

ROYAL CENTRAL  
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# ALL TOGETHER NOW



## DREAMARTS IMPACT STUDY FULL REPORT

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Recent publications include: Finding A Concrete Utopia In The Dystopia Of A 'Sub' City: Applied Theatre in Dharavi' Research In Drama Education Vol 22, 1 2017 and 'A Pedagogy of Utopia' Research In Drama Education Vol 20, 3 2015, 413-416. Selina is an applied theatre researcher and practitioner, who works in prison settings and with young people both in the UK and internationally. Her research focuses on theatre that invites the possibility of change, both in contemporary plays and participatory performance. Since working at Central, Selina has developed and overseen projects working in collaboration with partners and students in India, Costa Rica and more recently New York.

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Chris Blois-Brooke & Dr Selina Busby, February 2017



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary document gives an outline of the key findings of this Impact Assessment study which can be found in full at [www.dreamarts.org.uk](http://www.dreamarts.org.uk).

*“[DreamArts] saw in me the things I didn’t, and brought the best out of me.”*

## OVERVIEW OF DREAMARTS

- An outreach charity supporting three hundred 7-25 year-olds every year.
- Utilises a creative Arts-based methodology to “empower and inspire” their participants.
- Runs three programmes:
  - Express** - a flexible, targeted programme designed to be creative and therapeutic for the young people most in need and at risk.
  - Experiment** – affordable creative workshops on the weekend for young people living in deprived areas.
  - Expand** – a programme of personal development for young people to develop creative leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

## CONTEXT

DreamArts works with young people from across Westminster, currently one of the most unequal boroughs in London.

It is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> worst borough in the UK in terms of child poverty<sup>1</sup>. Across the borough 37% of youth are living in poverty<sup>1</sup> and in some of the wards where DreamArts works this figures rises up to 78%. Indeed, Westminster has “the third highest pay ratio between the 20th and 80th percentiles and the third highest proportion of out of work benefits claimants”<sup>2</sup>.

In this area of deprivation and inequality DreamArts use the Arts to enable young people to explore who they are, make positive life changes, build healthy support networks and develop a sense of community.

## THE IMPACT STUDY

DreamArts has developed a unified internal approach to evaluating its *Outcomes*, an approach that is unique in the sector. However, wanting to pursue best practice, the trustees of DreamArts approached The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama to build on the internal evaluation of programme outcomes, by conducting an assessment of DreamArts’ *Impact*.

Numbers and ranks of child poverty HMRC 2011				
	Rate	Number (aged 0-19)	Rank in London <i>Out of 33</i>	Rank in GB <i>Out of 409</i>
HMRC measure 2011*				
Westminster	37%	12,750	3	3

<sup>1</sup>HMRC 2011 census report (see graph above)

<sup>2</sup>London’s Poverty Profile: New Policy Institute



Participants, and their parents, share glowing reports of DreamArts' Impact and, speaking with 28 former members, it was immediately clear that they felt that their participation in DreamArts had a great impact upon their lives as they were growing up, as some of their words powerfully demonstrate:

*“DreamArts helped me to make the choices that made me who I am.”*

*“It was an integral part of forming you as an adult [...] you're not only able to create things but you're able to kind of grow in a safe environment which is so important and so rare when you're that age and in London.”*

*“DreamArts was really inspiring and helpful for me.”*

*“I just hope to come back in 10 years and to see that DreamArts still continue their great work by offering such brilliant projects, support and touching the hearts of more teenagers and young adults like myself.”*

*“There is so much stuff they have helped me achieve going forward.”*

This Impact Assessment study not only reflects such sentiment, but also points towards *how* DreamArts is able to achieve the significant impacts that it does.

As such, this Impact Assessment study will allow DreamArts to deepen its understanding of how the participation across the varied programmes impacts upon young people's lives. DreamArts will use the results of this study to refine, develop and enhance its practice.

It is recognised that impact is harder to measure than outcomes because, dealing with inherently personal experiences, the measurement of impact is less objective and so using standardised monitoring systems is less effective.

In order to examine how well DreamArts is achieving its intended impacts, **the study asks the following questions:**

- How does DreamArts enable young people to realise their full potential?
- How does DreamArts enhance aspirational thinking and goal building?
- How does DreamArts challenge young people's negative views of themselves?
- How does DreamArts develop soft and transferable skills?
- How does DreamArts develop support networks and a sense of community?



# FINDINGS

Examining how well DreamArts achieves their intended impacts, **the study finds solid evidence that participation in DreamArts impacted children and young people's lives by developing their:**

- greater sense of self-worth;
- coping skills and resilience;
- aspirations to achieve and contribute, *and*
- improved relationships with peers and adults.

Each of these key impacts is not only integral to all of DreamArts' programming, but also has a significant impact on young people's abilities to overcome disadvantage.

Although the study examines other associated impacts for Children and Young People in briefer detail, there is still remarkable evidence to determine DreamArts' success in developing their participants':

- awareness of their impact on the world;
- abilities to make better life choices;
- engagement in further learning;
- reduction in negative behaviour, *and*
- opportunity to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Above and beyond these impacts on participants' lives, this study also points briefly towards very positive impacts of DreamArts' work on society, as well as for the partner agencies with whom DreamArts works.

The remaining section of the Executive Summary will explore each of these impacts in greater detail.

## Achieving a greater sense of self-worth

*"I didn't have high self-esteem prior to starting DreamArts but look what I was able to do."*

*"[I felt] proud of myself because, after the gala, I had proven to those who said I couldn't do it, that I could."*

A unanimous theme from this study is the profound ability of DreamArts to increase young people's self-worth. Participants feel valued, and as one interviewee states, *"if you think about it, that's all you want as a young person [...] I want what I'm thinking and what I'm doing to be validated. And that's what DreamArts did"*. This enables the disruption of young people's negative views of themselves. *"When I first came to DreamArts I felt like I wasn't good enough"*, recalls a participant who felt like dropping out, *"[but] I'm still here"*.

Many well-run Arts projects should be expected to increase participants' self-confidence. However, it is clear that DreamArts increases self-confidence with particular breadth and depth. The sustained improvement in self-worth emerges from all the opportunities young people have to share, present and perform both their work and their ideas through a variety of art forms. Projects allow each participant to find their own niche but, crucially, also lead participants outside their comfort zones.





This study finds that DreamArts achieves improved leadership skills and a willingness to take creative risks and, most significantly, produces a marked improvement in communication skills - particularly in young people's ability to talk to new people and ask responsible adults for help.

An increase in participants' self-worth also supports their academic performance.

*"[DreamArts] gave me more confidence in school",* states one participant, while another laments that they had been disengaged both with learning and in life but that *"after I went [to DreamArts] I realised that you can actually have fun [...] and learn as well"*.

Furthermore, 65% of participants are from homes where English is a second language and there is evidence that DreamArts impacts upon their confidence in their language abilities. One former participant, for example, describes how DreamArts *"made me feel comfortable even though my level of English was a barrier at the time."*

*"If there were more youth theatres like DreamArts, it would make London a better place."*

*See page 24 for the full analysis of this Impact.*



## Developing coping skills and building resilience

*“There are ups and downs. It helps you to negotiate the downs.”*

Young people who work with DreamArts develop the ability to cope better and build resilience. Many participants, and alumni, told us that these skills had a profound impact on their lives. *“Prior to working with DreamArts I never had the greatest resilience however [participating in the programme meant that] after making a few small mistakes I began to bounce back easily”.*

DreamArts achieves this through the numerous opportunities it provides for young people to express feelings, talk about challenges and learn how to manage difficult emotions, such as anger, through the fictional environment of, for example, characters in a drama. Trained staff support participants to work through stressful experiences (such as preparing for performances) in an emotionally healthy manner. Staff create a safe, supportive workshop environment that helps participants develop self-discipline and self-motivation to achieve their aims.

The emotional support provided by DreamArts has a significant impact upon participants’ ability to manage the effects of anger, shyness, anxiety and, perhaps, emotional, domestic and/or sexual abuse. *“You make me see things differently”,* states one DreamArts participant, *“[...] I don’t just lose my temper, I can think of options, I talk things through.”*

*See page 29 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Aspiring to achieve and contribute

*“I could never afford to go to a Performing Arts school,”*

states one participant who is now an award winning playwright and budding filmmaker.

*“Without DreamArts I would never be in theatre. They gave me the confidence and skills to make this my career.”*

DreamArts has a profound impact upon young people’s confidence in their ability to achieve. Whilst participants’ aspirations can often be low before joining, DreamArts’ programmes raise their expectations of what they can achieve. This is done partly through staff members’ consistent encouragement and support, and by fostering aspirational thinking. One alumnus admitted, *“I didn’t have a lot of direction as a teenager, I was quite wayward”,* and that her involvement with DreamArts had helped her *“utilise my skills [...] get organised [...] it gave me a sort of purpose”.*

Young people become motivated and engaged by opportunities suited to their differing needs and interests. DreamArts gives young people a sense of accomplishment through which they can explore themselves and aspire to achieve. The sheer variety of activities provided by programmes is also significant as participants learn *“a lot about ourselves by doing things we never thought we could do”,* as one alumnus described. This newfound attitude helps them to contribute, to imagine new horizons and to fulfil their potential.

Crucially, DreamArts’ programming allows for the fact that ‘achievement’ means something different to each unique individual. Participants are encouraged to set short,



medium and long-term goals that they work towards. This way they have a structure, the space to reflect and the motivation to push for excellence.

DreamArts offers vitally important opportunities for young people to contribute to the cultural landscape of their neighbourhood. While the creative industries and cultural institutions of the West End may be on their doorstep, most new participants have no experience of participating in, or benefiting from, this cultural landscape. Many develop creative skills, which are not only completely new to them, but would have been impossible to learn were it not for DreamArts. Numerous alumni have gone on to successful careers in the creative industries.

*See page 28 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Improved relationships with adults and peers

*“It’s about learning to work with others. It’s a life skill.”*

Participation in DreamArts has a significant impact in terms of members improving their existing relationships with peers and adults, as well as their ability to meet, and get on with, new friends. This not only improves the lives of the young people themselves, but also strengthens their families and wider communities. This impact is particularly valued by those young people who said they lacked friends and support before they joined DreamArts.

DreamArts achieves this impact through providing an environment in which participants are given the opportunity to meet, and meaningfully communicate with, a large diversity of new friends. However, DreamArts is more than just a social environment. Programmes challenge young

people to work together with different people to achieve shared creative goals. This task-oriented group work encourages understanding and cooperation, within a supportive environment that fosters a sense of camaraderie. Young people learn to observe, praise and encourage or support one another in a way that improves their motivation and outlook both in the short- and long-term.

This collaborative working environment not only develops young people’s ability to relate with peers but also with adults. One Experiment participant commented that she had *“learned to make eye contact with adults”*, while an Express participant said that *“the girls group helped me be able to talk to teachers about life in the UK.”*

The DreamArts work that is explicitly about family relationships helps those whose relationships are problematic. As one parent participating in the Family Express programme commented, *“My children enjoyed the arts and crafts and spending time with me in this way, especially being able to talk about feelings”*.

*See page 36 for the full analysis of this Impact.*



## Awareness of their impact on the world

*DreamArts “wasn’t training for me, but really a journey where I found myself again [...] It has allowed me to realise my potential [and...] has given me tools to have a positive impact on people.”*

DreamArts works to help children and young people to become aware of the effect they can have on the world around them. Programmes give young people the opportunity to see the impact they can have on peers and adults when they share their views with others. This includes communicating their ideas and life experiences with audience members. In this manner, an alumnus suggests that DreamArts is “an amazing project based way of getting together to voice our opinions on other matters”.

