

# **“Actions Speak... “**

## **Report of Youth Music Funded Activity**

**October 2014 – June 2016**

### **Skimstone Arts**

This documents reports on the music-focused activity of Skimstone Arts’ Young Artists Collective between the launch of Reality Boots’ first album ‘Louder than Words’ in October 2014 at Gateshead Old Town Hall and their first London gig, the GOLDEXpo celebrating 10 years of Arts Award in June 2016. It therefore covers an initial phase of activity (approximately 2 months) which was internally resourced as well as the period of funding from Youth Music.

During this time members of the band have continued to develop their music making and performing, with 17 gigs in youth clubs, schools, college, secure children’s home, church hall, Skimstone Studios, theatres and music venues in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham. Three of these performances were part of a workshop that Reality Boots developed which included a facilitated session ‘Chorus-a-matic’ where band members worked with participants to create a chorus on the theme of children’s/young people’s rights. A further three were as part of specifically organised sharing events with other young musicians. Two more were as part of other Skimstone Arts productions. Others include performances as part of celebrations, festivals and award ceremonies.

Beyond individual practice and band rehearsals participants’ music making has been enhanced through individual and small group learning with peers and music leaders including instruments, vocal and theory. Participants’ breadth of appreciation has been further extended through visits by a range of musicians and Arts Award focused activity.

With the Youth Music funded twice weekly three hour sessions as a core, additional activity has also focused on developing a band identity (with subsequent paper, web and social media based marketing and promotion), recruitment of new members of the YAC, developing relationships with other agencies and enhanced responsibilities around running the studio, fundraising, and the organisation that goes with workshops and performances.

A total of 27 young people (14 male, 13 female) are reported to have engaged with music making over the period. Fifteen of these participants are considered as having been core, rather than occasional, members of the project with three of them having left during the period to study in further or higher education. This distinction between the groups is somewhat arbitrary, as individuals have come and gone and sometimes come back during this, as with any, particular time period.

Whilst all participants are encouraged to join Reality Boots, it was recorded that its established nature can make finding a place and role difficult for some. Whilst the changing membership of the Leadership Team, Youth Artists Collective and Reality Boot/band is reflected in this report, care is needed in interpreting the findings given such messy realities.

Skimstone Arts works in and between arts forms with personal and social development integrated into studio practice and organisational ethos. It is therefore difficult and arguably inappropriate to disaggregate the outcomes of the Youth Music funded activity from other work undertaken by participants, both within and beyond Skimstone Arts. Of particular relevance in this context is programme of activity funded by Esmee Fairbairn, in which 8 younger artists were directly engaged, and Smokescreen a mixed media exhibition of young artists work previewed in June 2016.

This report is based on 6-monthly evaluation discussions with younger artists, interviews with key informants - the artistic director and leader musician, three external music leaders - four external partners (two completed electronically) and a review of Leadership Team meeting minutes and other project documents, as well as multiple informal conversations and moments of participant observation. The appendices provide additional evidence.

Following this overview, the report is structured as follows:

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Thanks are due to all those who participated in this research, particularly the young artists collective. Whilst best endeavours have been undertaken to ensure the accuracy of this report, all errors remain the authors.

Chris Ford

July 2016

## Skimstone Arts Young Artists Collective – Significant Moments

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>October 2014 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Three short films with Duffel Films.</li><li>• Sunday afternoon band rehearsals (until March 2015).</li></ul>
<b>January 2015 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance as part of Skimstone Arts training for Arts Award.</li><li>• Logic software training.</li></ul>
<b>April 2015 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performances: Underground Youth Project, Music Sparks, Lithuanian visitors via CCE.</li><li>• Missing, Fittings Multimedia Company</li><li>• Sharing event with Arcanum, Jack Drum Arts.</li><li>• Participation in Case for Culture and Music Partnership North events.</li><li>• Workshop facilitation training</li><li>• Logic software training.</li></ul>
<b>July 2015 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance as part of All We Are Saying International.</li><li>• Peace Procession.</li><li>• A Natural Anthem.</li><li>• Liz Corney (singer) and Bartira Sena (experimental sound artist) in studio.</li></ul>
<b>October 2015 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performances: Frequencies/Music for Youth, Juice Festival launch party, Manifesto (with New Writing North).</li></ul>
<b>January 2015 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance at Academy of Music and Sound and Tyne &amp; Wear High Sheriff Award evening.</li><li>• Northern Triangle (work with Arcanum, Jack Drum Arts and The Cream Teas, Teesdale Resource Centre).</li><li>• Workshop at Bedlingtonshire High School.</li></ul>
<b>April – June 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance at GOLDEXpo, London.</li><li>• Workshops at Kyloe House and Northumberland College.</li><li>• Parallel Lines (work with Cuttlefish Orchestra, Jack Drum Arts).</li><li>• Lukas Estrela (guitarhada) in studio.</li><li>• Smokescreen.</li></ul>

## Findings

Below the findings of the research are reported against the funder outcomes.

### **To improve the quality and standards of music delivery for children and young people**

There is a demonstrable increase in the levels of skills and confidence in music making with much individual as well as group progress being recorded on a range of instruments and software packages. As well as the band rehearsals and gigs, this has been achieved through individual sessions and practice, with self and peer learning along with professional input in both formal and informal contexts. For example:

- “With singing I have confidence that I can sing. I have my own style of voice. I’ve increased capability and confidence in range, pitch and projection. I do warm-ups on the bus... 10 months ago I was hesitant, quiet, not comfortable singing on my own, or taking any sort of a lead.”
- “ A real journey for him... there’s been an increase in independence and confidence as well as improving as a musician, and he’s more able to tackle his frustration at not being able to do something... He did this (remember his part), with encouragement, for himself rather than being told what to do all the time. He did it, and found the notes and what Pete had been through with him all came back. He’s moving in that direction. It was a step in his independence.

