



People with passion

Getting the right people around the table

**A summary report on how to embed creativity in
the lives of looked after children
and young people**

**Helen Chambers
Principal Officer
NCB**

May 2009

Cover image courtesy of Whitewood & Fleming

Copies of the full report can be obtained from:
Helen Chambers
Principal Officer, Well-being
NCB
Wakley Street
London
EC1V 7QE

Telephone/fax: 0117 317 9606
Email: HChambers@ncb.org.uk

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Language

The term looked after children is used throughout this report to include looked after children and young people (five to 19 years) unless otherwise stated.

A full glossary of terms and abbreviations used can be found on page 12.

1 Introduction to the project

In December 2007, the Arts Council England and Creative Partnerships funded an investigation to identify:

- how creativity can be embedded in the lives of the approximately 61,000 children and young people looked after in the care of local authorities
- the role of creativity in the lives of looked after children
- how this work relates to the ideas of social pedagogy as described by the Thomas Coram Research Unit at Institute of Education, London University.¹

This project with six local authorities and three high quality arts agencies was carried out by NCB between December 2007 and April 2008. This report summarises the project findings.

The context

The Change for Children policy agenda and cross-government commitment to the five outcomes for all children provides a national framework for improving outcomes for all children and young people. This is taken forward through:

- The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures²
- Aiming High³
- National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services⁴
- the Child Health Strategy.⁵

Change for children looked after in the care of the local authority is driven nationally and locally through Care Matters and its Implementation Plan.⁶ It makes the structural and systemic changes needed to improve outcomes, based on what looked after children say they want, and highlights the individuality and creativity of young people to show their talents and potential.

The 'Find Your Talent' programme gives children and young people the chance to try out different cultural and creative activities. It is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Arts Council England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It is being piloted in 10 pathfinder areas across England and offers children and young people regular involvement with arts and culture both in and out of school. The programme is for every child and young person, whatever their age and ability.⁷

¹ Petrie P and others (2006) *Working with children in care: European perspectives*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

² DCSF (2007) *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*. Norwich: TSO.

³ DCSF (2007) *Aiming High for young people: A ten year strategy for positive activities*. London: DCSF.

⁴ DFES/DH (2004) *National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services*. London: DH.

⁵ DH/DCSF (2009) *Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures: The Strategy for Children and Young People's Health*. London: DH.

⁶ DFES (2007) *Care Matters: Time for change*. Norwich: TSO; DCSF (2008) *Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care. Implementation Plan*. London: HM Government and the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the LGA on behalf of the Children's Inter-agency Group.

⁷ Find your Talent see www.findyourtalent.org

How was the project carried out?

There were two strands to this work.

Strand one – local authorities

NCB visited five local authorities and carried out a number of phone interviews with a sixth. A series of questions and interactive exercises were used to investigate how arts and creative activities are provided for looked after children and to explore the role of creativity in their lives.

Strand two – arts agencies

Arts Council England provided a project budget for each of three selected arts agencies to work with local children's services for looked after children and young people. These locally determined projects provided:

- training for foster carers
- drama workshops for young people
- consultation on creative and cultural provision for young people in a rural area
- development of a DVD on health assessments
- a multi-arts project with young people in residential and foster care
- a conference for elected members and strategic managers
- input to high profile showcase seminars and conferences.

NCB gained an overview of these projects through site visits, discussions and 'creative memories journals'. This informed a learning seminar for the three arts agencies and core advisory group. Seminar participants considered how their creative practice relates to the ideas of social pedagogy. This report is informed by learning from that event.

Principles of the social pedagogic approach

- There is a focus on the child as a whole person and support for the child's overall development.
- The practitioner sees her/himself as a person in relationship with the child or young person.
- Children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate hierarchical domains.
- As professionals, pedagogues are encouraged constantly to reflect on their practice and to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to the sometimes challenging demands with which they are confronted.
- Pedagogues are also practical, so their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children's daily lives and activities.
- Children's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group.
- Pedagogy builds on an understanding of children's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislated requirements.
- There is an emphasis on team work and on valuing the contributions of others in bringing up children: other professionals, members of the local community and especially parents.
- The relationship is central and allied to this is the importance of listening and communicating.

