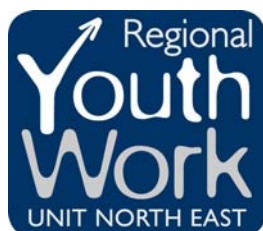


The MAG (Museums, Archives and Galleries) Offer Project

Young People's Report

2008/2009



Undertaken by the Regional Youth Work Unit –
North East, on behalf of MLA North East.

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1. BACKGROUND

The Museums, Archives and Galleries (MAG) Offer Project was developed to improve the way that cultural organisations engage with young people, and develop services which are “young person friendly”. The development of an “offer” to young people builds on the work which has been taking place both regionally and nationally between Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the youth sector. In particular, work in the North East with the Regional Youth Work Unit and nationally the development of a libraries offer to young people.

In recent years, the Regional Youth Work Unit has worked closely with MLA North East, to develop a range of initiatives aimed at improving young people’s engagement with the cultural sector. In 2003, the Unit with Newcastle Libraries Service, delivered a year long pilot project, to improve the way libraries engage with young people. A key part the programme was the development of a training course for libraries staff on working with, and developing services for, young people. This training programme formed the basis of the training which was delivered to cultural organisations during the MAG Offer project.

In 2005 and 2006, the Unit worked with two museums – National Railway Museum in Shildon and Killhope Lead Mining Museum – to assist their audience development with young people. The work with Killhope Lead Mining Museum extended over eighteen months and resulted in the development of expanded provision for young people at the museum. Part of the process was the development of a youth audit process at the museum – a process which was used during the MAG Offer project.

The culmination of this broadening experience and the Units commitment to improving young people’s engagement with the cultural sector, encouraged MLA North East to commission the Unit, to develop the MAG Offer project to cultural organisations in the Tees Valley area.

2. THE MAG OFFER PROJECT

2.1 Introduction

The MAG Offer project started with an additional scoping meeting between MLA North East and the Regional Youth Work Unit. From this meeting, information was sent out to cultural organisations in the Tees Valley area, who were asked to express an interest if they wanted to participate in the project. At the same time, the Regional Youth Work Unit contacted youth organisations in Redcar and Cleveland, a priority area for MLA North East. The Junction Youth Project in Redcar expressed a strong interest in being part of the project, and an initial meeting was coordinated.

The six partners for the MAG Offer project were:

- Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima)
- Teesside Archives
- Kirkleatham Museum
- The Junction Youth Project
- Regional Youth Work Unit
- MLA North East

At the first partnership meeting, the process for the project was agreed:

1. Establishing a group of young people who were currently accessing services at the Junction Youth Project.
2. Carry out a “youth audit” visit to each of the three cultural partners.
3. Undertake mystery shopping visits to each organisation.
4. Deliver training days to the cultural organisations on engaging with, and developing services for, young people.
5. Young people to visit other cultural venues, to see how youth engagement is delivered in other regions.
6. Feedback to cultural organisations.
7. Cultural organisations to develop pilot programmes using funding available in the MAG Offer project.
8. Young people to write the MAG Offer.
9. Final report.

2.2 Young People’s Engagement

It was identified at the beginning of the project that the involvement of young people in writing the MAG Offer was essential. The RYWU approached The Junction, a project that offers support, advice and guidance to young people under 25 based in the town of Redcar, to recruit a group of young people to participate in the project. Eight young people aged between 11 and 18 engaged in the project. All of the young people were from the Tees Valley area and were drawn from The Junction’s Young Carers project, and thus all had caring responsibilities. The RYWU recruited a youth worker experienced in the field of Participation work to support the young people through the process. This worker liaised closely with staff from The Junction to set up meetings, visits, and a residential, and to ensure that the involvement of young people was central to the project.

3. THE PROCESS

The project began with an initial information sharing and planning meeting with the young people, on 1st August 2008 at The Junction in Redcar. During this meeting the young people were asked about their current ideas and opinions of cultural organisations.

In general the young people felt that museums and galleries were places that they would usually only visit on a school trip. None of the young people said that they would visit a museum or a gallery in their spare time (despite the fact that one young person actually volunteered in a museum, Winkies Castle in Marske). The young people felt that museums and galleries were educational and could be interesting, but in their spare time they preferred to take part in more leisurely activities. Half of the young people felt that people their age didn't visit museums and galleries because they were boring, whilst the other young people felt that they were interesting and that there must be other reasons as to why young people didn't visit them, such as cost, poor transport, lack of time etc.

When asked about their opinions on archives, none of the young people understood what an archive was, or indeed where their nearest one was.