Additionally there is evidence of increased levels of independence and mutual support in music making with, for example, the shells of songs being developed by the young musicians with arrangement and refinements being developed with leader input.

Participant’s appreciation of music making has been enhanced through a range of artists working in the studio including Barti Senna a sound artist studying for a Masters at Northumberland University, Liz Corney a singer/songwriter/keyboard player, John Pope a jazz bass player, poet and percussionist Dave “Stickman “ Higgins from the national Missing project, and Lukas Estrela who plays guitarhada, a Brazilian form of electric guitar based music, as well as participants attending other performances, sometimes as part of their Arts Award.

Teaching music theory, including the use of techniques adopted from Dalcroze, has been well received: “I read up on theory outside of Skimstone Arts because I wanted to do music... By understanding the theory I can now work and play with it more.”

Lead sheets were developed, particularly to support new band members, with the primary responsibility for this quickly being taken on by a younger artist.

Between October 2014 and March 2015 the band met on a weekly basis at a participant’s home. The rehearsing has gone on throughout the period with consistent increase in skills and confidence recorded during evaluation sessions. As a key informant explained the regular gigs have provided a purpose and focus for the band, which stimulates regular rehearsals as well as personal practice.

During one small group discussion it was noted how the “aim” of performances led to a “rigor: play set, critique it, do it again”. The refining of skills to performance standard involved “pushing ourselves and practice and supporting each other in this space”. It was also recorded how the groups has “changed goals to be more realistic” based on “increased self awareness”.

Work on Arts Awards, which is one focus of a weekly session supported by the Newcastle Fund, has lead to the completion of one silver and one gold award over the period with a further bronze, silver and three gold portfolios to be moderated in autumn 2016. One participant having completed their gold award is reported to be looking to do GCSEs for the first time. The Arts Award work has included a range of individual and collective activity beyond, as well as within, music with one member of the leadership team taking part in the national pilot of Arts Awards assistants.

There has been an evolution of reflective practice over the period. This report draws on some elements of this.

The need for individual tuition to be formalised was noted throughout the period, as was the tension with integrating such structure within the more responsive and collectively shaped approaches to sessions (“because we are passionate we get absorbed in what we are doing”); and the varying degrees of skill, capacity and commitment to music making, individual practice and the band amongst participants. There are additional difficulties in regular practice where people do not have their own instruments.

## **To consolidate and develop the musical, social and work related skills and experiences of Young Artist Collective**

In November 2015, participants noted how their playing together had improved over the previous six months with increased confidence, better listening skills and non-verbal communication (“synchronicity and positive body language”) being recorded. It was also noted how the song arrangements were tighter, the new songs were musically more challenging, and how the band produced new songs quicker. The increased confidence allowed people to enjoy and relax so they were playing better; the willingness and skills allowed an adaptability which gave a fluency.

During the facilitated evaluation sessions throughout the period such features were consistently recorded, although progression is often not linear.

One key informant talked of “the ethos within the group. They are patient and supportive of each other. Its cyclical... [because of the ethos] people can bring things, so there’s experimentation. They all take it quite seriously.... There’s a recognition that you don’t just show up and play and really brilliant things happen. There’s a lot of background work... It’s real world stuff.”

- “There’s camaraderie. The group is close knit. There’s some clique stuff.”
- “Recruiting new committed members is difficult when there’s a band and there are songs. It’s a struggle for new members finding their place, but it’s happening.”

- “It makes me feel better ... helps with my mental health problems ... they’re like a family”
- “We are comfortable in expressing selves and our identity.
- “When I started working with him he was quite problematic. There was aggression just below the surface. Now he’s a different character – approachable, friendly, not disruptive... He’s struggling with finding a way in; he’s not as accomplished as others.

It was recorded that Ballad of the Boot expressed how members felt about the band. The lyrics are reproduced with permission (PS email 15 July 16) as appendix 1.

There is evidence of work and increased knowledge, skills and responsibility around a wide range of matters, such as the organisation of gigs and events, technical equipment, and stage craft; band identity and promotion, publicity and marketing (hardcopy, on line and social media) including album distribution.

Several funding bids have been developed during the period. Following a session “going over what was really needed in writing a proposal and budget, to write the application we divided into two groups: one looking at/writing main body of proposal and the other looking at/writing up the budget... It was helpful practice for the future as a group, but also as individual artists.”

As always several bids and other pieces of work did not bear fruit, including being featured on community radio and securing independent rehearsal space. Recruitment of additional participants has been an ongoing focus of work over the period, with limited success.

The re/allocation and re/negotiation of roles is a constant feature of the band and studio: “They take a particular role and either are not sure about it or think it’s too easy. Sometimes its revealed that it’s not easy, because they don’t know a or b. Then they’re put on the spot and have to learn it.”

One participant described how band members “have different musical tastes but we come together as a band. It’s a microcosm of the world. Have diversity within the group. Learning to work together leads to the macrocosm of our individual lives. How we go about our daily lives.”

Another: “Through artistic growth, personal growth is happening. Progress here, especially in confidence, allows progress outside of Skimstone Arts... We’re going to galleries, discussing and thinking about issues around art... It’s the confidence to go through the door, thinking this is my sort of space and I might be able to do this. ... We can do things; we have a bit of structure or an idea, and off we go...”

