



Youth Arts Open Fund

Case studies



The Big Project

Edinburgh | £15,000



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The Big Project

About us

The BIG Project is a trusted and much valued community-based youth project. We adopt a preventative approach in supporting children and young people aged 5-18 years, living in the Broomhouse area of Edinburgh (SIMD 1 &2).

The main aim of our project is to provide positive and consistent role models for children and young people, disrupting the cycle of poverty, unemployment and crime that otherwise exists in this area. We prioritise building relationships and aspirations ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to regularly participate in activities that strengthen their communication, confidence, resilience, and teamwork.

We deliver long-term sustainable support through a programme of enriching educational opportunities and experiences. This incorporates universal youth & children's work, holiday activity programmes, targeted group-work, individual support, and a young volunteer scheme.

Our Project

Imogen Young (Project Director, The Big Project), describes the project:



“Our project delivered an 11-month, youth-led arts programme involving 40 children and young people through drama, singing, and musical theatre. The programme was designed to remove barriers to participation and to create a safe, inclusive creative space where children and young people could build confidence, express themselves, and develop transferable life skills. Central to the project was the belief that performing arts can be a powerful tool for empowerment.

Over the duration of 55 weekly sessions and two intensive holiday programmes, children and young people took part in structured drama and singing activities culminating in seven public performances. These performance opportunities were a key driver of impact. Performing in front of an audience enabled our children and young people to challenge any self-doubt, overcome anxiety, and develop confidence in presenting themselves publicly. Many of our young people who were initially reluctant to speak or perform, grew to take on leading roles, sing solos, or direct scenes, demonstrating a real sense self-belief and improved resilience.

Drama and singing proved particularly effective for neurodivergent children and young people. Through the use of non-verbal communication, movement, rhythm, repetition, and sensory-based learning our children and young people were able to engage in ways that suited their individual strengths and needs. Performing arts offered alternative ways for them to communicate emotions and ideas when verbal expression is usually challenging. The structured routines combined with creative freedom provided both a balance of predictability and autonomy, which, we noted, supported emotional regulation and confidence for our neurodivergent children and young people. These children and young people who had previously struggled to engage socially have started forming friendships, taking creative risks, and show an obvious feeling of value within the group.



One of the project's most significant outcomes is a strong sense of belonging. The ensemble nature of drama and singing has created an inclusive environment where children and young people feel accepted, respected, and celebrated for who they are. Through staff led, consistent opportunities for peer recognition, shared achievements, and public performances, we have observed an increase in confidence and self-worth. Feedback from some

children and young people highlighted feelings of pride, connection, and being “part of something,” with most children and young people expressing a desire to continue participating in creative activities. For our performance at the Broomhouse Street Party, one young person commented that they felt like “a real star” getting to perform on a stage with lights and a microphone.

Overall, the project showed that drama and singing play a transformative role in supporting the wellbeing, skill development, and inclusivity amongst children and young people. By placing performance at the heart of the programme, our children and young people have been empowered to find their voices, build meaningful connections, and develop skills that will benefit them well beyond the project.”

"I felt nervous about doing the show but we played lots of fun drama games, prop-making and I got lots of help with learning my lines!"

Barriers to participation in arts experiences

The CYP in Broomhouse face significant challenges that stem from both their immediate environment and broader socioeconomic factors. Broomhouse is one of the most deprived areas in Edinburgh, with a child poverty rate reaching 35%. This is the highest in the city. The area ranks in the worst 10% in Scotland for employment, health, housing, and income, and in the worst 5% for education, skills, and training (SIMD 2020). This pervasive poverty impacts every aspect of the lives of CYP in the community.

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of opportunities and services available to young people. Due to limited financial resources, many families cannot afford to access activities outside the area, leaving CYP with few options for engagement and personal development. This lack of opportunity, coupled with low motivation and confidence, often leaves them isolated. Parents express concerns about safety, leading to children staying indoors and socializing online rather than engaging in outdoor play or activities, which further exacerbates their social isolation.

The environment in Broomhouse is marked by higher-than-average rates of vandalism, fire raising, and domestic violence. Many CYP are exposed to the effects of poverty, stigma, alcohol, and drug abuse daily. Without positive role models or consistent guidance, these young people often experience neglect, inconsistent parenting, and a lack of clear boundaries. The transient nature of many families in the area, who frequently relocate to avoid conflict, adds to the instability in their lives.



Growing up in such an environment has profound impacts on their health, aspirations, and general outlook on life. Many CYP in Broomhouse internalise a sense of low expectation and poor health as the norm, limiting their potential and perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

Impact

The project supported 40 young people facing additional barriers to access artistic and creative activities.

All 40 young people reported the following outcomes:

- Feeling better connected to their peers and communities
- Feeling better able to express themselves through involvement in arts activities
- Improved mental health and wellbeing through their participation in artistic and creative activities