DreamArts adapts to the needs and desires of participants. An excellent example of this is the Express programme, in which groups choose an art-form through which to explore a subject of their own choosing.

One participant describes the mindset of DreamArts’ staff being “we hear you, we see you, we want to work with you, we want to give you every opportunity that we can to make what you’re thinking in your head become a reality”. This child-led approach is significant because, by drawing upon young people’s skills, strengths and talents, staff are able to demonstrate the unique potential that each young person brings to the world around them.

*See page 35 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Ability to make better life choices

*DreamArts is, “helping me make the right decisions.”*

Programmes help participants prioritise their goals by providing a positive focus in their lives. One participant describes how DreamArts was “helping me make the right decisions”, while a Partner Agency staff member provided an example of several girls who, “as a result” of participation in DreamArts, have felt able to “stand up for themselves when boys tease them” and have broken up unhealthy relationships with boyfriends.

Parents comment on how the discipline of practising a creative art-form has helped develop time-management skills, a sense of independence, a mature outlook and improved self-image.

*See page 31 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Engagement in further learning

*“I had to speak spontaneously in German about a topic which, I think, is where acting helps.”*

Respondents to our study comment that working with DreamArts has given them the confidence to develop their interest in, and resolve to, pursue educational aspirations in a variety of subject areas.

Participation in DreamArts helps young people to enjoy learning and to try new things. The soft skills gained by participation in the Creative Arts play a supportive role in the study of other subjects. For example, one



participant describes how, despite choosing subjects which are “*nothing related to what I did in the Performing Arts*”, the skills they developed through DreamArts have been useful in A-Level study.

*See page 28 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Reduction in negative behaviours

DreamArts, “*was like a training ground [...] I could [...] say the wrong things, do the wrong things, be imperfect and have an almost unconditional love anyway.*”

Levels of concentration and cooperative behaviour dramatically improve through participation in DreamArts. A reduction of negative behaviours *within* workshops appears to be correlated by a similar decrease in negative behaviour *outside* the DreamArts sphere. Anecdotally, from young people and Partner Agencies, the likelihood of being in trouble at school, or with the police, appears to be much higher prior to participation in DreamArts programmes than afterwards.

This marked improvement in behaviour is brought about by the skilled facilitation of sessions by practitioners who not only come with experience in the use of Arts-based practice but also, through DreamArts training, are given further skills and knowledge in Therapeutic Arts practice. This enables staff to work with young people whose behaviour might be challenging by incorporating an attachment-based approach called PACE. PACE stands for Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathetic, and is informed by a knowledge of neuro-science.

Moreover, the Programmes’ focus on supporting young people to be open-minded and reflective is also significant in achieving this impact. “*You’re discussing really important issues from a very young age and you’re becoming socially aware*”, suggest an alumnus. Not only does such social awareness make participants more well-rounded and tolerant of other people and their ideas, but it also encourages young people to reflect on their own views and choices.

*See page 39 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Having fun and enjoying themselves

DreamArts “*is a place you can come if you had a rough day.*”

DreamArts is “*the highlight of my week. It keeps me going through the school week.*”

The programmes allow participants the time and space to have a good time, which is influential on young people’s emotional well-being. Having fun means young people come back and engage meaningfully in the programmes, helping to explain all the other benefits of DreamArts.

*See page 40 for the full analysis of this Impact.*



## Impact for society

Above and beyond the impacts on the individual children and young people themselves, youth participation in DreamArts also has a wider-scale social and economic benefit.

Engagement with DreamArts gives children and young people a sense of purpose, a creative outlet and a source of support in their lives. In this way, DreamArts not only prepares young people for successful careers, but also for healthy and happy lives through the social skills they learn, the emotional support they gather, and the passions they develop from the programmes. Participation in DreamArts also contributes to the development of soft skills that are demanded by the job market. As such, participation in DreamArts should be seen as reducing the risks of academic underachievement, unemployment and anti-social behaviour.

Furthermore, DreamArts broadens access to the Arts and Culture and significantly contradicts the national trends identified by the Warwick Report (2015) which concludes that, “access to opportunities for creative self-expression is currently socially stratified and restricted for many women, ethnic minorities and disabled people” (7). Three-quarters of DreamArts’ participants are young women, 78% have BME backgrounds and 18% are identified as having special needs.

In providing access to the Arts, DreamArts offers effective vocational training for young creatives, thereby contributing low-cost training to get more young people into employment, and producing work, in the Arts & Culture sector.

Westminster has no Arts and Culture hub with a remit for engaging local residents comparable with other inner London boroughs (e.g. The Tricycle in Brent, The Roundhouse in

Camden, Oval House in Lambeth, The Lyric in Hammersmith). As such, the role of DreamArts in engaging a diverse section of young people in the Arts is a cause for celebration.

*See page 41 for the full analysis of this Impact.*

## Impact for Partner Agencies

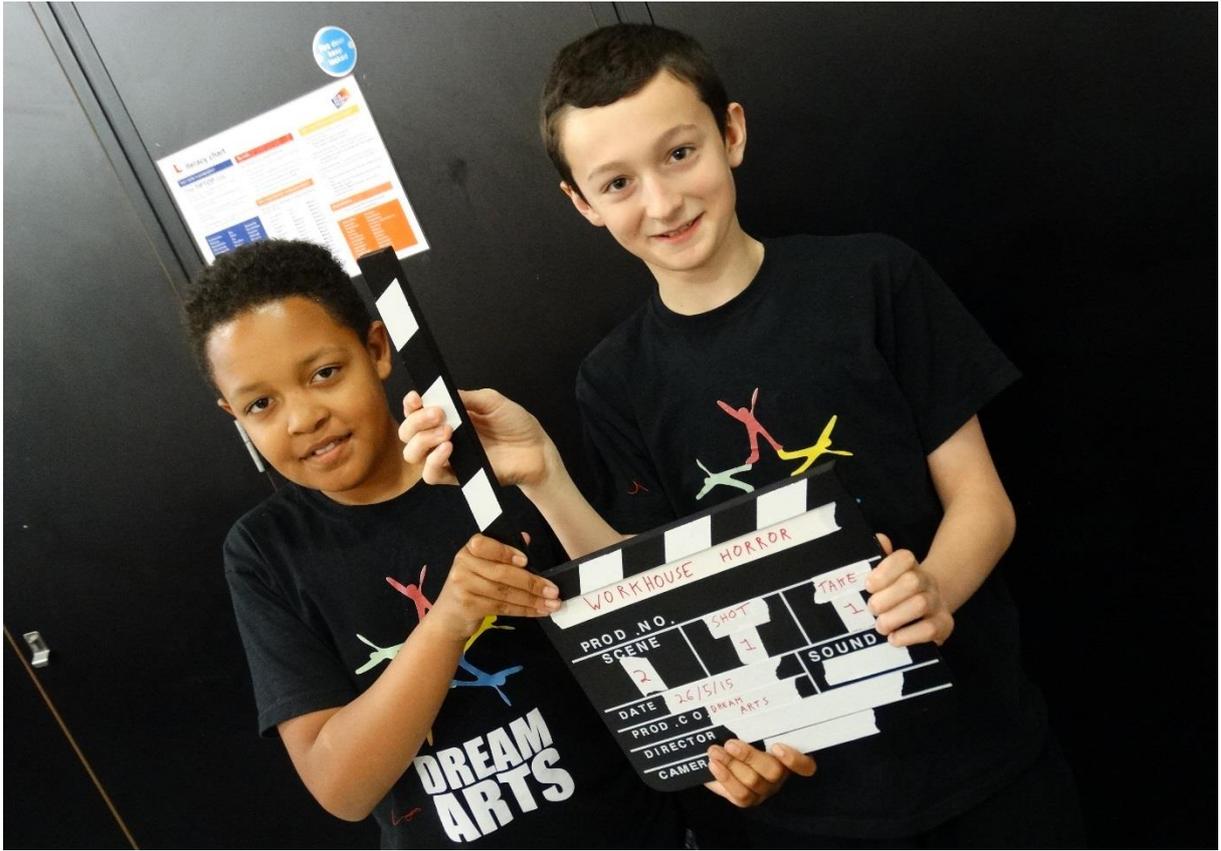
*“Working with DreamArts in this powerful way allowed me to build strong positive relationships with young people who I may not have had a chance to work with.”*

Participation in DreamArts’ Express targeted programmes also produces positive Impacts for Partner Agencies. The programmes help Agency staff build trust with their participants in a fun and meaningful way, whilst helping to devise ways of identifying needs.

DreamArts is also successful in re-engaging clients/students in learning opportunities and can provide young people with the benefits of a creative education that schools may currently be unable to fulfil. DreamArts’ programmes are also valuable to Partner Agencies in terms of engaging with those young people whose needs are not being met through alternative provision, such as sport.

*See page 42 for the full analysis of this Impact.*





# CONCLUSIONS

## DreamArts is a model of exemplary practice within the Youth Services sphere.

DreamArts is able to improve the life chances for those most at risk within society, by not only preparing young people for successful careers, but also for healthy and happy personal lives.

DreamArts' programmes are a model of best practice in terms of involving those who are very often underrepresented in the cultural landscape, and in terms of fusing creative, personal and social development.

Partner agencies would benefit from engaging with DreamArts as it would enhance their ability to have a positive impact on the lives of the young people they work with. This will also benefit DreamArts as it will enable the organisation to sustain and develop its work.

We are confident that future studies and research will draw similar conclusions to ours in their commendation of the DreamArts methodology as a model of exemplary practice.

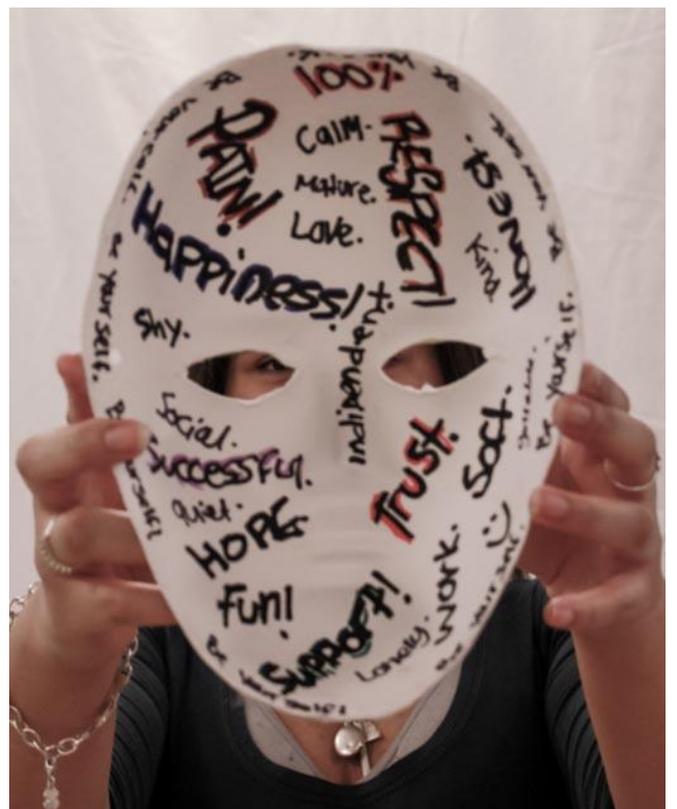
Notwithstanding this assessment, **we would call for more research into DreamArts' impact**, as well as for the continued and ongoing development of DreamArts' internal and external evaluation systems. This, we believe, will not only allow the organisation to achieve greater impact for the Children and Young People themselves, but also greater impact through the dissemination of its work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- DreamArts are pioneering and integrating their own Theory of Change and a self-evaluation system that underpins the work of the charity. As a result, it is possible to measure the outcomes that participation in these Arts projects has on young people throughout all of the strands of DreamArts' programming and other providers would benefit from adopting a similar strategy.
- We would recommend disseminating the good practice of DreamArt beyond arts organisations to reach youth sectors and policy makers.
- We would recommend increased contact with industry partners in the form of workshops and career information events would enable those participants who might be interested in the career paths in the arts.
- We would recommend increased contact with drama schools and educational partners who could offer HE advice, audition training and workshops or taster sessions in a wide variety of arts based courses.
- DreamArts is offering a unique role within the borough of Westminster which offers little in the way of creative opportunities for its young residents. We would recommend the development of a funding call to the creative industries that are also in the borough.