The young people were then asked to plan how they were going to carry out the project. Being involved in the planning of a piece of work was a new concept to the group, however with the support of the workers the group decided on the following process:

Audit visit - firstly, the young people would organise a visit to each of the participating cultural organisations. In this instance, the organisations would be aware of their visit and asked to meet the young people to answer any questions.

Mystery shopper visit - secondly, the young people would make an unannounced visit to each participating cultural organisation. This would be done in smaller groups in order to appear less conspicuous, with the aim of testing the experience of visiting the cultural organisation when they were not expected.

Visit to a cultural organisation in a different part of the country – finally, the young people wanted to visit a different cultural organisation away from the region, in order to do a comparison with an organisation that has a good reputation for working with young people.

Developing the Museums, Archives and Galleries (MAG) Offer - once all of the visits were complete, the young people wanted to meet together to evaluate their experience, make recommendations and write their version of a MAG Offer.

4. AUDITS

The audit visits took place on 12th August 2008 (mima), 26th August 2008 (Kirkleatham) and 18th November 2008 (Teesside Archives). There was a large gap between the second and third visit due to problems finding a suitable date and time for all parties involved. Throughout the visits the young people used an audit tool to evaluate their experience. This audit tool was devised during their initial planning meeting on 1st August (see appendix 1).

4.1 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima)

The Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima) is located in Middlesbrough Town Centre. Mima is a modern building with impressive architecture, outside of which is a large green, that is frequented with large groups of young people on a weekend.

On the audit visit the group were asked to meet at 1pm for a guided tour of the gallery by Claire Pounder, the Education Officer. The group met slightly earlier so that they could have lunch in Café Prego – the onsite café at mima. The young people were given the opportunity to remind themselves of the purpose of the visit, and to refamiliarise themselves with the audit tool. The mood of the young people was one of apprehension as some of the young people felt slightly intimidated by the building, describing it as “posh”.

The group was given a structured tour of the building including the gallery space and various exhibitions, the balcony and the education room. They were shown the Art Trolley – which is a trolley full of art and craft materials that is taken around the gallery during school holidays so that children can take part in activities. They also had the opportunity to have the exhibitions explained to them, and to ask Claire questions about the exhibitions and the gallery. The group recognised that this would not be the normal experience of a visit to mima and took this into consideration.

After the tour the young people went back to Café Prego and wrote down their findings.

Mima Findings

Positives:

- Upon arrival the staff were generally friendly and polite
- The guided tour of the gallery was informative and it was good to be able to ask questions and have exhibits explained.
- The idea of having an art and craft trolley during the holidays was good; however could this be adapted to suit older children / young people?
- The furniture and spaces to sit in the lobby were nice.
- The modern feel of the building – it looks good but is a bit posh.
- There was plenty of staff around to ask questions, however at first the young people were not aware that this was their role and even felt intimidated, like they were being watched.

What the young people said:

“Displaying young people’s work would draw more young people in. Put photos on display of young people’s work, and run art competitions”.

“The art box is a good idea, the one that goes around during school holidays and lets people to do something arty. These should be shown somewhere, either some photos on the website or in a community space”.

“The staff in each room were just standing around and we didn’t know whether they were there to make sure we didn’t touch anything, we didn’t realise they were there to ask questions. Maybe they should wear t-shirts or badges to advertise that they can be asked”.

“They could work with the young people who hang around outside on the grass a bit more, like do art workshops like graffiti or pavement chalk or photography”.

4.2 Kirkleatham Museum

Kirkleatham Museum is located in the Village of Kirkleatham, just outside of the town of Redcar. The museum itself is based in Kirkleatham Hall, an Eighteenth Century building which was originally a school. Opposite this is a more modern, purpose built education centre and staff offices. The purpose of the museum is to show how local people used to live. The exhibits range from toys, fashion, farming, trade, the war, industry etc.

The museum was aware of the audit visit however they were unable to offer the group a guided tour. The group met up in Lillie’s Café for refreshments before the visit began. The young people were more relaxed than the mima visit as they knew what to expect and they were starting to build up relationships with each other and the RYWU worker. The group also found the surroundings more informal and relaxed which resulted in them feeling less apprehensive than they were at mima.



The group began their audit by walking through the main doors into the museum. Although there was staff behind the desk, they did not make eye contact with the young people or greet the group. Only when one of the group asked what to do did they point us to the entrance of the museum. The young people wandered around the museum at their own leisure, looked at the exhibits, had the opportunity to try on old clothes and do some drawing in the old schoolroom. There was also a quiz that the young people could do, the answers to the questions could be found in the exhibitions.

