

Youth Arts Open Fund

Case studies

**HOT
CHOCOLATE
TRUST**



Hot Chocolate Trust

Dundee | £14,606



**YouthLink
Scotland**



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Hot Chocolate Trust

About us

Hot Chocolate Trust has worked with vulnerable and disadvantaged young people aged 12–25 in Dundee since 2001. Each year, the organisation supports around 400 young people who have experienced trauma, marginalisation, poverty, and challenges relating to mental health, exclusion, and risk-taking behaviours.

Hot Chocolate Trust's work is grounded in long-term, relationship-based youth work that blends whole-person support with opportunities for learning, leadership, and creative expression. Young people are supported to build the vision, confidence, and resources they need to live full, positive, and purposeful lives in their city. The organisation prioritises trust, safety, and participation, creating spaces where young people who feel excluded elsewhere can belong and thrive.

Creativity is central to Hot Chocolate Trust's practice and identity. Young people's voices shape the organisation's direction, including its strategy, spaces, recruitment, communications, and annual reporting, which has been co-written and designed with young people for over 16 years.

Our Project

The project expanded access to traditional and non-digital art practices for young people facing marginalisation, poverty, and trauma in Dundee. Funding enabled Hot Chocolate Trust to increase creative capacity by employing a mid-career artist, Zoe Gibson, on a one-year, part-time contract to work collaboratively with the youth work team.



The programme delivered a combination of open drop-in art sessions and responsive group work, designed to accommodate the complex and often unpredictable circumstances of young people's lives. Sessions explored a wide range of creative practices, including painting, printmaking, textiles, drawing, sculpture, and mixed-media work, with flexibility to incorporate other forms such as photography and graphic design based on young people's interests.



Across the delivery period, the project facilitated 62 taster sessions and 32 group activities, engaging over 200 young people. Activities included badge making, clay sculpture, sock puppets, Lego printing, potato printing, and creative workshops linked to trips such as the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design Degree Show, where young people collectively awarded a cash prize to work demonstrating imagination and ingenuity.

"Being part of this project has been amazing, I'm taken aback by how many young people actually want to be involved and have their voices heard thought the medium of art, its giving me the chance to get to know everyone that's took part on a deeper level and I hope that everyone continues to explore their creative side however they wish."

- Paige, Youth worker (Arts)

Creative activity was further embedded into the organisation's annual month-long summer project, Exodus, where young people explored the idea of monuments and public art, creating a collaborative artwork that now serves as a meeting point for young people. Towards the end of the project, young people designed and created arts and crafts items to sell at Christmas markets across Dundee, supporting the development of enterprise, confidence, and customer-facing skills.

Young people

The project worked with young people aged 12–25 who access Hot Chocolate Trust, many of whom experience social exclusion, discrimination, trauma, and challenges relating to mental health, poverty, and identity. Many young people describe themselves as ‘alternative’ and report feeling that they do not belong in their schools, communities, families, or peer groups.



Creative arts were identified by young people as a priority need through consultation, ranking highly alongside mental health and financial support. The project responded directly to this demand, offering accessible, low-pressure creative opportunities shaped by young people's interests and aspirations.

Youth leadership and co-creation were embedded throughout delivery. Hot Chocolate Trust's established youth-led structures ensured young people exercised real influence over how creative activity was developed and delivered, using art as a tool for engagement, self-expression, reflection, and connection.

"Art gives me a way to let out my stress and gives me the freedom and joy of creating things."

Impact

The project engaged a total of 212 young people in creative arts activity.

Young people reported the following outcomes:

- Children and young people feel better connected to their peers and communities (152)
- Children and young people feel better able to express themselves through involvement in arts activities (152)

- The mental health and wellbeing of children and young people improved through participation in artistic and creative activities (149)

Young people described creative activity as helping them manage overwhelming thoughts, improve focus, and feel calmer and more grounded. Art provided a space for self-expression, connection, and reflection, supporting wellbeing alongside the development of creative and social skills.