- We would recommend some development of participant recruitment via Partner Agencies to ensure that as many of the most vulnerable youth within the catchment area are aware of what DreamArts offer. The recent recruitment of an Outreach & Engagement Officer with an ongoing remit to build relationships and therefore referrals with schools, agencies and grass-roots community groups will aid this. We understand that this will include attending the new Early Help Partnership Allocation Meetings which will look at supporting young people with additional needs. We would recommend sourcing the funding to further develop this role.
- We would also recommend the organisation works to embed itself further into the local community via local events with participant ambassadors and/or performance work.



To find out more about the work of DreamArts contact Graham Whitlock, Chief Executive, at [graham@dreamarts.org.uk](mailto:graham@dreamarts.org.uk) / 0203 176 6766 [www.dreamarts.org.uk](http://www.dreamarts.org.uk)



Likelihood to recommend project  
Learn new skills  
Explore thoughts & feelings  
Show your skills

Share ideas  
Positive relationships  
Take a lead

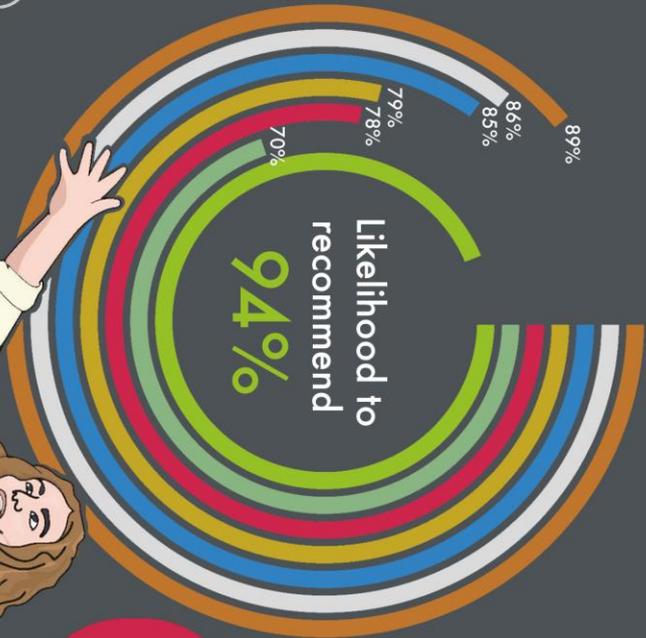
Figures reflect the percentage of total respondents that suggests that DreamArts has helped them improve in each of the respected areas.

DreamArts saw in me the things I didn't, and brought the best out of me

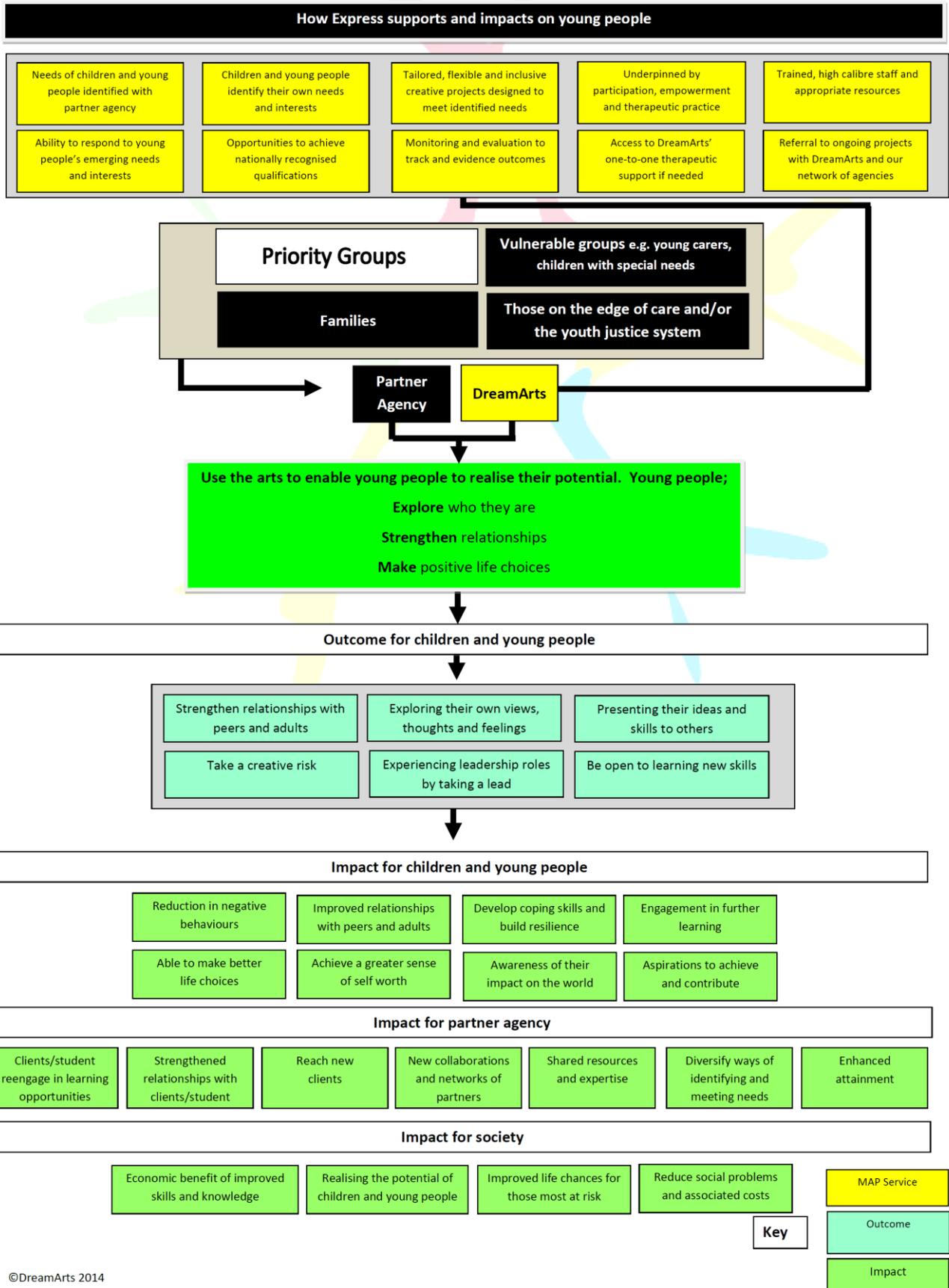
I realised that you can actually have fun and learn as well

DreamArts gave me more confidence in school

I didn't have high self-esteem prior to starting DreamArts but look what I was able to do



# DreamArts Theory of Change



# INTRODUCTION

## Overview of DreamArts

### The Organisation

DreamArts utilises a creative programme of Arts-therapy and other Arts-based methodologies to support young people with exploring their identity, making positive life changes, developing healthy relationships and communities, and aspiring to realise their full potential.

Working with an average of three hundred 7-25 year-olds each year, they work to develop their participants' creative and artistic skills. In doing so, young people are: challenged to take creative risks; encouraged to explore their own views, thoughts and feelings; confronted with the experience of taking a lead; invited to present their ideas and skills; motivated to develop positive relationships with peers and adults and inspired to learn new skills.

Underlying all of their work is a desire to instil their participants with a sense of achievement and purpose in their lives. With their participants developing creatively whilst learning important life-skills, it is no surprise that many alumni go on to successful careers, many within the Arts sector. Indeed, their status as Westminster's leading Youth Arts charity was recently acknowledged in their recognition as an 'Outstanding Organisation of the Year' in the Westminster Community Awards 2016.

### Programme Activities

DreamArts' activities fall within three distinct, and yet integrated, programme areas:

'Express' is a programme designed to be creative and therapeutic for the most vulnerable young people in need and at risk, such as; children in

alternative education, children with a range of special needs, children whose families are in crisis and exploited young women. The programme has three strands. Firstly, the 'Express Collective' is a targeted group work scheme, which is conducted in partnership with external agencies. Programme activities are tailor-made according to the needs and desires of the group, with participants choosing a creative art-form through which to explore an issue or theme that is significant in their lives - such as exploitation, friendship or keeping safe online. Recently, participants in the programme have utilised the Visual and Dramatic Arts but also other art-forms like creative writing, documentary filmmaking, designing online campaigns and even fashion, in order to build their skills and express themselves whilst working and enjoying their time together in their group. The 'Family Express' strand is similar, but is targeted specifically at the building and maintenance of strong relationships between parents and their children. Finally, through the 'Express 1-2-1' strand DreamArts also offers one-on-one therapeutic support through the Creative Arts for young people with complex needs struggling with significant difficulties, as well as those who are not able to work within groups.

'Experiment' is DreamArts' Weekend Company programme – every Saturday and Sunday approximately 80 participants aged 7-19 (in dedicated groups for 'Smalls', 'Mediums' and 'Seniors') are offered Westminster's only affordable creative workshops for young people living in

two of the three most severely deprived areas. Participants are referred either from the 'Express' programme, from partner agencies, from parents or via self-referral. Working with leading Drama, Dance and Music professionals, these young people are given the opportunity to express themselves through their creativity whilst devising and presenting their own work (from their own musicals to short films and radio plays), meanwhile learning new skills and having fun. With the Seniors forming a Performance Company, participants are given the opportunity to take a lead in their creativity and learning.

Finally, 'Expand' is a programme of personal development and support for young people to develop their creative leadership and entrepreneurial skills. The 'Foundation Scheme' provides training and placement practice in devising and facilitating creative workshops for participants' peers. The 'Advanced Scheme' builds on these skills to offer supportive training in developing their own work by exploring creative project management. On this scheme, participants practice, plan and produce their own Creative Arts projects such as stand-up comedy evenings, photography exhibitions and performances of new writing and dance. Often supporting young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) reclaim a sense of purpose in their lives, this programme also provides mentoring for those wanting to establish their own Creative Arts companies.

It is important to stress that DreamArts' different activities are necessarily tailored and targeted to the needs of each of these different programme areas. However, whilst conducting Impact Assessments of each of the programme areas would be merited, this is outside the scope of this study. Nonetheless, a common vision, of "using the arts to enable young people to realise their potential", unites each of these programme strands and, therefore, this report will assess the common impacts evidenced across DreamArts' work as a whole.

