



Fermynwoods Contemporary Art

Creative Community Fund Recipient



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background

Fermynwoods is an educational and arts charity supporting life through art, working with people in Northamptonshire for nearly 25 years. The organisation was originally based in the founder's home in a rural part of the county. As it's developed, Fermynwoods has made the surrounding area, and especially the woods, part of their mission. The arts charity regularly runs programmes for young people in the region who have never experienced the arts or visited the nature nearby their homes.

a Q&A with James Steventon, Director, Fermynwoods Contemporary Art

can you tell us a bit about your project?

We've been delivering a long-running Alternative Provision programme of weekly artist-led workshops for young people not in mainstream education, which has been very successful. With the support of TMC we continued throughout lockdown and nationwide school closures, resulting in Key Stage 3 students achieving Bronze Arts Award qualifications - which was a higher level than students would likely achieve at that age in mainstream school during normal times! We really believe in what we do and want to extend that support to others in need.

at a glance

- Fermynwoods Contemporary Art is an arts charity based in Northamptonshire
- Fermynwoods mission is to “support life through art”
- Funding from TMC has helped Fermynwoods to deliver a programme of creative workshops for young people who cannot attend mainstream school due to physical or mental illness
- The funding has helped the programme to reach 32 young people across Key Stage 4, all with varying physical and mental health needs
- Following feedback from schools, next steps include building on the workshops with the support of TMC funding

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The commercial art world is all about money, but the real art world is about making people feel alive - and you've made these young people feel alive.

Hospital Outreach Worker



who did the project support?

We'd been in touch with Northampton Hospital Outreach and, although they liked what we did, they didn't have much budget. But with the support from TMC and the Creative Communities Fund, it has been possible for their pupils to access our sessions.

After the last couple of years, Northampton Hospital Outreach have more pupils than ever who are mentally or physically unable to attend mainstream school, and the programme we ran is testament to our 'supporting life through art' mission. We've managed to support around 32 young people across Key Stage 4, with varying physical and mental needs.

The programme was a block of 12 sessions with Northampton Hospital Outreach with artist led activities ranging from robotics to oil painting! Our first session had a carousel of strange digital activities which was a little unsettling as it took over the young people's safe space. But by the end of the session everyone was fully engaged and enjoying themselves. In fact, commenting on a virtual reality activity, one young person said, "This is better than real life", which is quite moving when you think about it.

why is funding for these projects so important for young people?



In lockdown people really turned to the arts. But when cuts have to be made, it's always the arts. With so much going on in the world, we need it now more than ever.

There are children at school who aren't going to be fully developed individuals, because they don't have proper access to the arts. Participating in the arts is often seen as some elitist thing, but it's actually a fundamental part of being to human.

what impact has the project had on young people?

All young people should have access to the arts as human beings - it's a fundamental right. In one particular session, for example, we found that a child who was a selective mute connected with and went on to communicate with a member of staff through participating in artistic activity. For us, that was the point of the workshops - not that the child might necessarily go on to be an artist. We all turn to the arts to get ourselves through tough times, and it's not always about the end goal of a career, but about expression. Using art is an amazing tool to allow for healthy expression and communication - for every person, not just children!



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We've had a relationship with TMC for a while, but since receiving support during lockdown, our relationship has strengthened. Northamptonshire is so often forgotten about in the East Midlands, but TMC has a genuine interest in our work and region.

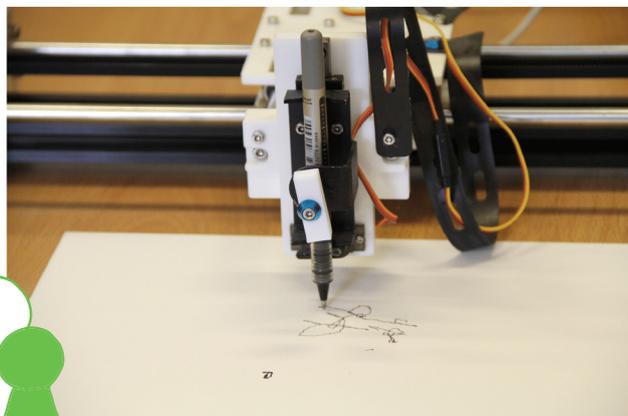
what other feedback have you received about the benefits of the project?

We spoke to the teachers from both schools after a few sessions with different artists and got some really interesting feedback. They both said the pupils felt really safe with traditional arts activities, but they needed a gentle provocation to encourage them to explore further than they usually might do, which I'd like to think is our speciality. So much so, that for later Hospital Outreach workshops, staff requested specific artists and themes to encourage the pupils out of their comfort zone.

We've also had some great reflections of the impact we've had from some teachers. For example, one Hospital Outreach teacher said, "The commercial art world is all about money, but the real art world is making people feel alive - and you've made these children feel alive".

what's next?

The next step is to build on the workshops as part of the funding received from TMC. There's lots of momentum right now, and we had amazing feedback from schools – they want it to continue indefinitely.



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how would you describe your experience working with TMC?

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what advice would you give to other organisations thinking about applying for funding?

The arts activity you're looking to fund should come from artistic practice. That's your quality control. TMC is a real youth-led organisation, so it's really interesting to see how collaborative work is done with young people and not to them. In terms of our own projects, we ask young people for their opinions and get feedback on artistic and creative activities we want to work on. We've found if it makes us say "wow", it'll make young people say "wow"!

how would you sum up your experience?

Profound, gently-provocative, creative.