Petrie, P and others (2006) *Working with children in care: European perspectives*. Maidenhead: OU Press.

2 What happened?

Strand 1 The six local authorities

Local authority children's services were contacted through the DCSF funded, NCB Healthy Care Programme and were asked to invite local key players, strategically and operationally. They were asked to consider issues of effective practice, strategy and sustainability in relation to the provision of creativity in the lives of looked after children and young people. Young people in one local authority were included in the consultation.

Local areas were asked to identify their own understanding of creativity and invite local agencies to inform their work. These included arts and cultural services, libraries and museums.

All of the five local areas that were visited appreciated the experience of bringing partners to the table and this project has led to several new developments with children and young people. All partners identified the need to work together strategically and to ensure their work is included in cross-agency planning systems.

Strand 2 The arts agencies

An overview of the three projects was gained through site visits and conversations with artists, carers and young people. This overview informed a learning seminar in April 2008 for the three arts agencies and core advisory group. At this seminar, Professor Petrie invited participants to consider how their creative practice relates to the ideas of social pedagogy, as described by the Thomas Coram Research Unit (see page 3).

Social pedagogy was described simply at the learning seminar as *'the point where care and education meet'* – providing nurturance, socialisation, upbringing, education in its widest sense and supporting child development. European social pedagogy training includes creative practice and the skills to help build meaningful relationships that help children gain enjoyment, self-realisation and cultural inclusion. Its intention is not therapy, although it will have therapeutic benefits. This is referred to as the 'common third' of training.

A brief outline of the work

Myrtle Theatre Company built on their experiences of working in the care setting and set out to address a number of barriers to effective engagement for children and young people, in order to fully participate in a creative project. Their focus was to develop an effective training programme for carers, support workers and artists. This culminated in a two-day theatre event led by specially recruited and trained theatre practitioners. These included musicians, choreographers and directors who work with the company on a regular basis and provide child-centred practice focused on providing quality performance.

A theatre piece was developed and performed by the participants at the end of the two days. It explored the role of creativity in supporting emotional well-being and resilience. The administrative director managed wider relationships with children and

carers, coordinated transport etc. and acted as a listening ear for all. Myrtle's work is highly regarded locally, regionally and nationally. It is not linked or strategically embedded in the work of the two local authorities involved.

Pablo Productions focused on the tasks of delivering high quality products and developing teamwork between participants and shared ownership and responsibilities with staff. Young people gained skills, confidence, and clear working and personal boundaries as well as awareness of future work opportunities and pride in the work they achieved. The agency ensured children's services put in place the necessary support to ensure safe working practice, involving a looked after children's nurse, a manager from care services, a residential home manager and youth support workers. The agency led two projects: one in Worcestershire, where young people produced an animation DVD on the health assessments process; the other in Telford and Wrekin where 16- to 19-year-olds explored their understanding of the 'cultural offer'.

Whitewood and Fleming worked with young people in residential and foster care in a hired theatre space, supported by a participation worker. The head of service for children and families in Cumbria networked the arts organisation with managers of service in fostering and residential care and with the looked after children's education service. Work is ongoing with strategic managers and elected members to raise awareness of the importance of the work and the need to embed its provision in the lives of looked after children and young people.

The company organised a high profile Cumbrian Conference, *Finding the Key*, at the end of May 2008. This was in partnership with the pilot group of looked after children, with contributions from Arts Council England, North West, NCB, Creative Partnerships' national office, and Lincolnshire and Birmingham local authorities.

All agencies ensured staff held enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance and worked to *Keeping Arts Safe* guidelines.

3 A summary of findings

The local authority meetings and work with the three arts agencies have identified key elements for effective practice and some of the barriers that are encountered.

It is clear that the national profile provided by engagement with this work has 'opened doors' for arts and cultural services to work with looked after children services. A targeted three-year cross-government programme for looked after children and their carers is required to build on this early learning and provide a theory and practice evidence base; national profile; training and mentoring opportunities; regional demonstration projects; and multi-agency learning events to support the national roll out of the cultural offer for all children and young people, including those who require additional support to ensure uptake.