## **To extend the skills and opportunities in facilitation of peer musical leadership and influence on other music leaders**

In addition to the range of performances workshops were undertaken in Northumberland with a high school, an FE college, and a secure children's home.

The training and development of the workshop is recorded in a draft Arts Award portfolio: "We discussed the ideas on what makes a good workshop. We worked in groups and then pairs to share ideas on the concept of what makes a good workshop using the skills we were given. We then went away and constructed our own workshop. We had a rehearsal workshop based on chorus writing."

The schedule for one workshop reads "12pm Arrival and set up: 1.30 Performance: 2.00 Q&A: 2.30 Break: 3 Workshop: 4 De-rig and pack: 4.30 Travel to Skimstone studios: 5 Un-load the vehicles and reflection: 5.30 Finish."

One participant recorded the activity in a workshop as part of their draft Arts Award portfolio: "We worked with a group of 14/15 year olds on trying to piece together a chorus there were 11 students altogether. We aimed to develop young people's skills on writing music and also passing the views of young people and enforce the message of the album reality boots which is all about the rights of young people focusing on the song manifesto...."

"In the workshop I participated in one of the groups to build a chorus about what rights young people do have I separated the groups and we wrote down rights they thought young people do have we also wrote a few sentences to start the basic lay out of a chorus whilst we were in our group we got the students to write the ideas on flipchart paper we got some good responses and good ideas. People listened quite well and were quite enthusiastic about writing their ideas. When we came to adding in some chords and a tune and a base to the chorus we had written some of the students did not like to sing so we taught them some instrumental skills on the piano and drums."

One key informant described the work at the secure childrens home as "a pinnacle... I have noticed how in situations that are potentially very scary, anxieties are overcome so quickly because they are secure as a band and with each other. You could see this in the flexibility in the workshop. They were sharing personal stories of hardship and music as part of their journey through it; and this had an impact on the young people ... This example was them working and performing together; their resilience – they coped with it; their flexibility – the structure went out the window, they improvised; their relationship building, positivity, confidence. The musicianship was also respected, especially the content of the songs."

The experience of partners is recorded in the appendices which clearly evidences the development of professional relationships with a range of partners and younger artists roles in practical arrangements. For example: "It struck me how actively engaged the young people from Skimstone are in all levels of the project, from leading the organisation of the event and into the creative process and performance and technical side. This is a good role modelling and peer to peer opportunity for our students here at the college."

Some change in the practice of ensemble members was recorded with one key informant stating that Youth Music was “very good for looking at the detail of work force development” with learning around the necessary structures from this phase of work informing future approaches.

One musician stated that their experience at Skimstone Arts has not influenced other work beyond the general experience; “that works, that didn’t”. However another stated; “It’s a challenge. There are expectations when delivering as a musician, but this can be more random. So you can plan, but that goes out the window... Sometimes there’s a lack of focus on the music. Its aiming for perfection; its coming, but its not really there. There’s a tension between enthusiastic encouragement and the reality.”

Talking of one young musician they recorded “things pop out about his life in the middle of a musical situation. It’s a battle between that and improving the music.” Stating that they had not had any training, but drew on their own life experience and putting themselves in young artists’ shoes, they continued “I’m a musician but I like to help out, to help people see things more clearly. It’s a strange line, a blurring of roles; being a mentor and musician as well as a peer and friend. When working, you put your personal stuff to one side, but not in this context.”

This professional musician has started to learn the piano and is being given “tips” by a young artist who they describe as “a better player”. This person states they are “using the new instrument to deal with melodic and harmonic issues in the band, so it’s informed development in a specific musical way.”

## **To embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project**

There are many examples of practice as well as specific activities being shaped through a range of mechanisms. A key informant noted that “the leadership team is where the arc of Reality Boots is discussed ... The planning of what needs to be done practically is embedded through this and the conversations about what we need to do at the beginning and end of sessions.”

Multiple instances of this influence are clearly evidenced in the minutes of the leadership team meetings, as well as some of the facilitated evaluation sessions. Two members of the leadership team have attended Board meetings during the period representing the younger artists’ perspectives.

Relationships have been enhanced and/or developed with the range of agencies as recorded above. As outlined in the appendices, in some cases these have had included organisational aspects as well as the sharing of artistic practice.

Beyond workshops and performances, participation by younger people has been recorded in events organised by two of the region’s music education hubs, a regional youth music network, a regional social leaders network, the Strong Voices conference, and the regional consultation on the Creative Case.

## **To test an approach to transferring Skimstone Arts' studio practice towards co-producing a community of practice**

One key informant described this outcome as “the lynch pin; its indicative of being an open not a closed community”. They went on to ask how the links could be made between the positive responses of marginalised young people visiting the studio and the inclusive outreach work of the workshops and other sharing events.

Another, noting how although the proforma had been developed it had not been used, talked of the intention of translating the practice to young people and in this the need to take account of existing mechanisms.

Although the agency has increased visibility, and partnerships, including with academics, were described as “the strongest we’ve ever had” it was also recorded; “In a recent ESF meeting I realised we still have got a long way to go in communicating this.... its about ethos and expectations. Pastoral care is also very embedded.”

## Conclusion

As part of developing the application for funding that has resourced the work covered by this document, the Young Artists Collective we asked to identify their next steps. One group headed their notes "April 2016 - The dream".

