

Youth Arts Open Fund

Case studies



Comics Youth

Dundee | £15,000



Comics Youth

About us

Comics Youth is a youth-led organisation delivering comics-based literacy, sequential art and wellbeing projects for marginalised children and young people aged 8–25 in Dundee. The organisation works with young people who are excluded from social, educational and economic opportunities due to factors outside their control, including neurodivergence, disability, poverty, care experience and discrimination.

Comics Youth is deeply embedded in its local communities and delivers long-term, youth-led creative participation through education projects, events, activism, campaigns and workshops. Its mission is to provide creative opportunities for young people to speak truth to power and have their voices heard through creating and publishing digital and physical publications rooted in lived experience. Comics are used as an accessible, engaging medium to support mental health, make reading and storytelling more inclusive, and build a sense of belonging among young people who often feel underserved by mainstream provision.

The Project

“Marginal” was developed as Scotland’s first young person-led comics label, created by neurodivergent and marginalised young people aged 11–25 in Dundee who wanted a creative space that worked in ways that reflected how they think, communicate and learn. The project was built on a simple but powerful idea: comics and visual storytelling allow young people to communicate complex thoughts and emotions in ways that words alone often cannot.



“I used to sit on my own all the time. Now people know me for my art.”

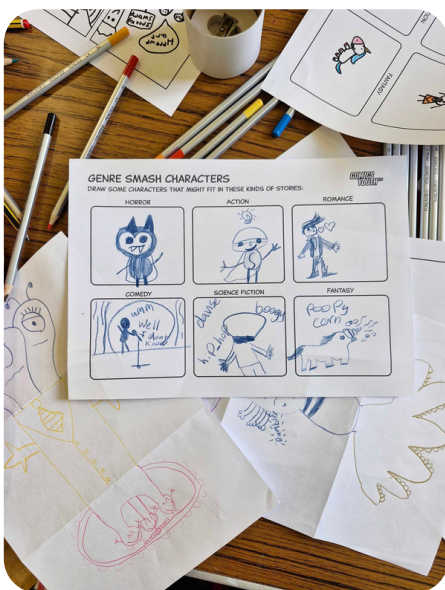
The project emerged after young people led consultation with over 120 peers across Dundee and identified a significant gap in youth provision for neurodivergent young people who felt excluded from mainstream youth groups. Comics were the common language that brought them together.

Over 46 weeks, 147 children and young people took part in 240 hours of free, inclusive workshops, taster sessions and drop-ins, delivered in accessible community venues and online. Sessions explored storytelling, character creation, world-building, drawing, inking, editing and publishing. Crucially, young people chose what stories they wanted to tell, with themes including identity, neurodivergence, mental health, poverty, friendship and hope.

Young people did not simply participate in the project — they led it. They shaped the programme, co-designed sessions, selected themes, made editorial decisions, managed budgets and guided the creative direction of the label.

“This is the first time adults trusted us to make something real.”

The act of making comics became a wellbeing tool in itself. The structured, repetitive nature of drawing supported emotional regulation and reduced anxiety, while visual storytelling allowed young people to process experiences safely and creatively.



The project also created strong peer connection. Young people who had previously felt isolated found a community of peers who shared their interests and experiences. Through Peer Mentor roles, participants led workshops, supported newer members and developed confidence as leaders.

“Marginal” culminated in the launch of the comics label, with young people seeing their work published and shared locally and nationally.

Barriers to participation in arts experiences

Many of the young people involved live in areas of high deprivation, with a significant proportion coming from households affected by unemployment, income poverty and long-term caring responsibilities. These economic pressures severely limit access to extracurricular opportunities that support social, emotional and educational development.

Neurodivergent young people face additional barriers when accessing traditional youth services, which are often overstimulating, fast-paced and heavily reliant on verbal communication. Sensory sensitivities, anxiety and difficulties with social interaction can make mainstream group settings overwhelming and inaccessible.

“Marginal” responded to these barriers by creating a structured yet flexible creative environment where neurodivergent young people could work at their own pace, communicate visually, and engage through shared interests.

Impact

The project supported 147 children and young people facing additional barriers to accessing artistic and creative activities.

Reported outcomes included:

- 90 young people reported improved mental health and wellbeing
- 100 young people felt empowered through youth-led activity and having their voices amplified
- 100 young people felt better connected to their peers and communities

Marginal demonstrated the power of comics as a tool for expression, wellbeing and social change.