After the visit the young people went back to Lillie's Café and wrote down their findings – outlined below.

Kirkleatham Findings

Positives:

- The exhibits were interesting, especially the toys, school room and the clothes.
- Having old clothes that young people could put on from different decades was a good idea and kept the group entertained for a while.
- They were not offered a guided tour, so the group was free to wander around in their own time. Some young people preferred this as there was more to do and they didn't feel rushed.
- Having a room whereby you could sit and draw was a good idea and a nice break, perhaps there could be more things to do in that room?
- There was no intimidation as there was no staff there staring at the group.

What the young people said:

"There are activities to have a go at during the school holidays which is good and attracts families but it is aimed at kids and there isn't much for teenagers to do".

"Its quiet and free and the car park is free".

"The older stuff is interesting".

"I liked the quiz idea to follow through the rooms, it makes you look harder at the exhibitions".

"They could update their exhibitions a bit as they're quite old now".

4.3 Teesside Archives

Teesside Archives is located in Exchange Square in Middlesbrough. The archive itself collects material from local authorities, churches, and private sources covering the council areas of Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. Archives are often associated with people researching their family tree. Within the group none of the young people knew what an archive was or how they could access it, making this visit perhaps the most unpredictable.



Only three of the group could attend the audit, which was held on a Tuesday night at 5pm. The young people were provided with a guided 'behind the scenes' tour of the archive by Michelle McCarthy and Jacqui Bareham – Learning and Access Officers. They were shown exhibits that were of specific interest to them, such as Ayresome Park (Middlesbrough Football Club's old stadium) stadium plans, diaries from a soldier in World War One etc. They were also given information about how the collections were preserved and restored. The group recognised that this would not be the normal experience of a visit to Teesside Archives and took this into consideration.

After the tour the group congregated outside briefly to discuss their findings – outlined below.

Teesside Archives Findings

Positives:

- The tour of the archives 'behind the scenes' was excellent and the young people got to see parts of the archive that are usually closed to the public. It was also explained to them just what an archive is and can be used for, which made the group realise the different uses that an archive has.
- The group found learning about how items in the archives were preserved very interesting.
- The fact that the archive items cover local history the young people could see the relevance to their lives, such as old maps, photos from the war and town plans etc.
- Overall the group were very surprised about how interesting they found the visit.

What the young people said:

"It was really interesting. I don't think I would use it in my spare time but I would definitely use it for school work".

"The tour was really good, seeing all of the really old stuff and the photos".

4.4 Youth Audit – Further Comments

Although the youth audits were generally very positive, the young people also highlighted some negative aspects of service delivery at the cultural organisations. These comments have been aggregated within this report, although individual feedback has been presented to each of the participating organisations.

- The young people felt like they were being watched by the staff in each room which was a little bit intimidating.
- Lack of things to do for young people – the art trolley activities were more for younger children.
- No space was available to display young people’s art work / community art projects. The group felt that having such space would be a good way of drawing more young people in.
- The archives were very difficult to find and were poorly signposted.
- Without the guided tour the young people felt that experience might have been a bit boring and not as informative.
- The group weren’t really greeted when they walked in and instead were left standing and wondering what to do, it was only when a member of the group asked where to begin that a member of staff spoke to them.
- The uniforms that the staff wore made them look like security guards and thus less approachable.
- Not having a guided tour meant that the young people had to rely on written displays for information, which some of the group didn’t like as they couldn’t take it all in.
- There was a lack of activities for young people to take part in that were appropriate to their age range
- There was a lack of interaction between the group and the staff.
- This coincides with a general lack of publicity about the archives. Prior to our visit, not a single one of the group knew what an archive was or what it could be used for. All of the young people felt that if they had known about it they would have used it for school projects.
- There were no staff floating around to ask questions to.
- The tour that they received was not offered to all young people, the group felt that this was a shame as it was so interesting.

5. MYSTERY SHOPPER

The mystery shopper visits took place on 28th October 2008 (mima & Kirkleatham) and 9th December 2008 (Teesside Archives). These visits took place without informing the cultural organisations and the young people were in smaller groups so that they would be less conspicuous and less easily recognised. On these visits the workers waited for the young people outside the cultural organisation as the group wanted the experience to be like they were visiting on their own with a group of friends. The purpose of these visits was to test out the experience of visiting a cultural organisation as a young person with regards to how young people are treated by staff when they were not expected and how interesting the

experience was for young people. After each visit the group met briefly with the workers to discuss their findings – outlined below.

