

Case studies: How can the arts and creativity support people who are shielding or vulnerable during Covid-19?

Project: Arts Drop

Organisation: Creative Learning Guild

Region: Yorkshire & Humber

'They couldn't believe they could keep them. They couldn't wait to use them.'

Introduction

Arts Drop provides clinician-approved creative activity packs that use arts and culture to boost wellbeing for the most vulnerable children.



Image credit: Arts Drop

Funders

The development of the Arts Drop framework was funded by the national lottery. The pilot was funded by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Calderdale Community Foundation with funds from Arts Council England managed by IVE. YPO provided business sponsorship.

Who is it for?

Arts Drop was designed to reach children and young people (CYP) who are identified by the local authority as the most vulnerable. This encompassed:

- Children deemed at risk of abuse and neglect
- Children looked after
- Young carers
- Children with refugee or asylum seeker status

We knew these CYP would have little / no access to online content and even if they did, may not have access to the basic art materials often assumed to be available. We also knew that these CYP would be living in chaotic and stressed households where the benefits of tailored arts activities could have significant impact.

The Arts Drop framework was created by specialist Arts & Health clinician Elaine Burke to ensure that activity would map to the developmental needs of CYP within 3 distinct age brackets: Early years, primary and secondary. This framework also ensures that any materials

needed to undertake activity are provided and that activity is emotionally and psychologically safe for children living in difficult circumstances.

Packs were distributed to CYP and their families by social workers and key workers.

What outcomes were/are you aiming for?

Arts Drop packs are designed to improve emotional and psychological wellbeing. The Arts Drop framework draws on the NEF 'five ways to wellbeing' framework with additional scope added based on the findings of the Marmot review. Arts Drop activity packs support CYP to:

- Find calm and take notice
- Learn new skills
- Connect with others
- Develop imagination
- Be physically active
- Understand self
- Make choices

Where is it happening?

Calderdale, West Yorkshire

Are you working in partnership?

Arts Drop was piloted by a consortium of more than 20 local stakeholders across the arts and culture sector, statutory sector and third sector. Partners included:

- Leading arts and culture organisations (such as Northern Broadsides theatre company and Eureka! the National Children's Museum)
- Local authority museums, galleries and libraries services
- Micro organisations and freelance artists
- Third sector mental health charities
- Social services (children's social care)
- Virtual schools (the department within the local authority with a responsibility for the education of children looked after)
- A local refugee charity
- Youth services

How many people took/are taking part?

Arts Drop packs were distributed to 1,500 CYP in May and a further 1,000 will be distributed in July.

For how long has it been happening?

The work began in April and though phase one was complete in early May, we are continuing to respond to a waiting list for further packs and develop follow up activity.

What were/are the main outputs?

Arts Drop activity was designed to be done independently, at home, by CYP and no outward facing creation of art work was expected in addition to the therapeutic outputs.

A dedicated website for parents and key workers to search and download / print activity has been set up and activity is available at www.artsdrop.co.uk

Evaluation and Feedback:

Feedback from key workers involved in our pilot distribution scored the quality of Arts Drop extremely high with 71% giving 10/10, 15% giving 9/10 and 14% giving 8/10.

Key themes that have emerged include:

Universally positive reception

Social workers reported that in all cases Arts Drop packs were very positively received by families and children. Parents/carers were very grateful their children had something useful to keep them busy. Children, particularly in the younger age groups, were surprised and excited to receive a pack with so many different things inside. Some key workers said the children's reaction exceeded their expectations, particularly in families who are better provided for than others.

'They couldn't believe they could keep them. They couldn't wait to use them.'

'Thanks for doing this and I hope that this scheme is repeated in the future'

High quality content

The high-quality materials and postcard activities made a significant impression on both children and carers. Social workers thought that the packs contained a good range of craft supplies to keep children occupied with open ended creative play. Many children and young people responded as they would when they received a gift. Several of the materials were seen by children as precious – making them feel special.

'The older child was also really excited, especially with the watercolour paints as she said they have them at school, but they are usually very used, so was really happy to have her own brand-new paints.'

Immediate engagement and activity

The packs were engaging and attractive, and children and young people immediately started making things using the materials and activity postcards. Parents and carers felt that the packs offered activities that could be done over and over again.

'The children immediately started using the chalks to draw on the pavement in their front garden.'

'The younger child was over the moon and started to use the craft things straight away to make a pop-up person on a piece of card using the scissors and glue.'

Promoting family activity

Parents/carers felt the packs gave them a family activity they could do together. Social workers thought that the packs have helped the whole family during this difficult time, and would also give families ideas for further activities to do with the children to spark their creativity. A number of children made pictures for their family.

'It put smiles on children's faces, and mum could focus on something enjoyable with her children.'

'I encourage special time with this family, so the fact they received these packs meant they could have that special time and it would be extra special!'

Reducing stress

Some social workers noted that the art packs were excellent at promoting creativity and giving the children activities to do when they had completed school work. This reduced stress for the whole family.

Catalysing new conversations with key workers

One social worker noted that the packs were a good incentive to encourage the children to have a conversation with them and to help set things up for the next visit – to look at what had been made together. Another commented that on their follow up visit after delivering the packs, they were shown things the children had made using Arts Drop.

NB: because of issues with safeguarding and data protection our evaluation has come via social workers and key workers rather than directly from children and families.

What have been the challenges and successes for you?

We know from the initial evaluation that the packs have been well received and are having a positive impact. Our biggest challenge has been eliciting feedback directly from the CYP themselves due to issues around data protection and safeguarding.

Further information

www.artsdrop.co.uk

The Creative Learning Guild brings together key partners to improve lives through arts and culture. The Guild is a charity and employs one member of staff who co-ordinates a consortium of over 90 local organisations.