This project has facilitated the meeting of key partners – in some areas for the first time – and this has led to many new developments. Three arts agencies have worked in areas on locally determined projects. Through this process, the exploration by NCB and the learning seminar a number of recommendations were made concerning:

- profile and leadership
- cross-government working
- research and evidence base
- training and development of artists
- training of care workers and health workers
- local implementation and quality assurance
- access to the arts and creative practice
- a social pedagogic approach.

These recommendations can be found in the main report.

Key findings from work with local authorities

- Arts and creative activities are not seen as a priority by looked after children's services and are not seen as being accessible to all.
- Local work seeks to provide arts and creative activities to enable enjoyment, engagement, education and training, children and young people's participation and the promotion of health and well-being. Children and young people's participation in service and resource development is a key reason for engagement in creative practice.
- There is limited engagement in creative practice as a focus to help build relationships with carers and staff or to develop emotional well-being.
- There is minimal evidence of understanding of social pedagogy and its relevance to arts and creative practice.
- There is minimal understanding and some anxiety among care practitioners, managers and commissioners about a range of issues, including how to engage with cultural services, what is appropriate arts practice and how to assess quality of practitioner and practice.
- Looked after children need support and encouragement from carers and social workers to access opportunities to take part in arts and creative work and to try out unfamiliar activities.
- Arts and creativity are not generally recognised as contributing to child development.

The benefits

A number of benefits of carrying out creative work with looked after children and young people were identified. The table below reflects the comments from local authorities.

Figure 1: What are the benefits of creative work with looked after children?

Social and emotional outcomes	Education outcomes	Personal development
Working together	Motivation	Fun
Leadership	Increase in young men being involved in literature	Expression
Supporting each other	Gain qualifications and accreditation	Discover and develop talents, skills and abilities
Relying on others and being relied upon	Learn new skills – interviewing, life skills	Skills for life e.g. getting on with others, take turns, listen, be supportive etc.
Making friends	Young people gain nationally recognised qualifications	Being part of something and feeling valued
Building confidence	Arts Award	Opportunity to explore alternatives in a safe way – try out different ways of being
Resolving disagreements		Non threatening and usually non competitive
Accepting differences		Breaks down barriers personally and between group members
Experiencing a positive and personal change		Experiences are more visible, but children and young people are anonymous
Showing care		Positive experience – positive feedback can be very powerful
Respecting boundaries		Self-awareness
Self-reflective and self-evaluating in a non critical manner		Self-efficacy as they see change happen from their actions
A way of staying in touch with other young people		Learning about the value of putting effort into doing things
Improved health and well-being		Being able to talk about things that have happened in the past and to talk about their future
		Builds self-esteem
		An opportunity to play
		Try out different solutions, or explore difficulties at a distance – happening to an imaginary character

Skills, values, qualities and roles

These lists were compiled from the interviews with local authorities.

Figure 2: What are the skills, values and qualities of creative practitioners and the roles of carers and other social care staff?

Skills of creative practitioners who work with looked after children	Roles played by carers and other social care staff in supporting children and young people in creative projects and in relating to creative practitioners
Communication	Social workers
Knowledge of arts and practice skills	Understanding benefits of creative projects
Flexibility, good improviser	Overcoming barriers with carers and young people
Thinking outside the box	Emotional fallout and long-term support
Questioning/challenging	Preparation for the project with young people and carers
Extensive practical experience	Support for carers
Understanding young people	
Team work	
Negotiation	Foster carers
Understanding of group work and different needs of group	Support and interest
Background knowledge of the work	Sharing in activity
Planning and organisation	Look after travel arrangements sometimes
Mentoring and reaching children and carers in different ways	
Education/teaching skills	
Ability to impart knowledge and passion for subject	
Values and qualities of creative practitioners who work with looked after children	Activity support staff
Intuition and empathy	Share responsibility
Open-minded	Contact with other support staff
Interest in young people	Promote to other agencies/young people
Patience and a cool head	Promote opportunities and support in a practical way
Placing children and young peoples' needs as priority	
Tenacity and resourcefulness	
Responsive	
Innovative	
Personal charisma	
Commitment and motivation	
Enjoyment/inspiration	
Enthusiasm and creativity	