## Theories of Change and Evaluation Systems

DreamArts is pioneering and integrating their own Theories of Change, underpinned by a self-evaluation system in order to monitor and evaluate the work of the Company. A Theory of Change is a diagrammatic model, which clearly explains a programme's activities, as well as the conceptual process of *how* change is *expected*, or *assumed*, to take place for the participants involved.

This Impact Assessment study is structured accordingly to the Organisation's established 'Theories of Change' for their 'Express' and 'Experiment' programmes (See Appendices A & B). Evaluating the extent to which the assumptions inherent within the Theories of Change are being evidenced in practice is an effective way of demonstrating how well a programme is achieving its expectations and identifying areas in which its theoretical model, or practical delivery, may need improvement (Project Oracle 2014).

DreamArts' Theories of Change succinctly and effectively demarcate: (1) The referral procedure for participants joining the programme; (2) The programme activities; (3) The expected outcomes the activities will have for the children and young people; and (4) The

expected impact of these outcomes. In this context, 'outcomes' denotes changes that the programme has instilled in participants' skills, behaviours and emotions whilst 'impact' refers to how the outcomes have affected participants' lives in the longer-term (Intrac 2016).

DreamArts' established self-evaluation system tracks the progress of the young participants during their time with the Company and, in doing so, assesses the success of the third component of the Theory of Change: *The expected outcomes the activities will have for the children and young people*. In collaboration with Context Consulting, they have devised their own bespoke 'Outcome Star', which is used across all of their programmes regardless of group size, participants' ages or the art-form being employed. This 'Outcome Star' asks participants to consider, at the end of a project, how they feel about the progression they made towards the 6 outcomes since the start. This data is regularly collated and examined for monitoring, evaluation and learning purposes (a graphic summarising such Outcome Evaluations can be found in Appendix C). As a result, it is possible to measure the outcomes that participation in DreamArts has on young people throughout all of the strands of their programming. This unified approach to evaluating a diverse range of projects is unique in the sector and other providers would benefit from adopting a similar strategy to the development of a bespoke and standardised evaluation system.

## Assessing Impact

This Impact Assessment Report builds on DreamArts' internal evaluations of their outcomes, in order to assess the success of the fourth component of the Theory of Change: *The expected impact of these outcomes*. Impact is often harder to measure than

outcomes because, dealing with experiences which are inherently personal, impact is a less objective measure and, accordingly, using standardised monitoring systems and matrices is less effective.

Participants and their parents share glowing reports of DreamArts' Impact and, speaking with 28 former members, it was immediately clear that they felt that their participation in DreamArts had a great impact upon their lives as they were growing up, as some of their words powerfully demonstrate:

*"DreamArts helped me to make the choices that made me who I am."*

*"it was an integral part of forming you as an adult [...] you're not only able to create things but you're able to kind of grow in a safe environment which is so important and so rare when you're that age and in London."*

*"I just hope to come back in 10 years and to see that DreamArts still continue their great work by offering such brilliant projects, support and touching the hearts of more teenagers and young adults like myself."*

*"There is so much stuff they have helped me achieve going forward from DreamArts."*

The subsequent sections of this Report hope to explicate what these impacts represent in real terms, as well as pointing towards how DreamArts is able to achieve them.

Within the Theory of Change for the 'Experiment' weekend programme the Organisation's intended impacts are broken down into 'Impacts for Children and Young People', in addition to 'Impacts for Society'. Further, as the 'Express' targeted programmes are coordinated together with partner agencies, separate 'Impacts for Partner

Agencies' are also listed<sup>3</sup>. We therefore revert to this phrasing as the sections headings of the following Report.

Our focus is mostly on what we assess to be four key 'Impacts for Children and Young People'. Each of these key impacts is integral in all of DreamArts' programming as well as being significantly impactful on participants' abilities to overcome disadvantage. Whilst these four key impacts make up a significant portion of our discussion, interspersed between these are assessments of other relevant, associated impacts for Children and Young People, presented in 'boxes' of briefer detail. Whilst a closer inspection would be prudent in the future, the time limitations of this study preclude us from providing more than a concise outline of the 'Impacts for Society' of DreamArts' work, as well as the 'Impacts for Partner Agencies'.

## Project Rationale & Context

Since 2004 there have been numerous reports that have evaluated the effectiveness of Arts projects as educational or developmental tools when working with young adults and vulnerable youth. These include those that assert the Arts are useful in aiding desistance from crime (Farrell and Caverly 2006, McNeil 2006, Anderson et al 2012, Bilby et al 2013), in the development of transferable or soft skills (Digard 2007, Miles and Strauss 2008, Houston 2009, Maruna 2010, and Harkins 2010), and, in the development of self-esteem and self-confidence (Silber 2005, Cohen 2009 Anderson et al 2011). Much of the literature identifies the Arts as having the ability to engender a sense of hope for the future

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<sup>3</sup> While most of the outcomes and impacts are the same across DreamArts' Theories of Change, the Theory of Change for the 'Express' targeted programmes is linear, as the programme is

Bottoms et al 2004, Farrell and Caverly 2006, McNeil 2006, Houston 2009, Harkins 2010, and Maruna 2010). This evaluation will consider how and if DreamArts meets these expected impacts and how it could be developed to do so more effectively.

In 2004, Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson undertook the most extensive research into youth theatre in the UK to date. In their report, they comment on the lack of recognition of youth theatre and note that it has, "attracted little interest from the research world and there is a scarcity of publicly available literature" (Hughes and Wilson: 2004 61). In their study, Hughes and Wilson describe youth theatre as:

A broad term used to describe a whole variety of organisations that engage young people in theatre-related activities. It takes place outside of formal education and is founded on the voluntary participation of young people (Hughes and Wilson: 2004 58).

This is an accurate description of the work of DreamArts, as the programmes they offer happen "outside of formal education," and are, "founded on the voluntary participation," of the youth. Hughes and Wilson go on to describe a range of activities that fall under this umbrella heading and name four models for youth theatre. DreamArts' mission statement, which identifies the aims of their work as being to use "the arts to enable young people to realise their true potential" and creating a space in which through the Arts they can "explore who they are, build positive relationships and make positive life

project-specific, whilst the 'Experiment' weekend programme is cyclical, demonstrating the ongoing nature of the programme activities.

choices”, places them in the third of these models:

Youth arts - the ‘reason for being’ is to support the personal, social and political development of young people through theatre and drama activity (Hughes and Wilson: 2004 62).

In the field of Drama Education, theatre academic, Anthony Jackson, points out, there has been a, “tension between the intrinsic value of the arts and the instrumentalist argument that the arts play a socially useful role” (Jackson: 2013 35). DreamArts offers ‘theatre as Art’ but with personal and social development as key goals. The focus groups, questionnaires and interviews conducted as part of this study clearly demonstrate that DreamArts’ participants believe the experience has offered them opportunities for personal development. Their testimonies, and the study by Hughes and Wilson, are indicators to the potential value of participating in youth theatre.

However, we are mindful of Applied Theatre researchers who counsel us to be careful when making grand claims about the instrumental value that participating in theatre can have (Balfour 2009, Thompson 2009, Gallagher et al 2010, Snyder-Young 2013 and Gallagher 2014). In her 2014 book *Why Theatre Matters*, Gallagher cautions that:

There are many such stories of transformation in the arts and education literature. They do happen. But it is often far more complicated than such neorealist narratives would have us believe (Gallagher: 2014 132).

With that in mind we believe DreamArts contributes positively in numerous ways to the personal and social development of the young people who participate in their

programmes, while acknowledging that these changes are complex and difficult to quantify and do not happen in isolation of other factors influences on the lives of the young people.

The value of participation in the Arts, to both individuals and to society at large, is currently under scrutiny in the UK, with several large scale research projects investigating who is taking part in cultural activities and what benefits this might bring. The *Taking Part Survey*, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been under way since 2005 collecting data on participation in both sport and culture in England. The *Cultural Value Project*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council has supported over 70 academic projects investigating cultural value, whilst the Warwick Commission conducted a 12-month inquiry into how Britain can secure greater value from its cultural assets.

The Warwick report (2015) maintains that in Britain in 2014, “high socio-economic background, university level education attainment and professional occupation are still the most reliable predictors of high levels of participation in a wide range of cultural activities. The wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population forms the most culturally active segment” (2015: 32). The *Taking Part Survey* suggests that, “those with disabilities or from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and those from lower socio-economic groups on lower incomes or with lower education levels are significantly less likely to engage with the arts” (Martin et al 2010). It also suggests that people who define their ethnic group as white are, ‘significantly more likely’ to engage with the Arts than people from black or minority ethnic groups. The survey claims that 61% of those defining their ethnic background as white have attended Arts events at least three

times in the last year, while only 49% of those describing their ethnic background as black or ethnic minority have attended Arts events.

The Warwick Report also concludes that, “access to opportunities for creative self-expression is currently socially stratified and restricted for many women, ethnic minorities and disabled people” (2015:7). The panel notes that they are:

Particularly concerned that publicly funded arts, culture and heritage, supported by tax and lottery revenues, are predominantly accessed by an unnecessarily narrow social, economic, ethnic and educated demographic that is not fully representative of the UK’s population (2014: 32).

DreamArts would appear to significantly contradict the national trends; 78% of the participants in DreamArts programmes are female, 18% of their young people are identified as having special needs and 78% have BME backgrounds (Black Caribbean 19%, Black African 16%, Mixed 16%, Arab 7%, and Kosovan 4%). During 2015-16, 72 children and young people aged 7-16 were involved in the Weekend Programme, of whom 63% stated they are from families on benefits and 43% from families where English is a second language. DreamArts is engaging a diverse section of young people from the Borough of Westminster in the Arts, and this is a cause for celebration.

# METHODOLOGY

As a means of assessing the impact of DreamArts, this Report uses results taken from 10 months of DreamArts' Outcome Star evaluations which are completed by participants from across DreamArts' programmes, as well as an Outcomes Star evaluation completed by 32 parents/carers from the Experiment programme. We also had access to Project Reports, which summarise the achievements and challenges of individual projects, as well as containing some testimony from DreamArts' staff, participants and Partner Agencies.

The project team conducted semi-structured focus groups with two groups of young people from DreamArts, as well as holding one to one interviews with alumni from the programmes:

- Focus Group 1: six 10-12 year olds currently participating in DreamArts programmes.
- Focus Group 2: seven 7-9 year olds currently participating in DreamArts programs.
- One to One Interviews: 26 young people who attended DreamArts programmes in the past.

We worked with Maddy Smith, DreamArts Programme Manager, to schedule these focus groups with current participants while they were attending sessions in preparation for a forthcoming performance. These happened in a quiet room at the rehearsal space in The City of Westminster College, Paddington Green, London on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016. The focus groups were carried out by two research assistants, working together from a list of semi-structured questions discussed in advance.

With the help of Graham Whitlock, DreamArts Chief Executive, we identified ex-DreamArts participants who had been involved with a range of DreamArts projects and were prepared to take part in either an online questionnaire or one to one interview. These interviews happened via telephone or Skype and were conducted by two research assistants at a time nominated by the interviewees, between June and October 2016.

In total, we spoke with 39 young people, 13 current members and 26 alumni of DreamArts. When quoting these young people in this Report we have anonymised the participants.

All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed, and all participants consented to their interview or focus group discussion being used as part of this research project and shared, both with DreamArts staff and with a wider audience via this Report.

# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

## IMPACTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Achieving a Greater Sense of Self-Worth

The first key impact of participation in DreamArts that we wish to highlight is 'Achieving a greater sense of self-worth'. Evaluation reports evidence many, indeed often a large majority of, participants being labelled by staff as lacking in confidence prior to starting DreamArts projects. This lack of confidence is confirmed by the interviews and focus groups in which numerous participants self-identified themselves as shy before they started DreamArts. Even participants in the 7-9 age bracket stated within focus groups that part of the reason they attended DreamArts was "to not be shy around others", "to learn confidence", "learning to talk loud" and "to improve talking and communicating". The older group (10-12 year olds) was also able to demonstrate an impressive awareness of how increased self-confidence can be advantageous in social situations, interviews and in work prospects.

It is evident from our study that this impact of regaining or developing self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence is achieved by DreamArts with significant results. One of the recurring, and almost unanimous, themes of participant and alumni responses was that an increased self-worth and sense of being "confident", "less self-conscious", "unafraid" and "brave" is a fundamental by-product of participation in DreamArts' programmes.

Whilst shyness may be a barrier to participation at the start (several participants self-identifying as shy said they didn't like DreamArts at first), this initial phase seems to be short-lived. One participant interviewee, for instance, was referred by her mother and started DreamArts "involuntarily – I didn't want to do it because I was ridiculously shy, but I'm glad I did it because I gained a lot more confidence!" Her enthusiastic contribution as an interviewee is testament itself to the self-worth she says she has achieved through involvement with DreamArts. She recalled not feeling able to talk to her teachers or anyone new, "Now I can just come here and talk to you!" She went on to recommend involvement in DreamArts to "younger kids [...] because that's when they need to start building confidence [...] later in life it's harder to put yourself out there".

Participants' inputs at focus groups and interviews suggest that an increase in self-confidence is often accompanied not only by improved leadership skills and a willingness to take creative risks but also, most significantly, by marked improvement of participants' communication skills, particularly their ability and confidence to talk to new people and ask responsible adults for help. A participant commented that she had "learned to make eye contact with adults" and that at DreamArts, for the first time, she felt "confident and unafraid" and able to "try new things". Participants described their heightened confidence as allowing them to be more spontaneous in school speaking tasks as well as helping them to be more outgoing, helping them to volunteer their ideas and grasp more opportunities. Moreover, outcome evaluations also regularly demonstrated that a majority of participants feel more confident in taking leading roles, and in managing projects and challenges at the end of a project, compared with at the start.

In fact, whilst some impacts are more evident in retrospective reflection by alumni, the sense of achieving greater self-worth is remarkably palpable among current participants. A participant stated that *“I was quite a quiet person and I wouldn’t want to talk to people [...] but, now, after going to DreamArts [...] I feel more confident to make new friends and [...] talk to other people”*. Significantly, this interviewee attributes this newfound confidence entirely to their involvement in DreamArts commenting, *“I didn’t have anything else apart from DreamArts that helped me with that type of stuff.”* Such impact has also been noted by parents. One parent, for instance, described how her daughter *“has become much more confident [...] and is able to express her feelings”* whilst another described their child being *“more confident and outgoing. She enjoys meeting new groups of friends”*. Alumni testified similarly, with one stating, for example, that DreamArts had contributed to delivering presentations at work conferences and hosting business meetings *“with great confidence and professionalism”*.

We would hypothesise that an increase in feelings of self-worth and self-confidence would support performance in school. *“DreamArts supported me when I got in trouble at school”*, recounts one participant, whilst another states that, *“it gave me more confidence in school [...] I changed in school because of DreamArts”*. One participant laments that, before they had joined DreamArts, they had been disengaged with learning and *“used to just think, there’s nothing [...] worth doing”*, but that *“after I went there [to DreamArts] I realised that you can actually have fun [...] and learn as well”*.

Furthermore, 65% of DreamArts’ members come from homes in which English is a second language and, for non-native speakers, there is evidence that DreamArts has impacted upon confidence in English language abilities. One alumnus, for example, describes how DreamArts *“made me feel comfortable even though my level of English was a barrier at the time.”*

A key mechanism through which DreamArts seems to achieve this impact of boosted self-worth is the young people’s experiences of performing and presenting. A participant from the Express programme reflected that they were now able to *“express myself in front of everyone. DreamArts have helped me to not be shy and to perform”*. The confidence that is developed for the youth whilst devising and performing allows them to build new identities as artists and performers which are beyond the label of ‘at risk youth’, creating the hope of change identified in other studies (Anderson & Overy 2010, Caulfield et al 2009).

Gala performances were frequently singled out as the highlight of the Experiment programme, with other public showings like film screening events also often being mentioned. Such opportunities to share their work with their friends, families and DreamArts associates are highly valued by the young people. Many participants felt that performing on professional theatre stages, for final performances, had not only been exciting experiences but had also significantly contributed to their feelings of self-worth. Participants spoke of working through anxieties about their performance and public speaking abilities, and overcoming stage fright for big performances with a fond reminiscence. One of the participants, for example, said that the fact they had *“performed in front of loads of people”* at DreamArts had helped them to achieve a sense of self-worth because *“it isn’t something*

*I would usually do so taking me out of my comfort zone actually helped.*" The results of this study, therefore, echo the findings of Anderson et al, who noted that "public success in performance before audiences of significant others opened up new personal and social identities (as artists) that helped [...] envision an alternative self" (2011 171).

Equally, feelings of camaraderie during projects, of everyone working hard to support each other, were very prevalent. A participant in the 10-12 year olds' focus group reflected that, "*Performing [...] gives you a feeling of accomplishment*". Indeed, many participants expressed a sense of hope engendered by the process, whilst reflecting on the emergence of a sense of value and achievement they developed while working on their own artistic work (both performance and otherwise). "*I didn't have high self-esteem prior to starting DreamArts*" recalls one participant, but "*look what I was able to do*", she continues. In this way, the opportunities provided by DreamArts, to engage with performance and the Creative Arts, contribute to the disruption of internalised negative self-perceptions (Anderson et al 2011, Maruna 2010). Another participant says, they were "*proud of myself because, after the gala, I had proven to those who said I couldn't do it, that I could*". This testimony demonstrates that, though DreamArts programming is founded upon what participants can learn during the workshop '*process*', this learning is often only solidified through the sense of pride, which is achieved from demonstrating the final '*product*' to others, an argument which has been extensively theorised by researchers such as James Thompson (2009).

By no means does this appraisal of final performances and presentations make their experiences of presenting to their peers in the rehearsal room insignificant. In focus groups,

participants identified the training of performance skills in the rehearsal room - like confident speaking, projection and eye contact - as being useful in other parts of their lives. In addition a staff member, from a Partner Agency on the Express Programme, observed that even lower-key exercises in which participants *presented* their work (rather than necessarily *performing*) had been "*very good for self-esteem and confidence building*".

The programmes also allow participants the opportunity to explore their own sense of who they are, a process fundamental to challenging the cripplingly low sense of self-worth with which many begin these projects. In some of the interviews and discussions with the participants, the youth equated being listened to in DreamArts projects with feelings of being truly valued. "*When I first came to DreamArts I felt like I wasn't good enough*", recalls a participant who felt like dropping out. "*I'm still here*", they conclude. Others also pointed out that "*they [DreamArts staff] don't put pressure on you*", contributing to this feeling of being valued for whoever you may be. One interviewee bluntly states, "*if you think about it, that's all you want as a young person [...] I want what I'm thinking and what I'm doing to be validated. And that's what DreamArts did.*" It is unsurprising, therefore, that participants connected their new found confidence and aspirational thinking directly to the experience of taking part in DreamArts' creative projects surrounded by the supportive and nurturing environment created by the staff.

It emerged that for all the participants interviewed, self-worth is not only achieved in the programmes through either performance or social interaction with staff and peers but also through the inspiration, support and courage required to take on different roles within the projects. Although some felt naturally more confident in some areas

compared with others, many pointed out that the projects had led them outside of their comfort zones in one way or another. Whilst some participants couldn't identify anything that they didn't enjoy, for others it was singing or dance sessions in particular, or even the planning and coordination required by producing shows, to which they attribute their sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Still others preferred the experience of filming behind the camera, or the technical skills of behind-the-scenes of a drama production. For this reason, a real strength of DreamArts' work is the variety of Creative Art forms that are integrated into their work. This variety stops the workshop pace ever feeling stagnant or repetitive and, crucially, it allows each participant to find their own niche, whilst also ensuring that each young person is challenged in one way or another, within a supportive environment.

Although this impact is most evident among participants who began their participation in DreamArts with feelings of low self-worth, there is evidence that even those who were more confident still benefited. *"I think I had high self-esteem prior to starting out with DreamArts",* states an alumnus, *"but what I was able to do is, through small projects and through the help of [DreamArts staff...] I was able to do something, be praised for it and see the end result".*

Ultimately, this impact of DreamArts, on children and young people achieving a greater sense of self-worth, is achieved very successfully. A young person's reflection that DreamArts *"saw in me the things I didn't, and brought the best out of me",* neatly summarises this fact. Similarly one alumnus, having gone from attending a failing school to being an up and coming technology entrepreneur, expressed how *"It was incredible [...] to receive such faith in what we*

*could achieve"* at DreamArts. The experience of participating and performing in Arts projects, together with the scaffolded approach to building confidence throughout the programmes, was a regular feature of project evaluations, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires.

This type of impact has also been noted by other research into the Participatory Arts (Goodrich 2004, Miles and Strauss, 2008, Maruna 2010). In 2005, for example, Hughes observed that, "arts activities are considered to have a range of benefits, from increased confidence to transferable skills" (2005 13). Whilst many well-run Arts projects should be expected to achieve such increases in participants' self-confidence, DreamArts appears to achieve this impact both with particular breadth, in terms of how many participants report meaningful change in this manner, and depth, in terms of the significance this impact has on participants' lives. That this impact is particularly pronounced seems to stem from the large number of opportunities for participants to share, present and perform their work and ideas; the project-based focus of their work which fosters a strong sense of achievement; the nurturing approach of DreamArts' staff to making participants feel valued in a supportive environment; and the large variety of art forms, and creative roles, to which participants are exposed.

## Box 1: Awareness of their Impact on the World

Closely associated with the development of self-worth are children and young people's increased 'Awareness of their Impact on the World', another change which DreamArts' programmes are intended to deliver to participants.

Giving the young people a voice through the Arts is key to achieving this impact. DreamArts is well placed to deliver on this front, as their programming is so flexible to the needs and desires of participants. The versatility of the Express programme, in which groups choose an Art form through which to explore a subject matter of their own choosing, is an excellent example of this flexibility. Evaluations demonstrate that the majority of young people going through such projects feel they have had the chance to explore their voice and who they are and, therefore, will have had the opportunity to see the impact they can have on peers and adults when they share their views with others.

Meanwhile, the recently renewed focus of the Experiment Weekend Programme is to give participants the drama devising skills they need to develop their own musicals. This feature not only allows participants to develop risk-taking and confidence in the sharing of thoughts and feelings with their peers, but also to experience the impact of communicating their ideas with audience members in their final performances. In this manner DreamArts is *"an amazing project based way of getting together to voice our opinions on other matters"*, an alumnus suggests.