<b>Identified Next Steps July 2014</b>	<b>Summative Assessment July 2016</b>
• Touring the Album	Yes
• Publicise the band/YAC - flyers etc	Yes
• UK tour	Partial
• Start with regional tour - test the water	Yes
• Meeting other musicians	Yes
• Inspire us to write more music	Yes
• Documenting the tour (film)	No
• Go busking (not for profit)	No
• Sharing the music and experiences of YP beyond the region	Yes
• Collaborating with other arts organisations, youth groups and bands/musicians (supporting other well known bands)	Yes
• Promotion of material/message	Yes
• Working at festivals - offering workshops	Partial
• Exhibiting a growing collection of our related art works - to promote 'Skimstone' and the band	Yes
• Increased confidence in performing (solos/duet/and with all band)/performance skills	Yes
• Increased visibility of yp rights through the music performances and art	Yes
• Increased/improved skills in playing and performing music (on our chosen instruments. more music lessons - being taught by guest musicians/more workshops)	Yes, Some
• Better attendance (make Skimstone more appealing)	Some
• Working with other organisations	Yes
• Expanding experiences and skills for YAC	Yes
• Social action project ; involve yp in a music session/play music together	Yes
• Skills swap with other groups for young people; create/collaborate together	Yes
• The band will have a name and a brand	Yes
• Sell merchandise	No
• Write more tracks	Yes
• Create a second disk	No
• Make a song with (not led by) the ensemble	Yes
• Get one of our tracks played on radio - radio - interview	No
• Members play more than one instrument eg double bass [linked to following]	Some
• Apply for our own funding [linked to above]	Yes but not linked with above
• Present our album to the EU (Brussels!)	No
• The YAC band will still exist	Yes
• Go pro and manage ourselves	No
• Paid per gig (portion of ticket sales)	No

As outlined in the Findings and Appendices and summarised above, there is substantial evidence to conclude that during the period considerable progress has been made on the funder outcomes focused around younger musicians. In drawing this broad conclusion it is important to recognise that there is significant variation in the degree and direction of individuals' progression over the period.

However as a group, members of the Young Artist Collective have increased knowledge, skills appreciation and confidence as musicians and artists. Additionally, increased individual and collective efficacy is demonstrable professionally and personally, as musicians and performers. The quality of the partnerships established, and members' roles within this, attest to the enhanced organisational and professional skills of the younger artists.

There is less evidence of the continuing professional development of members of the Ensemble.

Similarly the aspiration of clear model/s of practice to enable the testing of approaches to transferability has not been achieved. It appears that the studio practice and its transfer is enacted more than articulated. There is evidence of the continuing empowerment of younger artists within the organisation, however the transferability of practice appears to be at the level of techniques and tactics rather than more broadly.

This can be seen in much of the younger artists' work: perhaps particularly looking outwards in the workshops devised and delivered by Reality Boots and looking inwards in the identification of the new studio space.

The evolution of practice through this may provide an opportunity for further clarity and articulation of practice as well as its ongoing enactment.

Happy New Studio!

Appendices. 1 reproduced with permission

Ballad of the Boot

v1 <sup>Fm1n</sup> If you're feeling broken,  
<sup>Cmaj</sup> let your words be spoken  
<sup>Fm1n</sup> your journey's full of mountains  
<sup>Cmaj</sup> but the clock's still counting

v2 Stop and look for a minute  
 the darkness comes so quick  
 I know you say you're broken  
 But your heart's still working

Break  
 (6/4) <sup>Fm1n</sup> The journey aches us  
 and almost breaks us

Chorus <sup>Fm1n</sup> Don't you worry if you cry  
<sup>Dmaj</sup> Life gives you lows  
<sup>Gmaj</sup> life gives you highs <sup>Amin</sup> / FH  
 life is long but you'll get by

v3 so imagine our vision  
 if you care to listen  
 The future ain't a mess  
 Please don't give up yet

v4 So stop, forgive just a little  
 We are humans after all  
 I walk a different path to yours  
 But we don't walk alone

Break The journey aches us  
 and almost breaks us

chorus Don't you worry if you cry  
 Life gives you lows  
 life gives you highs  
 life is long but you'll get by

v5 One foot forward and one step more  
 It's all it takes I promise  
 Take my hand I'll lead you up  
 From the ground below

v6 If you're asking yourself why  
 Wondering how  
 Don't over think  
 Remember you're gonna be alright

Break The journey aches us  
 and almost breaks us

Chorus Don't you worry if you cry  
 Life gives you lows  
 life gives you highs  
 life is long but you'll get by

v7 this is your new beginning  
 take your footprints from the dust  
 walk the path that reality boots  
 for a future fair and just

v8 There's a hand reaching out  
 in your darkest of moments  
 All you have to do  
 is keep on hoping

## **2 Employability Skills Framework, Arts Award**

In May 2016 participants were asked to consider what work related skills they had gained over the period. The framework for the conversation was the Arts Award Employability Skills Map.

