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Qualitative Social Work

'Becoming more confident in being themselves': the value of cultural and creative engagement for young people in foster care

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Keywords:	Foster care, Art, Young people, Education, Arts-based interventions, Transformative education
Abstract:	<p>There is evidence that engagement with the arts can engender transformative effects on young people's views of themselves and their futures, this can be particularly useful for children and young people in care. This paper draws on a case study of an arts-based programme delivered in Wales, UK. Field observations of the arts-based sessions were conducted, and the participant sample included young people in foster care (n=8), foster carers (n=7) and project facilitators (n=3). The study employed interviews, observations, reflexive diaries, and metaphor work to explore the subjective accounts of these different stakeholders. This provided an insight into their experience of being involved with the arts-based programme, the impacts of this involvement, and what steps they felt could be taken to improve the model. The paper argues that arts and cultural engagement can be transformative in improving the confidence and social connectedness of young people in foster care, but that attention needs to be given to how programmes are delivered. The paper documents the often overlooked mundane, yet important, aspects of planning arts-based programmes, exploring the involvement of foster carers, interpersonal relationships, and the provision of refreshments. It calls for investment in developing carefully designed extracurricular opportunities for young people in care, where they can experience 'becoming more confident in being themselves'.</p>

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Introduction

Cultural projects are increasingly being viewed by academics and policy makers as valuable assets in strengthening community engagement and facilitating grassroots expression (Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Welsh Government, 2016). Creativity has also become the 'new watchword in UK academic and policy circles' (Robinson *et al*, 2019), and the importance of creativity as part of young people's education has been recognised in the national curricula of member states of the European Union (Wyse & Ferrari, 2014).

The call for more emphasis on the arts has been recognised in the White Paper Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum, which sets out the detailed legislative proposals for Curriculum for Wales 2022. This prioritises the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience, including the five disciplines of art, dance, drama, film and digital media, and music as the entitlement of all learners (Welsh Government, 2019). Nonetheless, it is important to consider learners who have restricted access to the arts (Andrews, 2014), and barriers to engaging with education, which can place them in a position of cultural disadvantage.

Care-experienced young people generally achieve poorer educational outcomes compared to their peers (Mannay *et al*, 2017a; O'Higgins *et al*, 2015; Sebba *et al*, 2015), with a gap of 43% between the GCSE (age 16 qualification level) attainment of care experienced students and the rest of their cohort in Wales (Macdonald, 2020). They can face significant educational disadvantages due to unstable and disruptive environments, time spent out of school, poor additional educational support, and a lack of understanding of their specific mental and emotional health needs (Harker *et al*, 2004). They are also at greater risk of developing mental health problems (Luke *et al*, 2014), and of experiencing instability related to placement moves (Cunningham & Diversi, 2012; Girling, 2019). Additionally, they are often labelled as 'failing' or 'supported' subjects and the low expectations of teachers, carers, and social workers can have unintended, yet deleterious, impacts on their educational

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2
3 trajectories (Mannay *et al*, 2017a). It is important to acknowledge that negative comments
4
5 from teachers and carers can sometimes serve as a key motivator for young people to
6
7 succeed academically; but young people's awareness of low expectations for care leavers
8
9 remain a key barrier (Brady & Gilligan, 2020).
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11
12 The complex barriers and inequality in education outcomes faced by care-experienced
13
14 young people suggest there needs to be more emphasis on how success is conceptualised
15
16 and achieved (Rees & Munro, 2019). The study discussed in this paper focuses on a
17
18 programme that aimed to engage fostered young people and their families with the arts, as a
19
20 vehicle to engender confidence, belonging, and creativity, which could potentially contribute
21
22 to further learning and personal development. This emphasis on the value of cultural and
23
24 creative engagement necessitates an understanding of the literature in this area, which
25
26 constitutes the focus of the next section.
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30 Arts Interventions with Care-experienced Young People

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33 Gilligan was one of the first authors to consider the potential benefits of cultural activities for
34
35 young people in public care in Ireland and Scotland, noting that they played a 'critically
36
37 important but relatively neglected or invisible role' within the care system (1999: 188).
38