Key findings from work with arts agencies

- Embedding creative activity requires strategic partnership working between creative organisations and children's services to build understanding and experience of how arts and creativity can improve the lives of looked after children.
- Being part of a nationally recognised project helps artists and creative practitioners to gain access to children's services and to develop programmes for looked after children.
- The ways in which artists are working with children and young people, carers and partner agencies suggests an opportunity to develop the role of artist pedagogue to improve outcomes for looked after children.
- The three arts agencies demonstrated different approaches that can all inform the role of artist pedagogue.
- There is a need for an arts and creativity champion in children's services as a focus for project development and management.
- There is a need for greater awareness and training within services for looked after children about the role of creativity in the lives of looked after children.
- The support of foster carers, social workers and participation workers is important in enabling looked after children and young people to participate.

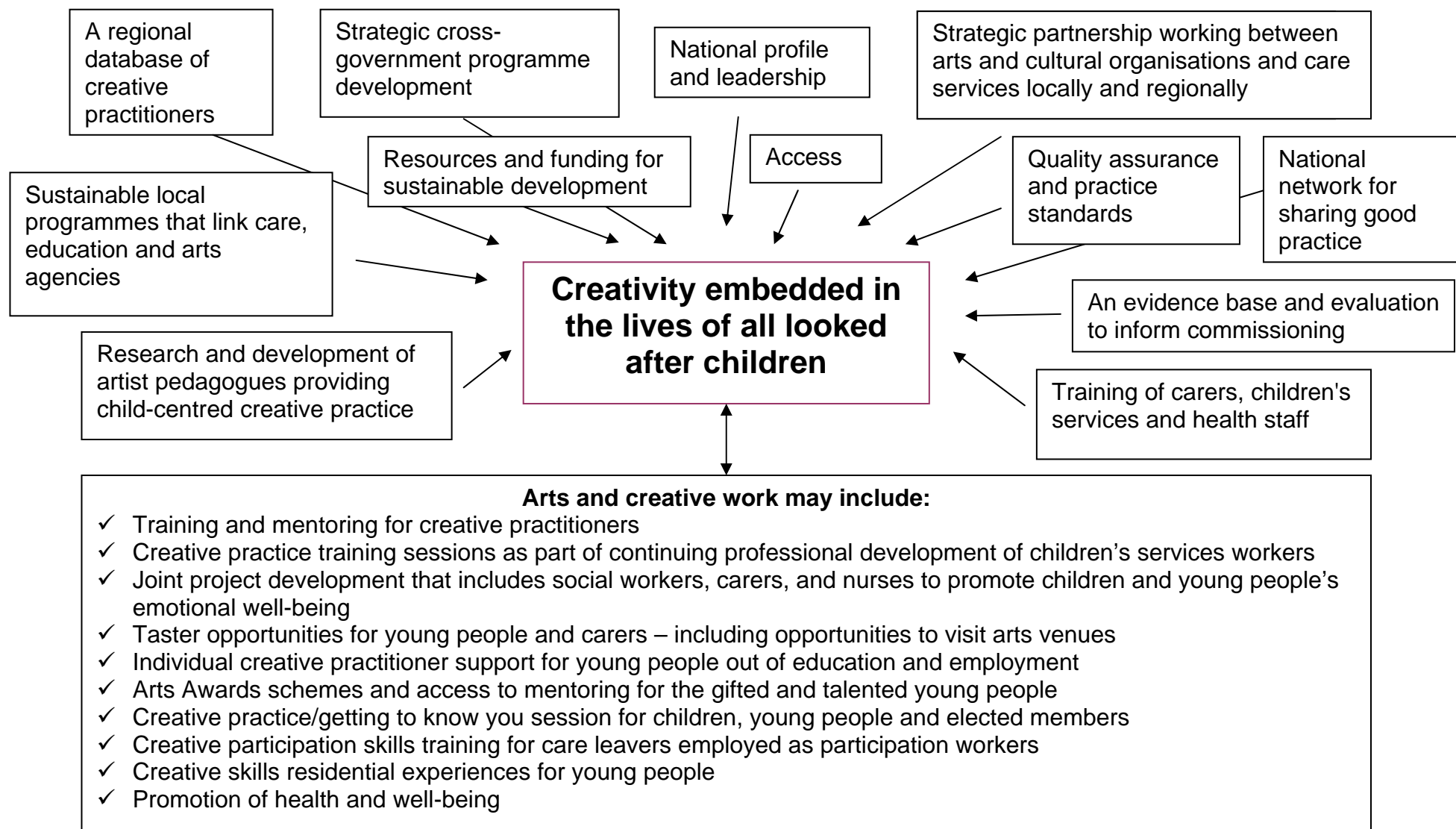
Sustainability

Through this project, a number of key points were identified relating to good practice in the commissioning of creative work with looked after children and young people.