### **Personal attributes**

#### **Positive attitude and willing to learn**

#### **Good personal presentation**

#### **Honesty and Integrity**

#### **Reliability**

#### **Time Keeping and organisation**

- School workshops demand punctuality
- Writing down times, dates and keeping to deadlines
- I took responsibility to find out dates and times for sessions
- In making sure equipment list for gigs is updated
- Attended Skimstone on time put all dates in my diary

#### **Team work and collaboration**

- Juice proposal is evidence of this – working together towards a common goal
- Working together to create songs and music to peoples work
- Contributed towards supporting other band members in a school setting
- Being positive and sharing enthusiastic energies towards others when working with others

#### **Flexibility**

- Adapting and understanding the individual needs and levels of others
- Adapting to the needs of other group members to rehearse particular parts thoroughly
- Assisting in improv music for a piece of work. I really dislike this type of improv
- While attending Skimstone I have had to work round my job to attend Skimstone sessions regularly

#### **Customer focus**

- Talking to viewers and audience about Skimstone, myself and my work
- Explaining my art work to audience members and making them feel welcome
- Designing events for particular groups eg schools
- Knowing what to say to others about myself, my art, skimstone

## Skills

### **Communication**

- I emailed someone an equipment list
- Advice and assistance – pastoral issues
- Communicating information about work
- Communicating ideas and possibilities
- I have learned how to voice my ideas better
- Learning how to deal with musical problems arising in the band

### **Numeracy**

- Teaching N how to work within bar structures

### **Leadership**

- Allocating different responsibility and seeing people develop within their new roles
- Input into i) session ii) leadership meetings
- I led a warm up
- Leading vocal warm-ups/lessons

### **Self promotion**

- For lessons call 0191 555 555
- People to highlight what they can offer and give one off workshops

### **Enterprise skills**

- Organising market stall and band camp
- Marketing
- Networking with other bands and schools – gaining contacts

### **Planning**

- Collaborate on gig tech specs
- I have learned how to plan workshop which I didn't do before
- Developing my planning workshop skills from that of taking an activity as a TA in a classroom
- Taking notes for leadership and assisting in planning

### **Problem solving**

- Coping with issues as they arise and working through them also working with others
- Sound issues whilst performing solved by having mixing desk supervisor
- I did a poster; I did a rap once

## **Reflection**

- Reflection on solos during gigs thinking how to improve them
- I have no reflection! I am a vampire
- I now take time to reflect upon things that have gone well and things I can improve
- Reflection embedded within my own practice

## **Project and event management**

- Learned how to fit into other establishment timetable frameworks and communicate through formal channels
- Learning new skills as a curator, such as planning deadlines, overseeing artist statements, deciding when [?] art pieces will hang etc

## **IT Skills**

- Learnt how to use Cubase 8 lite recording software and Audacity to produce audio pieces
- Learnt a bit more about Mac books
- More experience in Photoshop and Moviemaker
- Challenged myself to create a film for the first time using Final cut pro

## **Character Skills**

### **Resilience**

- keep attending through tough times
- working through having kids balancing skimstone and coming to band rehearsals
- when lots of things to do and feeling stretched I stick with it and carry on
- Good attendance and punctuality

### **Confidence**

- More confident in performing
- Increased confidence through opportunities to perform
- Gained more confidence talking to other people [:] skills
- Helped YAC members to develop musical skills in learning the piano
- More confident in personal progress in improving instrument level
- Being confident enough to create a film for the first time? : confident to push past anxiety and visit other organisations and events

### **Empathy**

- Caring for others and being there when people need to talk. I'm a good listener
- I have lots of empathy
- Of other people's problems

- Tolerance

### **Behaviour**

- Sense of community
- Collaborating with people that you may not have otherwise met
- Helping others when they need help

### **Tolerance**

- Sense of community

### **Curiosity**

- Curious about doing certain things
- Sala [?] performances and small pieces group pieces of music
- Investigating different musical styles

## **3 Case Studies**

The case studies were produced in November 2015 as part of an evaluation of a nine month multi-disciplinary participatory arts project funded by Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. Funding to develop these case studies was drawn from both Esmee Fairbairn and Youth Music. They are reproduced below as they appeared in the earlier report.

### **Case Study with Steven Richens, Younger Artist, Peace Process-ion.**

Steven left home at the age of seventeen kicked out by his mam. Housed in a Salvation Army hostel, “which isn’t the best place for a 17 year old”, Steven states “this wasn’t a good part of my life”.

Although he had been physically fit in the past, Steven got into serious problems with alcohol and a wide range of drugs. He did some “stupid things” including assaulting another resident for taking his baccy. “I got into heavier drugs - did crack once or twice - and then I turned around and said ‘I can’t live like this anymore’”.

He’s been coming to Skimstone Arts on and off for the past four years, he’s going to the gym and living in supported accommodation, as living with his brother wasn’t working out. “My brother brought us here. When I first went he turned around and said ‘they won’t like you’. Because of who I am. So on the first day I was shy, I didn’t talk to anybody. The first person to talk to me was [another younger artist] and ever since I’ve loved coming here because they were very accepting of us. I actually fit in. Its one of the very few places I fit in....

“If I make a mistake, make myself look like a tit, they say ‘its alright Steven’. They are very respectful. If I say something they don’t agree with they will say ‘its the wrong thing to say’, or ‘you could

rephrase that'.... I wouldn't keep coming if they didn't challenge the behaviour.... What's the point? It's not going to help progression.... I used to butt heads with [core team], back in the day. There was stuff I couldn't agree with. But now I've matured enough to know [their] hearts in the right place."

Talking about the impact of the art work he's done Steven says: "it helps channel it. I use my personal pain from life to help make good art. They help channel and refine. If you get an idea it's going to be a raw idea. They teach you how to refine it. They don't just channel it. They teach you how to channel it. They show you how to mould it into something you wouldn't have anticipated at first but could go well with a piece of film or piece of photography.

"From the work I've done here, hopefully it'll inspire other people, the general public... Through inspiration comes determination, and through determination you can hopefully cause inspiration.