Through DreamArts' focus on developing creative skills, participants are led to think about their potential impact on the world, in

the longer term, through the creative sector. One of our interviewees, for example, suggests that DreamArts *"wasn't training for me, but really a journey where I found myself again [...] It has allowed me to realise my potential [and...] has given me tools to have a positive impact on people."* This sentiment is echoed by another alumnus who said that, integral to DreamArts' impact was *"encouraging us not to be afraid of the gifts we have [...] we found out who we are as artists and people which made us stronger in all areas of our lives."*

DreamArts' staff were noted by several interviewees as skilfully drawing upon the young people's skills, strengths and talents during workshops. *"They're like 'we hear you, we see you, we want to work with you, we want to give you every opportunity that we can to make what you're thinking in your head become a reality"*, states an alumnus.

Demonstrating to every young person the impact they can have, on a creative project, is a valuable life lesson to participants of the unique potential they hold, regardless of whether or not they go on to a career in the creative industries. As such, this approach to instilling and reinforcing positivity has arguably changed the self-expectations held by the youth.

## Developing Coping Skills and Building Resilience

The second key impact of participation in DreamArts that we wish to highlight is the development of coping skills and the building of resilience.

A significant way in which this impact is achieved is through the experience of performing in drama. The development of drama skills arguably impacts upon how participants cope with various pressures and challenges: in the focus group for 10-12 year olds a participant demonstrated wisdom beyond their years, stating that drama skills were useful in day-to-day life because *“Life is a drama”*. When the same focus group was asked what was special about DreamArts, one participant responded, *“There are ups and downs. It helps you to negotiate the downs”*. Drama activities such as role-plays, musical theatre, mask work and discussions about characters all offer participants the opportunity to experience expressing different emotions and needs. An interviewee describes how, on the one hand, performing an ‘evil’ character *“was interesting [...] they’re fun to play”*. However, when they go on to describe how this experience formed *“an idea of how to get into that sort of character”*, they betray the development of emotional intelligence that is embedded in character exploration work.

Learning drama was described by participants in the 7-9 year olds’ focus group as an opportunity to *“express yourself, not to hide your feelings.”* Indeed, another interviewee recounts that *“if we ever had something [difficult] that I wanted to tell but not quite want to tell [explicitly, then] we could always*

*show it through there [the dramas in the DreamArts workshops]”*. One participant from the 10-12 year-olds’ focus group said that, *“Kids think they should only feel happy; it gives us a chance to feel other things”*. Such activities give participants a safe environment in which to explore challenging emotions, which they may encounter themselves, whilst providing a vocabulary in which to talk about them and normalising conversations about emotions and mental health. *“It was a creative outlet to deal with stuff”*, recalls an alumnus. Consequently, such character driven work should be seen as providing a lead in for participants to ask difficult questions pertaining to real life.

One of the most significant ramifications of exploring emotions in this way is the effect upon participants’ ability to manage anger and cope with rejection in the real world. A participant who was involved with a stage fighting workshop recalls that *“we were learning how to slap in stage fighting [...] you really can feel it inside [...] all the power you have, but sometimes you get scared and shocked of [...] how you do it”*. Being able to explore such potentially destructive emotions like anger is potentially very impactful. When this type of activity is done with the appropriate care, a significant improvement can be observed; *“You make me see things differently”*, states one DreamArts participant, *“[...] I don’t just lose my temper, I can think of options, I talk things through.”* For these reasons, we would suggest that engaging in character driven drama exploration can play some sort of part in the emotional support for the participants at DreamArts who are having to manage the effects of anger, shyness, anxiety and even, perhaps, emotional, domestic and/or sexual abuse.<sup>4</sup> *“In hindsight, I*

*order to support vulnerable youth and ensure their wellbeing through the work.*

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<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, just like any other provision of psychosocial support we would stress that the appropriate expertise should always be in place in

*realise I was coping with a lot of different things in my life” states an alumnus, “at the time I didn’t even realise that [and] I realise now it was sort of a form of escapism [...] it definitely does help with coping with difficult things in life because you have that expressive outlet”.*

In this manner, participation in drama can also be said to help DreamArts’ participants learn about how to cope with stress within a supportive environment. Whilst the run-up to shows was described by a participant as *“really stressful”*, several members recalled how, within the DreamArts environment, they were able to control and channel their *“nerves [so that they] make you concentrate and they encourage you to try harder”*, and rehearse well in preparation, rather than feeling an overwhelming sense of stress at the point of performance. The youngest participants (7-9 year olds) said in a focus group that performing in front of others had taught them *“how not to be scared”*, whilst an older participant acknowledged that being cast in a lead role had taught them skills to cope with stress. Such a healthy relationship with stress and anxiety is heartening to see.

Alongside the impact of the emotional skills and stress reduction techniques developed through drama activities, an alumnus describes the supportive role played by DreamArts staff who *“build your resilience to negativity because they are so positive”*. Whereas an unhealthy sense of competition between members can sometimes pervade youth Performing Arts projects, several alumni recall the environment at DreamArts as a safe one in which participants were free to *“make mistakes”* as they were exploring themselves and their creativity.

On top of this, interviewees also spoke of the *“self-discipline”*, *“motivation”* and *“work ethic”* needed to achieve their creative goals.

*“Definitely coping skills and resilience were needed in DreamArts”*, commented an interviewee, *“I learned that if I wanted to learn them [the lines of a play] off by heart I did need to practise them, and I did have to have that motivation to do it myself.”* Supporting participants to learn self-discipline in this way, leads another participant to describe how DreamArts has helped them develop *“a different mind-set and [I] tried to push myself even if I fail[ed] a few times”*.

A sense of stability for children and young people is incredibly important during the turbulence of personal challenges. DreamArts provides this sense of stability by providing young people with a sense of purpose and structure whilst staff also assist by mentoring the young people who are faced with navigating such challenging situations. Nonetheless, several participants highlighted the persistent need to relocate between (or within) venues, which should, if at all possible, be kept to a minimum moving forwards.

Certainly, DreamArts demonstrates strong success in terms of delivering this impact - developing children and young people’s coping skills and supporting them to build resilience. Many participants and alumni spoke of the way in which these skills had impacted upon their lives in a profound way. One interviewee, for example, recalls, *“Prior to working with DreamArts I never had the greatest resilience however [participating in the programme meant that] after making a few small mistakes I began to bounce back easily”*, whilst another mentioned that *“it also taught me how to be a bit headstrong [...] I guess you can call that resilience.”* DreamArts seems to successfully achieve this impact in part because they provide participants with numerous opportunities to express feelings, talk about challenges and learn how to manage difficult emotions, such as anger, in the fictional environment of characters in a drama. Further,

they support participants to work through stressful experiences of preparing for performances in an emotionally healthy manner and cultivate a safe, supportive workshop environment which instills in participants the values of self-discipline and self-motivation to achieve both creative and life goals.

## Box 2: Ability to Make Better Life Choices

An interrelated impact, that we explore here in only a cursory manner, is participants' 'Ability to make better life choices'. It was not uncommon for participants/alumni to discuss in interviews how DreamArts was "*helping me make the right decisions*". As a participant reflects, "*DreamArts focuses your attention on what matters*". In this way, the programmes seem to help participants prioritise their goals by providing focus in their lives.

Moreover, parents have commented on how the discipline of practising a creative art-form has helped developed time-management skills "*and readiness for tasks – 'now means now!'*". Whilst these impacts are worthy of further study, it is likely that participants garner these abilities through DreamArts' child-led focus, by which we mean letting the young people "*have a say in what we do*", as one of the Express participants put it. "*It matures you [...] prepares you for the working world*", one alumnus states. Additionally, the resilience built by participants is also evidenced anecdotally from Partner Agency staff who provided an example of several girls who, "*as a result*" of participation in DreamArts, have felt able to "*stand up for themselves when boys tease them*" and have broken up unhealthy relationships with boyfriends.

## Aspiring to Achieve and Contribute

There is evidence that, as a result of their work with DreamArts, a majority of participants have found new confidence in their ability to achieve and that this newfound positivity has enabled them to imagine new horizons, fulfil their potential and contribute, in various ways.

Such enhancement of aspirational thinking and goal building seems to be predicated by the great deal of support and guidance provided by staff. At DreamArts, tutor and mentor support is a vital component of the youth engagement with the work. One alumnus explains, *“they not only help with Arts-based issues, they also are sort of there in a complete pastoral, protective way”*, ranging from career advice to helping participants cope and stay safe during challenging phases of their lives. For this reason, participants and alumni spoke very highly of their interactions with staff, with various respondents describing staff as *“nurturing”*, *“down to earth”* and *“relatable”*, whilst identifying them as one of the most influential parts of their journeys. Respondents suggested that the high quality of staff interaction was often down to the stability of familiar faces on the staff, which would be worth maintaining as much as possible moving forwards.

The sense of achievement provided to the young people by the organisation’s programming is invaluable. Various alumni pointed to their engagement in the Creative Arts as giving them *“something to do [...] something to be passionate about”*. Whilst many said that weekends were *“boring”*, prior to their involvement in DreamArts, the Experiment weekend programme, kept them *“active”*. Providing young people, who would otherwise have nothing to do on a weekend, with creative stimulation, provides a sense of

purpose, which is undoubtedly integral to fostering aspirational thinking. When asked how DreamArts made them feel, one young participant responded, *“Tired, because we do so much work”*, before adding *“it’s a good thing!”*

However, a sense of purpose does more than merely provide distraction from the challenges at home or school, which participants may be facing at the time. Being described by a participant as *“very organised”*, the programmes give their members a sense of structure. Admitting that *“I didn’t have a lot of direction as a teenager, I was quite wayward”*, one alumnus said that her involvement with DreamArts had helped her *“utilise my skills [...] get organised [...], it] gave me a sort of purpose”*. An alumnus recollected that *“it was something fresh, something new [...] it was a major help for me”*, and that *“I became this confident person because I had something I was good at”*, as another alumnus put it.

In this vein, the sense of purpose instilled by participation in DreamArts impacts upon aspirations by providing participants with a creative outlet, not only for their energy and enthusiasm, but through which they can explore their own voice. Another alumnus described how, unlike her friends’ experiences of having nothing to do, working with DreamArts meant she’d *“spent the summer chiselling away at a part of me [...] I would have just been sat at home playing video games [otherwise...] but I spent my summers being treated like a professional in a professional environment”*. Not only, she says, did her teachers, parents and friends notice a difference in her attitude and work ethic, but she also went on to achieve *“full marks in my Drama exam”*, the first student in her school to do so. *“I really attest that to my time at DreamArts”*, she concludes.

The sheer variety of activities provided by the programmes is also significant as participants learn *“a lot about ourselves by doing things we never thought we could do”*, as one alumnus described. This newfound attitude helps them to contribute, to imagine new horizons and to fulfil their potential.

DreamArts’ programming also allows for the fact that ‘achievement’ means something different to each unique individual. Some achievements listed by staff in Project Evaluations include short-term tasks like writing a poem or experimenting with how to act in a scene. Whilst participants devising their own play may be a more medium-term goal, it is pleasing to see that shorter, less tangible achievements, such as participants being more open minded, or able to use their imaginations, are also held in high regard in Evaluation documents. Giving participants recognition, or awards, to mark these achievements obviously means a great deal to the young people in question. Furthermore, they become important milestones in participants’ development, particularly for those who may have underachieved in the past. The very basic interactions of congratulation, encouragement and positive feedback, from multiple parties within the project, seem to have been the driving force behind not only increased confidence and essential feelings of self-worth, but also to further developing an aspirational mindset.