39 Drawing on the accounts of foster carers, Gilligan emphasised that the support of key adults
40
41 in providing young people with access to the arts can engender transformative effects on
42
43 young people's views of themselves and their futures (Gilligan, 1999).
44

45
46 Again, drawing on the accounts of foster carers, as well as care assistants and social
47
48 workers, Hopkins (2004) reported on 'The Friday Club', which provided opportunities for
49
50 care-experienced young people to engage with cultural activities. The adults connected with
51
52 the programme reflected that it created social networks with others and encouraged positive
53
54 relationship-building. Comparable benefits were reported by Coholic *et al* (2012), who
55
56 evaluated two holistic arts-based group programmes that facilitated a context in which young
57
58 people were 'encouraged to build connections with peers experiencing similar challenges'
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2
3 (Coholic *et al*, 2012: 354). In their self-reports, young people noted improved emotional
4 regulation, self-awareness, and esteem, as well as coping strategies, cognitive skills, and
5 confidence (Coholic *et al*, 2012).
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10 The National Children's Bureau and Creativity, Culture and Education foundation
11 commissioned the Office for Public Management to evaluate their arts and cultural
12 programme with care-experienced children aged 7-11 across three locations in the UK. Data
13 generated with children suggested post-programme developments in participants'
14 confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. However, this was contradicted by adult
15 participants who felt that a proportion of children continued to exhibit low self-efficacy and
16 self-belief. Nonetheless, there was evidence that the project strengthened relationships with
17 care staff, foster families, and peers (OPM, 2013: 4). The evaluation documented factors
18 that contributed to its effectiveness, including having a 'safe space' cultivated by skilled
19 artists; the involvement of foster families; the importance of positive arts opportunities; a
20 small group containing only those with care-experienced backgrounds; and multiple, varied
21 arts activities (OPM, 2013).
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36 Theatre-based work has also been used effectively with care-experienced young people.
37 Salmon & Rickaby (2014) reviewed a programme designed to explore the lives of ten care-
38 experienced young people through the development and performance of a play based on
39 everyday life in care. Young people and carers reported that they enjoyed their time in the
40 theatre setting, and that they had developed social networks, relationship-based skills and
41 confidence. Correspondingly, Nsonwu *et al* (2015) explored the utility of drama as a creative
42 therapy for young people about to transition out of the foster care system. Participants
43 highlighted key benefits from taking part, including respect and recognition as an individual;
44 reduced social isolation; peer bonding; and confidence in their ability to construct plans for
45 the future.
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3 More recently, Lougheed & Coholic (2018) reviewed an arts-based mindfulness programme
4 with adolescents about to leave the care system, which incorporated painting, drawing, and
5 music and took place once per week for 10 weeks. The authors noted inferentially that
6 participants reported better emotion regulation and feelings of optimism, and feeling
7 accepted in the group with their peers, which is vitally important for young people 'who are
8 marginalised given their experiences of exclusion and discrimination' (Lougheed & Coholic,
9 2018: 170).

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19 Despite the successes reported in these studies, there were concerns about the financial
20 costs of arts provision, the capacity and willingness of carers to facilitate access to
21 opportunities, and the associated sustainability of participation by care-experienced young
22 people when funded programmes ended. Supporting young people's engagement was
23 particularly problematic for those placed in residential units where workers changed regularly
24 (Salmon & Rickaby, 2014). These issues reinforce differences between those in care and
25 those who are not, but also between young people in different care settings.

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34 Existing literature has evidenced benefits for care-experienced young people engaging with
35 arts-based provision, but also acknowledged the barriers to participation for this
36 marginalised group (see Peeran, 2016 for a more detailed review of the literature). However,
37 evaluations of arts-based interventions with care-experienced young people have not always
38 engaged with all key stakeholders or provided detail of the seemingly mundane yet
39 importance practical aspects of these interventions. In response, this study drew on the
40 perspectives of foster carers, facilitators, and care-experienced young people. Involving all
41 stakeholders was necessary to gain a more nuanced understanding of this specific arts-
42 based programme. We were interested not only in the benefits of arts-based engagement in
43 itself, which has been documented in the previous literature; but in how engagement was
44 achieved in routine practices involving the setting, interpersonal relationships, and the
45 provision of refreshments.