"Skimstone Arts utilises potential... natural and taught... They don't just say 'you've got a skill, we'll use you'. They teach you new ones and through teaching new ones it helps when it comes to making art. When I came here I was just a performer, an actor with bits of backstage, now I do song writing, perform on stage... other stuff. I have a say. I'm allowed to have an opinion. In most art groups you're just told what to do and how to do it. Here it's a good mix of professional and personal work....

"Its a natural way we work and also the rules, the stimulus. We're told from the beginning that is a professional space.. So we don't take the piss, take advantage of the situation, of [core members] good nature. We take the professional space and that helps stimulate the work that we do.

When Steven first joined Skimstone Arts he wasn't involved in a band, rather doing his music working individually or with an ensemble member. Although as a youngster Steven wasn't musically inclined - "whenever I sang, mam told me to shut up." – he was always good at lyrics. He created his own music, an original rap piece, that was used in an exhibition and wrote spoken pieces for another. He used the garage band software to work on 3 or 4 pieces of instrumentation.

He now evaluates his song writing; listening to others input. He is currently learning to sing and doing backing in the band. The first performance was "awesome." He's starting work on his own materials.

Steven has done bronze and silver Arts Award during past 3 years and will be doing gold when the sessions start again. Steven wants to learn an instrument, but hasn't decided what. When Skimstone Arts brought a Cajon/beat box he started learning that: "where things were, the sound textures. I started learning how to hold a beat."

Steven had a bit of involvement with A Natural Anthem. He then went to Ipswich for ten months, as he was told there were better prospects, leaving after the first performance. He came back and lived with his brother before moving to his current address in July 2015. On his return to the region, Steven had felt as though he didn't fitted in. "There were new people, new materials. I didn't know where I belonged. I felt lost. I wasn't in the right frame of mind to come back." Since July he been "attending regularly and engaged. I've been giving my ideas. One of the main reasons came back was to increase my artistic arsenal."

Steven now feels “a reinforced bond with people in Skimstone Arts. When I came back to Newcastle I felt I had no friends. When I came back to Skimstone it fell back into place. I’d spent 10 months on my own. I felt I had no friends. It helped mentally and socially. I’m trying to rebuild myself... Skimstone pulls me in not just through the music, also through the friends... I try to be a supportive figure in people's lives, not just in Skimstone.”

Talking during Peace Process-ion Steven states “We’re working effectively as a team... function as a professional and able to have a laugh and joke on. If someone’s off we’re able to pick up the slack for them to come back to...” His involvement with Skimstone Arts is “mostly voluntary, but we’re getting a bit of pay for this.” The difference is “Just the bills. It doesn’t affect the dedication... but it’s nice. It says they respect me enough as an artist to offer us this. It’s an opportunity. It gives you the confidence.”

He describes Peace Process-ion as being “less about talking, although there’s the dialogue on stage, but also about shutting my mouth and letting the silence do the work... I saw myself as an actor; now as a multi-disciplinary artist. I have multiple functions and can go between these.” Steven describes the professional context as “very important. When I started I was sloppy with my ideas, and writing. Now it’s developed. The ideas are bigger picture ideas.” And he’s developing his own style.

Thinking about resilience, Steven says “I can successfully say ‘no’ when anybody offers me drugs. I used not to be able to do that. There’s a pressure to fit in ... so you do any amount of drugs, spend any amount of money just to fit in. Over the past 4 years Skimstone Arts helped me get off drugs. It felt not possible just to say ‘no’. One day I was able to. Now I can do it. It was about [core members] saying I could. It’s a biggy - I thank them for it every day.

“They were just there, they were very nurturing, supportive. It’s what I needed when I was going through a difficult patch in my life... because I wasn’t talking to my family... Through being there and supporting me and saying I could do it, that I didn’t need the drugs. That’s what I needed, the push I needed.

“When I was down to my bare bones, I wasn’t shy to ask for money. Now if I’ve not got any I will cope with what I’ve got even if it’s not much until pay day. I don’t have to beg borrow or steal. Now I’m strong enough to get by on what I’ve got. ... I have tried to develop myself; to be compassionate. I’m trying not to hurt other people by what I say. You’ve got the right to say what you want; but also the right to think about what you say... Evaluation is a natural part of me now; every night before I go to bed I ask ‘what could I have done that was more effective day?’ ... I’m writing myself a log of skills I need to develop. I use it to check out with myself. I’d learned about reflection before at Skimstone, but the Ritual of Reflection is now a practice for me.

Steven has recently been filming. “I heard a rumour and it followed up. I attended an audition, and now I’ve got four days filming work... I’ve taken a long time to mature. Working in a professional environment has developed me. Now I won’t spend all my money on crack and just not turn up. Now I’d rather turn up and get sent home if I’m ill. If I need a day off I’ll explain it... I had to sell my phone to get by recently. [Core member] still supported me through this.”

## **Case Study with Jessica Johnson, Younger Artist, Peace Process-ion.**

[The production of this case study was funded by Youth Music. It is included because of the cross referencing of the participant's activity and experiences; which reflects the alignment of funder outcomes focused on personal and social development.]

Jessica is 24 and has rented a house with her long term partner for the past 2 years. She left school at age 17 to finance the family: her older sister had left home, her dad was ill, and her mum was a fulltime carer. Whilst she was doing an apprenticeship with a local Council, a years paid role came up in the arts development team. Although Jessica hadn't done the bronze or silver arts award, the team wanted her to do a gold award. They provided the cash, a bit of information and Jessica was referred to Skimstone Arts. At the end of the year, Jessica was transferred to a central administrative role.