Notwithstanding the importance of short-term achievements, one interviewee stressed a particular strength, and unique feature, of DreamArts’ Experiment Programme was its enduring nature. *“I don’t think there’s been one [an experience comparable to this programme...] that’s as good as DreamArts”*, an interviewee states, *“I have been to a couple of courses but [...] they’re so short-lived and you don’t do as big a performance [...] with*

*DreamArts it is a long term thing”*. Thus, although some participants do admit that participation at DreamArts can sometimes feel like a large commitment to maintain (with some, in their exam years, regrettably feeling unable to continue their participation as a result), the sustained duration of their programmes means that DreamArts’ impact is often more significant than shorter interventions by other providers. DreamArts’ model of facilitating a process, whereby participants work towards a final product (such as a group film) or a performance, seems to be particularly strong in this regard (see the discussion above about the value of gala performances in the ‘Achieving a Greater Sense of Self-Worth’ section). In fact, for many young people, participation in DreamArts is the first time they have meaningfully engaged in, and completed, a project of such length, which boosts feelings of achievement tremendously.

DreamArts is unique in offering local young people the opportunity to contribute to the local cultural landscape of their borough, Westminster. Whilst the creative industries and cultural institutions of the West End may be on their doorstep, most new participants have no experience of participating in, or benefitting from, this cultural landscape, let alone aspiring to contribute towards it. Workshops at, for example, the Royal Opera House or opportunities to see professional actors in a West End show are vitally important opportunities for engaging these young people in professional Arts & Culture, often for the first time - and developing their interest in contributing to local culture in the future. It is also worth noting the important role DreamArts plays in enabling access to the Arts given that Westminster has no creative hub for residents comparable to other inner London boroughs (e.g. The Tricycle in Brent,

The Roundhouse in Camden, Oval House in Lambeth, The Lyric in Hammersmith).

Clearly not all participants at DreamArts will aspire to contribute to the Arts and Creative sector beyond this role as an audience member or as a hobby. However, many alumni from DreamArts' programmes do go onto active participation, and successful careers, in the field. Some of these alumni arrived at DreamArts with an already established interest in pursuing the Performing Arts as a profession, whilst other alumni described DreamArts as *"the root of where I started"*, or as the place where they *"fell in love with the Arts"* and *"found my passion"*.

For those young people aspiring to enter the creative world professionally it is important not to understate the impact DreamArts has had upon their lives. Many of the young people on the programmes develop creative skills, which are not only completely new to them, but would have been impossible to have learned were it not for DreamArts. *"I could never afford to go to a Performing Arts school"*, states one participant who is now an award winning playwright and budding filmmaker. Participation in DreamArts makes a career in the Arts seem feasible because, as an alumnus remarks, the organisation provides participants with *"the experience of a professional environment"*. *"Without DreamArts I would never be in theatre"*, states another alumnus, *"they gave me the confidence and skills to make this my career."* Another alumnus reflects that, *"now looking back at it, you really see how much it prepares, prepared me, for [...] actually being a creative in the real world"*. The successful careers of numerous alumni are testament to the DreamArts model – one alumnus set up a group during the Expand Programme which has since gone on to tour internationally, whilst another, lacking confidence in dance

before joining DreamArts, has since performed as a Lion King cast member in the West End. By preparing them for the industry, one alumnus is forthright in stating that DreamArts *"meant my career, it meant my life"*. Hence, DreamArts can be said to not only play a pivotal role in sowing participants' interests in contributing to the field, but also in developing their confidence and creative skills to an extent that their aspirations feel, and have been proven to be, achievable.

To sum up the profound impact of participation in DreamArts in terms of developing aspirations to achieve and contribute, one alumnus remarks that, *"being a part of DreamArts makes you feel there isn't a limit to what you can do—it lifts the barrier—it tells you that it is possible"*. Whilst participants' aspirations can often be quite low before joining, it is clear that participation in DreamArts' programmes raises young people's expectations of themselves. This impact is achieved partially through staff members' consistent encouragement and support in the personal development of participants. By delivering a creative curriculum comprised of varied and multiple opportunities, suited to participants' different needs and desires, they give young people a sense of purpose. Through this they can aspire to achieve, whilst enjoying a continual sense of accomplishment. Setting medium and long-term creative goals to be worked towards gives participants the structure, and motivation, to strive for excellence, as well as the experience of reflecting on their progress.

Finally, with regard to this impact, DreamArts also offers opportunities for participants to contribute to the cultural landscape of their neighbourhood through spectatorship and creative careers guidance. In achieving such a profound impact for their participants, DreamArts should be seen as enabling young people to realise their full potential.

### Box 3: Alumni in the Creative Industries

Whilst many current participants aspire to join the creative industries, the experience of many alumni demonstrates that such dreams are possible in reality.

Notable alumni have gone on to graduate from top drama schools and conservatoires including: Drama Centre London, Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts, Rose Bruford College, The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama and The Poor School.

Professions represented by alumni include: Actors, Artistic Directors, Backing Dancers, Choreographers, Creative Directors, Creative Project Managers, Drama Teachers, Entrepreneurs, Event and Stage Managers, Filmmakers, Musicians, Online Designers, Playwrights, Song Writers and Stage Technicians, as well as Facilitators & Practitioners working for DreamArts.

Several respondents to our study commented that working with DreamArts had given them the resolve to develop their interest in education and further education courses in a variety of subject areas. These responses ranged from interests in completing a Bronze Arts Award, studying creative subjects like Art, Dance and Drama at GCSE and A-Level, up to considering applying to university courses. This echoes research from The Cultural Learning Alliance (2017, 1) that suggests that young people from low-income families who take part in Arts activities are three times more likely to get a degree than those who do not participate.

### Box 4: Engagement in Further Learning

An impact which is associated with aspirational thinking, is participants' 'Engagement in Further Learning'. In Project Evaluations, there is confirmation that participation in DreamArts helps young people to enjoy learning and trying new things.

The soft skills gained by participation in the Creative Arts can play an incredibly supportive role in the study of other subjects. For example, one participant describes how, despite choosing subjects which are *"nothing related to what I did in the Performing Arts"*, their skills from DreamArts have been useful in A-Level study giving the example that *"I have to speak spontaneously in German about a topic which, I think, is where acting helps"*.

## Improved Relationships with Peers and Adults

The final key impact of DreamArts' work on children and young people, which we want to highlight in detail in this assessment, is that of improved relationships with peers and adults.

Participants frequently cited speaking, listening and other social skills learnt at DreamArts as impacting upon their existing relationships, and helping them with their confidence when interacting with new people. This impact is largely achieved by DreamArts providing the opportunity for young people to enjoy themselves in a community environment. Many participants described how meeting new people was both a reason they had joined, and one of the things they had enjoyed most about, the Experiment weekend programme. One participant expressed that they preferred DreamArts over a sporting programme because workshops had allowed them to speak more with new people than they might be able to during sports training sessions.

Many participants begin their participation in DreamArts already knowing others in the group. A large proportion join the weekend programme, for instance, through the recommendations of either siblings or friends, whilst the Express targeted programmes often operate in places such as Alternative Education settings, in which young people will already be familiar with their co-participants (although it should be noted that such familiarity does not necessarily equate with having a positive relationship with peers when a project begins).

Nonetheless, the possibility to meet, and develop, meaningful relationships with *new* people is a strength of the DreamArts model. Participants spoke frequently, and very

positively, about the diversity of their co-participants. *"You just learn to mix with so many different types of people"*, one alumnus remarked, *"from many different backgrounds, so many different abilities, so many different ways of life"*. Various participants mentioned that they really felt they benefitted from meeting new people. A junior member spoke of the chance *"to work with new people who aren't very familiar"*, whilst a senior mentioned that they enjoyed *"build[ing] friendships with people I don't usually work with"*. In fact, another spoke of their desire to meet an even *"wider range and number of people"*, whilst participants in the 10-12 year olds' focus group wanted to have more opportunities to engage with participants in different age groups to *"give us more experience"*. Attracting a wider diversity of participants to the Experiment weekend programme, especially in the smaller Seniors group, should consequently remain a priority. Thus, whilst knowing fellow participants in advance can have obvious benefits of creating a sense of familiarity for participants, there is a balance to be had between bonding further with familiar faces and meeting other new people.

Whilst it is of course true that friendships may be forged through various non-creative activities, one interviewee points out the benefit of the Performing Arts in this regard, stating that *"because it's such a physical thing, like, acting, dancing, singing – you have to get to know everyone so it was very easy to make friends."* Furthermore, the facilitation of a welcoming and safe space by DreamArts' staff seems to be very effective for inducting newcomers into the group, whether or not they knew anyone beforehand. Not only did new participants report that they quickly felt at ease, but also participants from an Express targeted programme stated that *"Welcoming people"* was something they had achieved that

had felt important to them. For those with an already established interest in the Arts, a sense of inclusion is fostered simply by *“meeting people with the same passion”*, as a focus group participant reminisced.

That several alumni have maintained friendships with co-participants beyond their time at DreamArts, even collaborating with them on work projects in their professional lives, is testament to the organisation’s facilitation of a supportive environment. However, it is important to distinguish the DreamArts model from that of a social club. Participants do not value DreamArts solely as a socialising space but also as an arena in which they can collaborate together on creative challenges as a group. *“It was such a great opportunity for us to all get together and work on a project, whilst building friendships and getting to know each other better”*, an alumnus recalls.

Indeed, the newfound social confidence and communication skills that participants gather from participation in DreamArts seem only to be as strong as they are because they are interacting in both creative and *purposeful* ways with other young people. *“It’s about learning to work with others”*, one participant suggests, *“It’s a life skill”*. Certainly, an overwhelming majority of participants assess their teamwork skills as having improved through their participation in DreamArts. As one participant put it, *“I realised I wasn’t the only one who could, and wanted to be, the lead so I’ve learned to be part of a team”*. Integral to such improvement in teamwork skills, is participants’ increased ability to share their ideas publically. Not only do Project Evaluations demonstrate a significantly increased willingness to speak in front of a group, it is also apparent that participants are much more likely to be open, interested and respectful when listening to the facilitators,

and one another, by the end of a programme, compared with the start.

Many of the young people also noted a deep sense of camaraderie, peer support and community spirit at DreamArts. Such an atmosphere is marked by the frequency with which respondents spoke of the DreamArts community providing a sense of family and belonging. A participant from the 10-12 year olds’ focus group, for example, reports that, *“Everyone wants to progress together”*. *“You had everybody motivate you”*, said another interviewee. *“When we went we were all so different”* they recall, *“but yet we were, like, a sort of family. We trusted each other.”* Even participant groups that began being described as *“fractious and estranged”* in Project Evaluations have been evidenced as creating and sustaining positive relationships with both staff and peers by the end of their time on the programme. This sense of community appears to be fostered by the impressive extent to which participants are genuinely engaged in the Arts-based curriculum at DreamArts. *“We all had that one thing in common”*, reflects an alumnus, *“which is we love to be creative”*.

This ability of the young people to witness, praise, encourage and support one another provides a platform of inspiration and aspiration, which is a key area of the programmes’ success. In fact, it is clear that witnessing the development of others has enabled young people engaged in DreamArts’ projects to connect with their peers and to start to challenge, both their own negative self-perceptions, and their perceived judgement by others.

Anecdotal evidence confirms that DreamArts participants show success in applying their willingness to help, support and encourage one another in their creative work to other social times with their peers, which helps them to manage difficult relationships in their lives.

