



**Cardboard Citizens
Music Lab Case Study**

***innovate* 2015-2016**

Case Study written by Effie Makepeace

March 2016



Background

Cardboard Citizens is a theatre company that works with people who have experience of homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness. Our young people's programme ACT NOW has been running for five years and has primarily focused on theatre projects. During 2015 we ran ACT NOW Arts Lab, a 12-week long theatre course which featured some guest sessions with spoken word and rap artists. We were struck by how engaged our young people were in these musical elements of the course, and how talented they all were. We became interested in exploring this further and wanted to investigate the possibility of a solely music-focused project.

We asked our young people about this and they agreed that music was a massive part of their lives, in particular their creative lives and that this would be a good progression opportunity for them. We applied for Innovate funding from Sound Connections, which would provide us with enough money to pilot ACT NOW Music Lab, a project that would follow the same 12-week Monday evening drop-in structure as Arts Lab, but place the focus upon music. We would have guest tutors come and deliver sessions in various disciplines which would build up to a final performance, or sharing of some kind. We were particularly interested to see the results of this pilot project because Cardboard Citizens has not conducted a music-only project before.

Our key outcomes were:

1. **Musical skills and abilities:** the 20 young people who take part in the project will increase their musical skills and abilities by being exposed to new influences and practices. This will result in a public performance of their own material which has been developed throughout the project.
2. **Employability and progression:** the 20 young people taking part in the project will increase their confidence, self-esteem, group work skills and other employability skills during the project. They will also receive tailored advice and support around onward progression routes and employment opportunities in relevant industries resulting in 80% moving directly onto other opportunities.
3. Cardboard Citizens will have explored **the application of music in the engagement of young people as a tool for their personal and social progressions**. This will result in new professional connections with music organisations and partners and influence future project planning and opportunities at Cardboard Citizens.

Project planning

As we were developing the project, a number of exciting partnerships arose. We met with staff from local cultural arts venue Rich Mix, who were keen to get involved by offering space in-kind for the final performance. Rich Mix host the established monthly Open Mic night Allsortz which gives a platform for a diverse array of up-and-coming performers to showcase their talents, and we took a group along to it as part of Music Lab. Through Rich Mix we got in touch with the organisers of Allsortz and decided that instead of a stand-alone show, we would partner with them to be featured in their Christmas edition of Allsortz.

The project also gave us the opportunity to develop our conversations with staff from internationally renowned venue the Roundhouse, who were interested in working with us on a Community Radio Project. This fitted well with our idea of delivering masterclasses in different skills, so we agreed that the Roundhouse would deliver two sessions on Making Radio with the group, and then invite a smaller

group of interested participants to the Roundhouse for an intensive weekend, culminating in a one-hour radio show.



Through our networks and connections, we lined up some incredible and diverse artists to deliver masterclasses to the young people: Reynaldo Young (instruments and sound), ESKA (songwriting), Goldierocks (djing and radio presenting), MC Zani (beatboxing), Shay D (rap) and Bakery Boys (performance coaching). Our existing ACT NOW staff team of three also includes Conrad Kira, a grime artist who led the sessions at Cardboard Citizens when we did not have a guest facilitator.

We also recruited volunteers for the project who had extensive musical experience, which proved a real asset during the delivery of the project. We recruited Daisy Granger who has studied Music at Goldsmiths and is now interested in a career in Community Music.

The project ran over 12 weeks from September to December 2015, including a final performance at Allsortz, Rich Mix.

What happened

Outreach for the project was a real success. We reached out to our existing networks of hostels, youth centres and youth provisions, which resulted in workshops happening with 31 young people and 70 new signups for Cardboard Citizens. We were pleased to build on links with our local hostel Drapers Foyer who are based in Tower Hamlets; seven of their residents participated as well as two support workers.

We performed at Rich Mix as part of the Christmas Allsortz event on the 20 December. 11 of the group performed to 150 people. The event was a massive success and ESKA, one of the workshop tutors, attended to support the young people. After the show at Rich Mix we held another workshop to reflect on the successes of the project and evaluate what had happened.