Jessica says she "fell into arts" through her council role, although in her own time enjoyed anime and manga using her computer and DVDs. To get the gold award Jessica needed some original material. With the Thursday sessions extended so she could come in after her day at work Jessica learned camera work with an ensemble member. Skimstone Arts also got Jessica volunteering at Trinity College, who run the Arts Award, as part of their national Youth Network Leadership Team.

Jessica felt her work at the council was going well, when without warning she was pulled into a meeting and over 2 hours had 3 months worth of errors pointed out. About 10 days later Jessica had a day off booked because she was at the North East Arts Award conference at the Sage with Skimstone Arts, where she was making a presentation and doing a Q&A session. The contrast between being in a room with 200 people listening to Jessica with her views being valued; and being so devalued at work, was so great that on the following day she could not face going to work. She was depressed in the morning; at 1pm went to Skimstone Arts and has been going three full days for the past three years. Besides the situation at work, Jessica had lost her dad, and became the main carer for her mum who had develop a range of difficulties.

While doing the gold Arts Award, Jessica met her partner. He had been involved with Skimstone Arts for several years and has been in and out of hospital all his adult life. He was living in supported accommodation. When Jessica's dad died, her mam moved to similar single personal accommodation so Jessica lost her home. For about a year she lived between the two as she was only allowed to stay a couple of nights at a time. Jessica drew in this experience when working with another young artist to write a song performed by Reality Boots.

Along with Trinity, Skimstone Arts helped Jessica's recovery: "it was a definite release, an outlet for me, my own time." Over about a year and a half Jessica was involved with Trinity. They employed her as a part time sub editor as they were creating a new website. Jessica was working in an advocacy role, talking at conferences and meetings. It increased her independence; she was socialising, interacting with unknown people. "It was really interesting. It was very slowly building me back up." But they were wanting more and more for free, while Jessica was needing to move on.

At the same time, Jessica learned video editing and became part of the Young Artists Collective Leadership Team. She secured funding and then organised an exchange event between Skimstone Arts and two groups in Middlesbrough.

After four years, Jessica is at the end of her ongoing relationship with Skimstone Arts. Having left the sciences at sixth form, she is doing an Access to Higher Education diploma at a local college. Ideally in the future she would like to draw the two together; arts will always be there as a hobby, and she may pick it up at the other end of the science.

During the past year her partner voluntarily admitted himself to hospital. Historically this has happened every two years, but he had broken the pattern with a four year gap and had been discharged to a GP. This has been the shortest time on section and the quickest recovery. She describes the experience as “manageable and draining”. Jessica got support from health professionals as well as core team members and other young artists; their visiting took some pressure off Jessica, she got time off Peace Process-ion to organise meetings. On one occasion when things had gone wrong and she needed to get home a core team member gave her a lift by car: “it was very, very helpful.”

Thinking about her work as part of Reality Boots, Jessica highlights the increased independence in her own music learning, particularly the ocarina which she played as part of A Natural Anthem. On the key boards, having started playing again after seven years, she is now making her own lines up. She has increased musical knowledge including the theory stuff and rhythmically, knows how to make interesting patterns rather than copying what she is shown. Writing lyrics has grown throughout: it is something Jessica didn’t know she had. She now talks with ensemble members about the fine detail of musical performances, about specific rhythms as well as song structure.

Jessica was involved in the leadership team as it evolved and was designated as Chair, because she was doing the agenda setting and time keeping. Compared to when the team was set up, they get through the business much quicker: there is an awareness of what it’s for, what is relevant, what is in and out of the meeting. “At the start it was ‘do you have an opinion on this?’ Now there are questions, answers, ideas. It’s a platform for what needs to be said or highlighted. It’s not instigated by ensemble members. It’s pretty self managing including having a to do list for the lead artist at the end!”

She has been part of the band’s development, most recently involved with the workshop ideas and packages being offered to schools and youth groups. Jessica also has increased knowledge about technical set up including the new equipment the leadership team were involved in buying. She has the confidence to transfer her knowledge across different bits of kit. Having increased her understanding, she is helping others to learn this as well.

She has now returned to photography, independently of Skimstone Arts. She enjoys the creative process and sharing on-line with friends from school who Jessica has not talked with for years. She is now teaching her mam.

## Peace Process-ion.

Jessica was involved with interviewing potential ensemble members. The question she formulated - 'what would you gain from working with the Young Artists Collective?' - got very varied answers. In this she felt trusted and valued by both young artists and the organisation.

During A Natural Anthem, Jessica had a more administrative role, and although she devised and supported the use of an invoice template, the focus of her input was artistic.

Initially there was a focus on creative writing, she also played the keyboards during the early stages of the project and did some audio editing using new hard and software having worked with an Ensemble member to create the audio and music tracks. Jessica states "it was nice that [core member] had the confidence and time to allow my input. Skimstone Arts have trust and give that chance... It was very important ... I wasn't believing what I was writing about positive skills and attitude in job applications."

"Being paid is a big thing. After my experience at work I had a dent in my confidence: I was good as a volunteer but not good enough to get paid... I've responded, been giving of my best; my ideas, being sociable, overcoming problems I had. I've had to give all and manage myself... It's increased my confidence. It's a middle step, closer to professional, there's a recognition of the professional in myself.

"Using the 'creative habits of mind' my lowest point was 'collaboration'. On the Friday we did an evaluation process, giving each other messages. I got "easy to work with because of sociable nature". I've never been described like this before. It was the icing on the cake.