One staff member from a Partner Agency involved in an Express project, for instance, states that, *“The strengthened bond enabled the girls to develop their friendships and gain a better understanding of one another; this meant that they were able to resolve conflicts in a more positive way and become supportive to each other in times of need”*.

The impact of these experiences can be life changing for participants, with many saying their time at DreamArts had made them more comfortable and confident interacting with new people. A participant working within an Alternative Education setting described how, through Express, she had *“learnt to get along with people I usually don’t get along with”*, an impact which may well contribute towards her reintegration back into mainstream education in the future. In this manner, the chance to develop their social and teamwork skills appears to be particularly valued by those young people who were identified as lacking peer support and friendship before joining DreamArts.

A final manner in which participation in DreamArts impacts upon improved relationships is through the ‘Family Express’ strand of their work which helps young people to build positive interactions with family members. Beyond the development of social skills in the ways we have already described above, this programme explores parent-child relationships directly. Such projects are designed to allow families to bond through shared participation in the Creative Arts - participants on these projects sometimes struggle with difficult intergenerational relationships and shared their delight in Project Evaluations at being given the opportunity to interact, reflect and create things together in a fun and playful way.

To conclude our discussion of this impact, participation in DreamArts has been evidenced as having very significant success in terms of improving children and young people’s relationships with peers and adults. This improvement in the quality of relationships is widely reported by participants themselves in their evaluations at the end of programmes. Testimony from staff, participants and alumni not only confirm this outcome, but also demonstrate how the improved relationships brought about by participation in DreamArts activities have a really significant impact on participants’ lives. DreamArts’ programmes achieve this high level of impact by providing an environment in which participants are given the opportunity to meet, and meaningfully communicate with, a large diversity of new friends. Nonetheless, DreamArts is more than just a social environment in that the programmes challenge young people to work *purposefully* together with different people to achieve creative goals. Not only does this task-oriented group work encourage understanding and cooperation, but it also fosters a particularly strong supportive environment and sense of camaraderie, which helps with young people’s motivation and outlook both within the programme, and in their daily lives. Finally, through targeted work that deals explicitly with family relationships, DreamArts facilitates a bonding process, using the Creative Arts, for those whose relationships with their parents are particularly strained.

## Box 5: Reduction in Negative Behaviours

An impact related to the improvement of relationships is the 'Reduction in Negative Behaviours', which we will address here briefly. Project Evaluations document poor levels of concentration and cooperative behaviour in participants at the beginning of the process which, following staff support and encouragement, dramatically improve by project end. These documents also demonstrate, that on Express targeted projects in which participants struggle with conflicts within the group, they conduct themselves much better and are much more willing to reconcile by the Project's conclusion, compared with at the start.

An alumnus describes how the Express project *"was like a training ground [...] I could [...] say the wrong things, do the wrong things, be imperfect and have an almost unconditional love anyway"*. Such evidence points to the skilled facilitation of sessions by staff, who balance encouragement and pastoral support with appropriate discipline, as being responsible for such marked improvements in behaviour.

The reduction of negative behaviours *within* workshops appears to be correlated by a similar decrease in negative behaviour *outside* the DreamArts sphere. Anecdotally, the likelihood of being in trouble at school, or with the police, appears to be much higher prior to participation in DreamArts' programmes than afterwards. Indeed, a Westminster Key Worker commented that, *"none of the girls from the group have come to the attention of Police during or after working with DreamArts"*.

This marked improvement in behaviour appears to be brought about by the skilled facilitation of sessions by practitioners who

not only come with experience in the use of Arts-based practice but also, through DreamArts training, are given further skills and knowledge in Therapeutic Arts practice. This enables staff to work with young people whose behaviour might be challenging by adopting an approach called PACE. PACE stands for Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathetic, and is informed by a knowledge of neuro-science.

Moreover, interviews with participants and alumni, demonstrate that the Programmes' focus on supporting young people to be open-minded and reflective is really valued, and may also, therefore, be significant in this respect. Lastly, an alumnus points out that *"you're discussing really important issues from a very young age and you're becoming socially aware"*. Not only does such social awareness make participants more well-rounded and tolerant of other people and their ideas, but it also encourages young people to reflect on their own views and choices.

## Having Fun and Enjoying Themselves

Although it is not listed on DreamArts' Theories of Change as an intended impact, our study also indicates that another key impact upon Children and Young People is the ability to have fun and enjoy themselves. Participants and alumni shared glowing reports with us of enjoying their time at DreamArts - time which was filled with exciting activities and laughter. Indeed some of our interviewees, so encouraged by their own experience at DreamArts, encouraged younger children to join as early as possible in order to get full benefit of the programmes. Revealing how important it is for young people to be enjoying themselves, one current participant stated that DreamArts *"is a place you can come if you had a rough day"*, whilst another spoke of DreamArts as *"the highlight of my week. It keeps me going through the school week"*.

Whilst this is obviously significant of its own accord, we would also suggest that this experience of fun is vital in underpinning the success of the other impacts listed above. An alumnus, for instance stated that, *"I kept coming back to DreamArts because it was so fun."* Were the programmes not so engaging, the programmes would likely lose the interest of participants, and be less likely to achieve the other impacts. Added to this, a staff member from a Partner Agency on the Express programme suggested that the fun environment meant that the participants *"seemed unaware of the amount of learning that they were achieving while concentrating on being creative"*.

# IMPACTS FOR SOCIETY

*“If there were more youth theatres like DreamArts, it would make London a better place”,* states an alumnus. Indeed, we share this view that above and beyond the impacts upon individual participants, youth participation in DreamArts also has a positive impact upon wider society.

In assessing impact upon individuals, this paper has already outlined how participants gain numerous core and transferable skills during their time with DreamArts. However, there is also a wider-scale social and economic benefit of young people, many of whom are among the most disadvantaged in London, having such improved skills and knowledge. The range of creative skills that participants develop, and the dexterity with which they are able to practise these, mean that participation in DreamArts delivers *“some really practical training”*, as one alumnus put it, for participants wanting to enter the creative world professionally. This benefits society by contributing low-cost training to get more young people employed, and producing work, in the creative sector.

DreamArts contributes more to the education landscape than offering vocational training just for the creative industry. It is also clear that participation in DreamArts contributes to the development of soft skills like time keeping, teamwork, self-esteem and confidence, collaboration and understanding others, in addition to study skills, other practical skills and attainment in personal development. A recent report entitled *The Value of Soft Skills to the UK Economy* reveals the importance and economic benefits of such soft skills, stating that they “are important to

all parts of the UK economy” (2015 3). Whilst the report, therefore, warns that “Individuals and organisations will be affected by a combination of skills shortages and skills gaps” (2015 3), DreamArts’ programmes already contribute to addressing this shortfall by supporting many disadvantaged young people to develop the requisite skills to help them gain qualifications and employment across all sectors of the workforce.

Beyond preparing young people for successful careers, the combination of soft and social skills they learn, emotional support they gather, and passions they develop from DreamArts means that young people are also prepared for healthy and happy personal lives. *“Staying in contact and [their focus on long-term] personal development”*, was indicated by an alumnus as a particular strength of DreamArts, and one that really means DreamArts is able to realise the potential of children and young people in society. A combination of these factors means that DreamArts is able to improve the life chance for those most at risk within society, with DreamArts being described by one participant as *“vital”* in her life.

When it is considered that DreamArts works to improve the life chances of an average of three hundred of some of the most vulnerable 7-25 year-olds each year, the positive impacts of DreamArts upon society of a reduction in social problems (and their associated costs) may be accounted for. One participant describes DreamArts as an organisation which supports young people *“who don’t really know what to do”*, by *“having something there [...] to keep them busy, to keep themselves occupied, to help them progress, to help them learn”*. From giving participants a purpose, creative outlet, and source of support in their lives, we would hypothesise that DreamArts contributes significantly to solving social

problems such as academic underachievement, unemployment and antisocial behaviour.

Despite being absent from DreamArts' Theories of Change, there is another impact upon society which we deem to be very significant, namely the broadening of access to the Arts and Culture. Minorities, who are statistically some of the least likely to participate in the Arts (*Taking Part Survey 2008-9, Warwick Report 2015*), are well represented in DreamArts' programmes. With so many of their alumni going on to actively participate in the Arts & Culture, either professionally or as a hobby, DreamArts' programmes are a model of best practice in terms of involving those who are very often underrepresented in the cultural landscape.

Fundamentally, very many of the 'Impacts on Children and Young People', which we outlined in the main section of this Report, also have very significant ramifications when extrapolated to a societal level. It is clear that, as an organisation, DreamArts has a very significant positive impact upon society in many ways that would be worthy of closer scrutiny in the future.

## IMPACTS FOR PARTNER AGENCIES

There are also various impacts that participation in DreamArts has upon the partner agencies with whom it works, especially as a part of the Express targeted programme (for more information about this programme, see the discussion of Programme Activities in the 'Overview of DreamArts' section).

Firstly, Partner Agency staff have commented how *"Working with DreamArts in this powerful way allowed me to build strong positive relationships with young people who I may not have had a chance to work with."* The creative methodology can, in this light, be understood as a means to build trust with clients/students in a fun and meaningful way. Furthermore, it can also be impactful in terms of diversifying ways of identifying needs, with a staff member from a Partner Agency suggesting that even the simple act of observing a DreamArts session *"helped me identify which families needed additional support"*.

Moreover, Project Evaluations demonstrate the success of DreamArts' creative methodology in re-engaging clients/students in learning opportunities. DreamArts' programmes support participants to develop an increased willingness to co-operate, as well as a renewed sense of purpose that helps them to apply themselves in the rest of the Partner Agencies' offering. Within the context of an Alternative Education Academy, for instance, students who would normally be uncooperative with others and disengaged in lessons, showed a good record of participation in DreamArts' activities. In this case, beyond

developing their creative and soft skills, the Partner Agency stated that *“DreamArts were able to re-engage pupils”*.

In these settings, the high levels of participant engagement with DreamArts’ activities is likely due to the fact that, although the programmes have an educational purpose, they offer something very different to a school environment. It is certainly true that many of the younger participants at DreamArts also study Drama at school (before they reach the exam years). However, contrary to what participants referred to as the *“prescribed”, “hurried”* and *“boring”* nature of school Drama classes, respondents pointed out that DreamArts’ activities were often better structured and gave them more freedom to make their own creative choices. *“You don’t get that much access to the Arts through your education”*, lamented one alumnus. As such, the DreamArts model seems to be a useful supplement to schools’ offerings, providing young people with the benefits of a creative education, which schools may currently be unable to suitably fulfil.

In a funding environment in which children and youth services are being cut, it is incredibly important that statutory and voluntary agencies retain a diversity of ways in which they meet clients’/students’ needs. Whilst they undoubtedly meet the needs of other young people, various participants at DreamArts stated that they were uninterested or disengaged by sporting programmes, for instance. With some suggesting they were not good at sport, others made a specific preference for Drama because of an established hobby, or aspirations within Performing Arts. Others pointed to it being an opportunity to *“express yourself”* whilst still keeping active. As such, it is important to defend the impact that a Creative Arts programme such as DreamArts can bring to a Partner Agency, in terms of engaging with

those young people whose needs are not being met through alternative provision, such as sport.

Whilst this section has outlined in only very brief detail some of the potential impacts for Partner Agencies, there are certainly some very significant benefits of youth participation in DreamArts which would be prudent to study further going forwards.

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