5.1 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (mima)

Four young people attended the mima mystery shopper visit. The group found the experience less interesting than the first visit, and only spent 30 minutes looking around the gallery (compared to 1hr 45mins on the initial visit). The group felt that this was due to the fact that there was no guided tour to keep their interest, and that just reading information about the exhibits did not keep their attention. The group also commented that they were not greeted as warmly as on their first visit. They still felt that the staff in each room were watching them, and none of these staff offered them any help or information. There were no activities on offer for young people despite it being half term and they young people finished the visit with a feeling of indifference, it was neither good nor overtly bad, but they probably wouldn't go back.

5.2 Kirkleatham Museum

Five young people attended the Kirkleatham mystery shopper visit. The young people felt that the mystery shopper visit was much the same as the first visit as they were not offered a guided tour on either visit. Once again the staff failed to greet and welcome the young people, however they felt that they saw more the second time around and they noticed stuff that they missed the first time.

There were some art and craft activities on in the education centre. A few of our young people had a go at these activities. The activities were aimed at younger children and there were no other teenagers there. One of the Kirkleatham workers even commented on the fact that they were



the only older young people there by saying “is this the teen table then?”. The group felt that there should have been some different activities for them to do, such as orienteering in the grounds. Like mima the group felt that the visit was neither good nor bad and felt indifferent, but probably wouldn't go back in their free time.

5.3 Teesside Archives

Three young people attended the mystery shopper visit to the Teesside Archives. The group pretended that they were doing some research about Middlesbrough Football Club for a youth club project. They found the staff to be welcoming, friendly and helpful. Firstly they were directed to where they could look for information and then a member of staff kept bringing them further information for their project, such as old match day programmes. The group were impressed with the help that they were offered and got a picture of how they

could use the archives in the future for homework and research. The group didn't feel that they would use the archives in their leisure time unless specific activities aimed at young people were offered.

6. VISIT TO MILTON KEYNES GALLERY

The group identified in their first planning meeting that they would like to visit a cultural organisation outside of the region that had a good reputation for working with young people.

In July 2008 the youth worker employed by RYWU had attended a conference on how museums are developing work with young people, organised by the Museums Association. Whilst there she saw a presentation by a group of young people from Milton Keynes Gallery Young People's Project (MKGYP) who had been involved in the running of the gallery and activities for young people. It was suggested that the group make a visit to Milton Keynes to meet members of MKGYPP to get a better idea of the work they had been involved in. Links were made with MKGYPP and the group were invited to attend a recruitment evening for MKGYPP on Friday 14th November, followed by a meeting with members of MKGYPP to ask questions about their projects and experience of being involved on Saturday 15th November.

The group travelled by coach down to Milton Keynes on the Friday morning and checked



into the hotel. Before heading to Milton Keynes Gallery the group had the opportunity to unwind and have a few games of ten pin bowling and go for dinner. The group then attended the MKGYPP recruitment evening. The purpose of the evening was to attract new young people to the project by giving them a taster of some art based activities. This included decorating their own hat and taking part in the making of a short film. The young people really enjoyed the evening and were still talking about it on the way back to the hotel.

The next day after breakfast the group were given a guided tour of Milton Keynes Gallery. The exhibition was by Gilberto Zorio and consisted of a series of sculptures made of every day materials that came to life using electricity and chemical reactions. The group really enjoyed the exhibition because it was modern and "funky" which they found more attractive to young people. The staff that worked at the museum were dressed casually and were welcoming and friendly. The tour they were offered was by a volunteer who was knowledgeable and friendly and could really engage with the group.

After the tour the group had a meeting with MKGYPP who showed them some DVD's of the work that they have done and then answered lots of questions from the young people. MKGYPP are involved in activities such as making short films, music projects, large art

projects and planning the annual MK4U festival – a young people’s festival that incorporates art, music and film into a one day event, attracting thousands of young people each year. The group were impressed with the work that MKGYPP had done and felt that there were lots of ideas that they could take away from the meeting to suggest to cultural organisations in the North East.

6.1 Milton Keynes Gallery Findings

Positives:

- The exhibition was modern and “funky” and appealing to young people. Even members of the group who were not interested in art could appreciate it.
- The staff were very friendly and welcoming. They were casually dressed, chatty and approachable and engaged really well with the young people.
- The activities at the recruitment evening for young people were fun and interactive. The activities were specifically aimed at young people, not children.
- They used different media such as music, photography, film, textiles etc. so it was appealing to young people with different tastes and talents.
- The atmosphere was relaxed.
- They have a dedicated project space for the young people to use when planning and carrying out their work.
- All of the activities at MKGYPP are planned and run by young people – they have complete ownership of the project. As a result, young people’s attendance at the Gallery is high.

Negatives:

- The group did not feel that any of their experience at Milton Keynes was negative.