"There's been a big change over 4 years. I've got social confidence in working and non-work environments. When I'm out and about – on buses, in shops - people are now striking up conversations. They never did before. I don't know why... I cannot put my finger on it, but it's happening. I'm seen as approachable."

In summary Jessica describes her involvement in Skimstone Arts as being "the biggest commitment since school. It's given structure and a purpose. When I couldn't face going to work, I could go to Skimstone." Its increased her confidence, independence, sociability and life skills. "These have been pushed on by Skimstone Arts with modelling, gentle promoting and practical support"

## 4 Partner Perspectives

In spring 2016 brief interviews were undertaken with three partners who had facilitated introductions, hosted workshops, or been part of the Northern Triangle work. They had heard of the project through Arts Awards training, regional Youth Music network meetings, past professional relationships and/or Northumberland Music Hub activity.

Why did you agree to become involved?

- Primarily to give the students an experience of live music. We have 12 students and only one of them had ever seen a live band before.
- Because it was a good opportunity for the students here on the course and in the wider student body. Plus it enabled us to establish links with external agencies and raise the profile of music within the college.
- Sometimes we can struggle to find the spark to engage secondary schools. Reality Boots had the relevance and the engagement of young people who were not academic, lived with challenging circumstances, and didn't feel that school suits them. So we could engage schools beyond those who are academically engaged.
- Probably wouldn't have done with the personal connection... an understanding of each other's approaches... This sort of work requires going above and beyond the funded programme of work. Working with very vulnerable young people is not simply about sessional artistic input. Some participants talk to us more than with their parents. The pastoral care is beyond the session time. Size of organisation is an important factor: the ability to be reactive, beyond policy and procedures: the writer of the funding bid is also delivering the work. This is not true of bigger organisations. We have an investment in the community where we work. It's not a 6 month parachute in.

What if any impact has the project had on your organisation and on the young people you work with?

- Not had a major impact on the day-to-day; but it has shown MPN engaging with high schools, so its raised the profile and offer. It has had a direct impact th eon emerging relationship between MPN and [organisation]. Its helped to enhance the relationship... The young people engaged with Skimstone are not who we regularly work with.
- It has helped us grow the credibility of the new course internally and externally at an early stage in our developments of the creative offer from the college. It also provides a positive learning experience for our students and also helps them build up their experience in music and local music networks from the community.
- Benefits at different levels: the young people and between the groups of young people. At another level the organisation and music facilitators... Difference is it gets them out of comfort zone... Its aspiration for the staff and young people. Organisationally its about peer support: can

be honest, open, unguarded in a competitive industry where the admission that things are not great can be difficult... As well as differences ('urban/rural dimension') there are similarities; both working around self harm, mental health, self esteem... both organisations working with transgender young people... there are issues for them, and also for the agency.

- The students involved in the workshop definitely got a lot out of it and were inspired to try learning some instruments in the days after the session which has really supported the learning that I do in the timetabled music lessons...

Alongside inspiring them to try something new I think that the stories shared by the musicians and artists who came in really impressed upon the young people here that there are positive fun things that you can do for free, and that no matter what they've gone through, they can still find something enjoyable and be a part of it.

Is there anything distinctive about the project?

- I think the way that they're approaching their work. There was a lot of emotional warmth about all the people involved and I think that this really shone through. Another good thing is that they're openly approaching people and asking to visit: there are a lot of projects going on that are very insular and hard to get involved with.
- Disengaged and disillusioned young people who use music to express themselves.
- Both have a real investment in the young people working with. Is this a result of both being family based organisations?
- It struck me how actively engaged the young people from Skimstone are in all levels of the project, from leading the organisation of the event and into the creative process and performance and technical side. This is a good role modelling and peer to peer opportunity for our students here at the college.

Has the project met you expectations?

- Yes. Its been brilliant. There's loads more we can do...
- Yes it was great and we want to do it again very soon.
- It did absolutely and more. Reality Boots had a very professional approach to workshops.
- It exceeded my expectations. I really thought that it would be a set of adults doing a kind of therapeutic outreach work and it was a pleasant surprise to find that there were so many inspiring young people involved.

How would you rate the work of Reality Boots/Skimstone Arts?

- High class. Music leaders know their stuff. Skimstone Arts have a good reputation and following.
- Love what they do! They are really aspirational for their young people – being treated as musicians; offer public platforms for their work. Sessions and rehearsals have to go somewhere beyond a 'family and friends' event.

- From this experience, it was an excellent experience for us an organisation and for our students and we could see that the work done by Skimstone is engaging, progressive, developmental and delivered professionally and using good practice based and with a strong young person led ethos.
- I would rate it 10/10, I wish more people were doing things like this.

How could it be improved?

- By increasing the availability of sessions and maybe becoming larger.
- Understand limitations (ie funding) but speed to communications. Communication is always an issue in partnership working – the particularities of schools; the complexity and capacity of partnerships. I got write up from [one] but not from others.
- It's not necessarily about improving, it's keeping it going. Why do we need to be inventing new innovative projects when what you're doing works? Perhaps working with younger people? but they've found their niche, and that's fine.
- Any improvements made I feel would be down to better logistics and marketing from the colleges side. Additionally perhaps a bit more communication and marketing guidance to understand better what Skimstone were going to do on the day also might have helped too, but this again is also an area we at college could have improved too.

Anything else you would like to add?

- More of the same.
- Currently have specific gap around digital music
- Nothing other than I am very keen to explore further collaborations with Skimstone in the future.
- Dear Government, GIVE THESE GUYS MORE FUNDING!