The radio aspect of the project worked very well, with four young people attending the weekend workshop at Roundhouse, producing an hour-long radio show on Music Lab. One of the young members developed a keen interest in radio and we are now working to get him a placement at a local radio station. The show they produced can be accessed here:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/roundhouseradio/cardboard-citizens-takeover-show-16-december-2015/>

We saw excellent engagement and attendance across all of the workshops, with an average of 19 attending each workshop. We signed up four young people to start Arts Award with us (to be completed in the next year) and eight completed a PEARL (Personal Employability, Achievement and Reflective Learning) qualification.

Our young people also took part in the monitoring and evaluation design of the project; creative ideas included:

- interviewing each other at the end of the project
- asking 3-6 months down the line which of the material they developed in Music Lab is still in use
- using creative writing about Music Lab as an evaluation tool

We implemented some of these ideas and found that the peer-interview technique in particular worked very well.



Challenges

One of the main challenges of the project arose due to the large volume of young people we had engaging. The high numbers each week had an impact on the workshops and the workshop leaders, who had to adjust their plans to cope with 20+ participants. This also presented challenges in terms of recording and filming each session.

The amount of people in the Cardboard Citizens building meant that staff, including our Equipment and Media Assistant, were stretched to capacity dealing with support needs, logistics etc., and so our original plan of recording each week as we went along was not so viable.

Alongside this, shifting groups (lack of commitment to regular weekly attendance from some young people meant groups found it difficult to rehearse), and lack of 'readiness' (young people not feeling ready to record unless a track was finished) also made the envisaged plan of recording each session harder.

To counter this, we set up a private Tumblr for participants to share work and a Soundcloud (<https://soundcloud.com/cardboard-citizens-538379816>) to provide an online space for the recorded

music to be shared on, and since the project has ended we are working with the Roundhouse to offer some space to record the tracks which were performed at Rich Mix.



Outcomes

The majority of young people who engaged with Music Lab live in hostels and in various chaotic circumstances. Some of the challenges they faced during the project included: homelessness; criminal proceedings; drink and drug issues; and mental ill health.

The project provided a positive space and environment in which the young people could not only access support for these issues, but also creatively explore their musical talents and use this art form as an outlet for the difficulties that they faced.

Some of their comments are below:

“The resources, atmosphere, vibes and belonging influenced my decision to come”

Why did you enjoy the project?

“Lives up to expectations all factors, feels safe, escape from outside life”

“Awesomely! It was very inspiring”

“It was accessible for someone like me who struggles with commitment and I could jump in and out, each session was engaging”

“It has improved my view on life, I can talk to strangers freely”

What was your favourite moment?

“Eska! Because she had a big impact on me getting published as I found a new way to get inspiration and because she was a singer and her advice to merge my passion of singing and poetry helped”

“The love we showed each other, it was very encouraging and motivating for me to keep performing in the future”

“Meeting all the new people and for the result at the end”

“Eska, the individual attention she gave each of us and she delivered her workshop really weird. ShayD - her techniques like the cyper really helped us work together. Her attitude working with us was really positive and she was excited which made us excited.”

“Everyone needs a bit of ACT NOW in them!”

We captured Music Lab in two short films, which will be available online shortly on our YouTube channel.

We also bought tickets for the group to see Eska perform, who was nominated for a Mercury Music Prize during the course of the project.

What's next?

We are delighted that the majority of our new members who came through Music Lab are still engaged with our projects bringing musical elements into our current, ACT NOW Arts Lab project. We also signposted four members to projects at the Roundhouse and other partners. We did this through providing them with a 'Leaving Pack' which featured a range of next steps and opportunities for further development/progression.

One participant has gained employment in the professional musical 'Beggars Opera', which will be performed at the Park Theatre in April/May 2016. We have employed three Music Lab Members in our new touring production of 'Meta'. Since the project 24 members are still engaged with Cardboard Citizens, seven have had positive employment outcomes and three have made positive housing outcomes.

In terms of organisational development the project has had a very positive impact at Cardboard Citizens. The depth of the engagement of the young people has been inspiring for the organisation and the final performance at Rich Mix was commended by our most senior members of staff and some Board Members. Music Lab is now a regularly programmed slot in our annual ACT NOW programme of activities, for which we will be looking for additional funding to continue and develop this project.

We are also investigating the possibility of a music-centred adult project for our members over the age of 25 who are also interested in music, which may follow a similar model.