7. DEVELOPING THE MAG OFFER

After all of the visits had taken place the group reassembled one last time on 19th January 2009 to evaluate their experience of being involved in the project (see evaluation report), to make some recommendations and to write the MAG Offer.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from all of their visits, the group would like to make the following recommendations to cultural organisations in the North East in order to improve their service to young people:

- Cultural organisations need to be better at publicising their services to young people, including the use of the internet and networking with youth organisations.
- Young people prefer a more personal approach. Cultural organisations should offer guided tours to groups of young people, both organised and where practicable, on an ad hoc basis.
- Cultural organisations should ensure that their staff are approachable, friendly and helpful. Staff should be easily identified and available to answer questions from young people. Staff should not feel afraid to approach young people and offer them assistance or information.
- Cultural organisations should make use of their outside space and think outside of the confines of their four walls. For example, mima could offer activities on a Saturday to the young people who congregate outside the gallery on the green, such as pavement chalk drawing. Kirkleatham could run wildlife conservation projects or orienteering.
- Cultural organisations should offer activities specifically aimed at young people, making use of 'free' resources, such as staff skills, outside space etc. These activities could take place during school holidays or on a weekend.
- Cultural organisations need to improve their avenues for young people to feedback their opinions on their service, such as feedback forms, suggestion boxes, online surveys, youth forums etc.
- Cultural organisations should make available opportunities for young people to volunteer, and young people should be able to gain accreditation and qualifications for doing so.
- Cultural organisations should consider setting up young people's projects, based on the Milton Keynes Gallery model. These projects should plan and run workshops and activities for other young people.

Based on these recommendations, the group believes that MAG should adopt the following standards when working with young people:

9. THE MAG OFFER

As young people we expect MAG to:

- Have friendly staff, who give us a warm welcome and a helpful service. We expect staff to treat us with respect and to not judge us negatively because of our age. We would like staff to share their knowledge with us and to help us learn and have fun in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Offer activities aimed specifically at young people, through a variety of one-off workshops, holiday activities and continuous projects. These activities should be free or reasonably priced, safe and run by friendly and trained staff. These activities should make use of all available space. We expect these activities to be planned and run in conjunction with young people.
- Give young people lots of opportunities to give their opinions about their experience of the museum, gallery or archive, and for this feedback to be listened to, responded to and acted upon when possible. We expect MAG to consider setting up a youth forum where young people can help to shape the services offered to other young people.
- Offer opportunities for young people to volunteer, and for this volunteering to be recognised with a qualification such as Vinspired, Duke of Edinburgh or Youth Achievement Award.
- Have inspiring, different and interesting exhibits and to give young people the opportunity to have a say in choosing exhibitions. MAG should also take into account that young people learn in different ways and that there should be a variety of learning aids, such as guided tours, audio tours and interactive activities.
- Make some space that is young person friendly, whereby young people can take part in activities or design their own exhibitions.
- Publicise their activities and services properly to young people, including going to places where young people hang out such as youth organisations and schools. We expect services to be easy to find, well lit and well sign-posted.

APPENDIX 1

Museums Audit

The purpose of this audit is to test how young people friendly the museum's that we visit are.

Date: _____

Name of Museum: _____

What sort of museum is it? E.g. art, historical, science, sport, heritage etc:

On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent) how did the staff behind the counter treat you when you walked in:

1 2 3 4 5

Any comments: _____

What sort of exhibitions are there? E.g. paintings, photographs, memorabilia, interactive etc:

On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent) how interesting were the exhibitions:

1 2 3 4 5

Any comments: _____

On a scale of 1 – 5 (with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent) how informative were the exhibitions:

1 2 3 4 5

Any comments: _____

If there is a charge to enter the museum, how much is this: _____

Do you think this is:

Very expensive	A little bit expensive	Reasonable	Quite cheap	Very cheap
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What facilities were available? E.g. shop, café, toilets? (Please list and score out of 5)

1. _____	1	2	3	4	5
2. _____	1	2	3	4	5
3. _____	1	2	3	4	5
4. _____	1	2	3	4	5
5. _____	1	2	3	4	5

Any comments: _____

How long did it take you to look around all of the exhibitions: _____

Did you notice plenty of staff around to ask questions to:

Yes loads	A few	Hardly any	None
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What was good about the museum? _____

What was bad about the museum? _____

What could they do to improve / make the museum more youth friendly?

Overall would you recommend this museum to your friends / other young people?

Yes, it was
great

Maybe, it was
OK

Probably
not

No way,
it was terrible

Finally, describe your experience in 3 words:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____