Figure 3: What is good practice in commissioning?

Strategy and resources	Plan work strategically to link with education, care, youth support and health services as required
	Provide adequate staffing and budgets
	Involve children and young people in project planning as early as possible
	Work with carers and social workers as well as children and young people
	Be clear about project aims
	Provide adequate 'lead in time' to plan and set up the work
	Identify overall local authority project coordinator with management responsibility, accountability and protected time within children's services
Choosing the right practitioners	Engage creative practitioners with a proven track record of working with looked after children and young people
	Ensure all staff are cleared with Criminals Records Bureau (enhanced certification) and work in accordance with <i>Keeping Arts Safe: Protection of children and young people and vulnerable adults involved in arts activities</i>
Support for practitioners	Basic induction training for creative practitioners on local care processes, protocols and procedures
	Provide contact details of staff and carers to the creative practitioners, including for out of work hours
	Ensure artists have support for their emotional well-being to ensure safe practice
Planning the detail	Plan and develop the work with practitioners, identifying what creative outputs are needed
	Consider the venue and any possible food required – high sugar and food colouring affect behaviour
	Clarify necessary permissions required, and where and how information or outputs will be shown or used
	Identify what support is available for practical arrangements such as transport
	Identify how individual children and young people will be supported to take part in projects and how their possible therapeutic needs can be addressed
	Where possible build in accreditation of young people's work
	Ensure effective evaluation of child focused creative practice from the beginning of the project
Making it happen	Ensure effective recruitment to the project through an effective publicity strategy to carers and children and young people
	Ensure participants' health information and specific safety concerns are known and discussed with creative practitioners, and a health and safety sheet is completed for each child

Figure 4: How do we embed creativity in the lives of looked after children?



Glossary

Creative participation	A term used in the Healthy Care Programme to encourage creative participation methods to develop fun and inclusive engagement and involvement in decision-making
Creative Partnerships	The government's flagship creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills of young people raising their aspirations and equipping them for their futures
Creative practitioners	A term used in this document for practitioners of a range of arts and creative activities, including cooking and gardening
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DH	Department of Health
Every Child Matters – Five Outcomes	Be healthy; stay safe: enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being
Find your Talent	This programme gives children and young people the chance to try out different cultural and creative activities. It is funded by DCMS, DCSF, Arts Council England and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It is being piloted in 10 pathfinder areas across England.
Healthy Care Programme	A national programme developed by NCB, funded by DCSF to promote the health and well-being of looked after children
High quality practice	A term used in this context by Arts Council England to encourage best arts practice. This does not necessarily infer high quality engagement with children and young people
Looked after children	Refers to children and young people who may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accommodated under a voluntary agreement with their parents consent, or their own consent if aged 16 or 17 • in care on a Care Order or Interim Care Order under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 • accommodated under section 21(2) (C) (i) of the Children Act 1989 (remanded to local authority care) • on an Emergency Protection Order under Section 44 of the Children Act 1989
Social pedagogy	<i>'The theory of all the personal, social and moral education in a given society, including the description of what has happened in practice'</i> (Karl Mager, 1844) Social pedagogy was described simply at the learning seminar as <i>'the point where care and education meet'</i> – providing nurturance, socialisation, upbringing, education in its widest sense and supporting child development. A part of European social pedagogy training is the 'common third' – creative practice and skills to help build relationships between carers and children. Children gain enjoyment, self-realisation and cultural inclusion. Its intention is not therapy, although it will have therapeutic benefits. The work of the pedagogue involves the whole person: head, hands and heart.

Helen Chambers
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EC1V 7QE

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