charity. The Young NCB advisory group, meets quarterly to discuss NCB's new projects, strategies and to help provide evidence for government consultations. NCB staff facilitate discussion and encourage young people to express and develop their opinions. Before and after each meeting there's communication and follow-up. As we are often asked to give our views about tangible issues, it's important to see our opinions affecting decision-making, which they do!

'My tips are to be friendly, positive and upbeat. I've felt most engaged when everyone in the room is relaxed, therefore best able to work together. I recommend that you consider creating a "safe space" or welcoming area where young people feel comfortable and can meet and talk - some venues seem very off-putting! Being genuinely accessible to young people is important to gain our confidence. Offer a staff member's email address or a social media handle so we can connect easily and know that our voice is heard.'

Art Award's impact on long-term involvement



In addition to developing leadership skills and offering a framework for involving young people in meaningful projects, Arts Award opens up the world of the professional arts to young people; as a feasible career choice and as an area for life-long involvement. Young people who have undertaken Arts Award at Bronze, Silver or Gold levels are likely to continue to be proactively engaged with the arts and to contemplate an arts career, as well as experiencing a long-term improvement to their creativity.

Arts Award has been shown to have an impact on...

CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

Young people are 'definitely' or 'very likely' to continue activities learned through Arts Award



Continue to produce art



Lead my own arts project



Lead a project in general



Continue to visit arts events

'Arts Award gave me a lot of experience of: 'this is me, I'm trying to sell myself to you'

CAREER CHOICES

Young people who have completed higher levels of Arts Award show increased interest in arts careers

'It's definitely made me see a career in the arts as more feasible'



Architecture

↑9%



Dance

↑14%



Design

↑19%



Music

↑11%



Fashion

↑8%



Film & Video

↑22%



Multimedia

↑20%



Radio

↑25%



TV

↑17%



Theatre/drama

↑11%



Visual Arts

↑20%



Writing

↑17%

CREATIVITY FOR LIFE



9 out of 10 young people

felt a strong positive impact on their artistic skills, even 3-6 years following Arts Award



9 out of 10 advisers

say that Arts Award improves young people's creativity

95% of advisers run Arts Award because it offers accreditation and recognition

Findings of a study of the impact of Arts Award, London South Bank University (2012).

Arts Award is managed by Trinity College London in association with Arts Council England.

Make Arts Award part of your offer

It's easy to get started with Arts Award or build on your current delivery, including offering Gold Arts Award (organisations are no longer required to have run one of the earlier levels before starting Gold). [Contact us](#) to arrange a conversation about how Arts Award can strengthen your youth offer. artsaward.org.uk

About Upstart Projects

Upstart's mission is to increase young people's voice in arts and culture. We run an arts and culture magazine called Voice (voicemag.uk) which offers jobs for young journalists, a UK-wide young reviewers programme and an open platform for any young person to have their say on culture or society. We also run training for arts organisations in building youth voice and deepening engagement.

Find out more at: upstartprojects.uk/training