Methodology – A Qualitative Case Study

The study aimed to undertake qualitative research with programme facilitators, care-experienced young people, and their foster families to provide an insight into their experience of being involved with the arts-based programme, and their perspectives on what could be done to improve the model and encourage engagement with the arts. The study design aligned with some of the tenets of action research, which examines and evaluates an issue of study to determine if and how changes can be implemented to improve processes, procedures and programmes (Lewin, 1946; Howard & Eckhardt, 2005).

The research was conducted within the foundational project associated with a five-year Big Lottery funded Confidence in Care programme, led by The Fostering Network in Wales, and delivered in partnership with Action for Children, Barnardo's, and TACT. This arts-based programme was provided within the Wales Millennium Centre and delivered over 10 weeks between May and July 2018. The sessions generally ran for two hours on Sundays but the final session was extended to include a meal at a nearby restaurant, a theatre show, and a backstage tour.

Three artist facilitators from the Wales Millennium Centre designed and delivered the sessions with the support of two staff members from The Fostering Network in Wales and Action for Children who were experienced in working with young people in care. Each session began with a warm-up followed by a focus on a specific arts-based activity. In three of the sessions, the group was joined by external artists with one session featuring an expert on singing, one involving two practitioners from local theatre company, and one involving two performers from a national puppet based theatre production.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by Cardiff University's Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Participants were asked to provide written informed consent to take part in all stages of the research process. A risk assessment was conducted, and several steps were taken to help ensure the wellbeing of participants.

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3 The research techniques included observations of the arts programme sessions, a group
4 interview with foster carers; a group interview with arts programme facilitators; document
5 analysis; and interviews with young people and their foster carers. The sessions included
6 games, drawing, puppet making, singing, acting, plot development, character development,
7 and writing up activities in a reflexive diary to collate evidence of engagement for a
8 certificated Arts Award (see also Robinson *et al*, 2019) [1].
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16 Two researchers participated in the sessions, which enabled a period of familiarisation to
17 build rapport with foster carers and young people prior to the interviews. Both researchers
18 entered the sessions as full participants, getting involved in activities rather than simply
19 observing from the side-lines. This enabled an ethnographic approach based on first-hand
20 observations and reflections (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Fieldnotes were written after
21 each session as reflexive accounts of the activities, social relations and interactions. These
22 were drawn on to finalise the interview themes and later to contextualise the data.
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32 Foster carers were made aware of the program via networks and organisations related to
33 foster care. Eight young people were involved in the arts programme, seven were in foster
34 care and one was the biological daughter of one of the foster carers. All the young people
35 were female, white, resident in Wales, and aged between 12 -15 years old. The
36 demographical distribution did not reflect those invited to participate as the call went out to
37 foster care networks. The inability to engage male participants could be related to wider
38 gendered norms around legitimate participation in feminised subjects (Invinson & Murphy,
39 2003), while the lack of ethnicity in this small sample aligns with the population
40 demographics in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020).
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52 The arts programme comprised contributions from several arts practitioners and a group
53 interview was conducted with the three main facilitators primarily involved with the sessions.
54 The eight young people resided in five different foster homes and five foster parents were
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3 involved in the group interview. Seven foster carers later joined young people in their
4
5 individual interview sessions [2].
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8 Group interviews were guided by an interview schedule but the format was flexible, allowing
9
10 participants to raise other points that they felt were important. The group interview for foster
11
12 carers was held half-way through the programme. This was facilitated by the two
13
14 researchers who had attended the arts programme sessions because relationships had
15
16 been developed between the foster carers and researchers within these activities. The foster
17
18 carers' interview enabled a space for both shared understandings and differences in opinion
19
20 and it lasted for 1:04 hours and generated 11,546 words of transcribed data.
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23
24 The interview with the three artist facilitators was conducted at the end of the project. The
25
26 researchers involved in the session observations were concerned that preconceptions about
27
28 the arts programme could have a deadening effect on the data generated if they undertook
29
30 this interview (see Mannay, 2010). While they were not foster carers, or young people, their
31
32 role had overlapped with the facilitators in supporting aspects of the programme delivery.
33
34 Accordingly, a different member of the research team worked with the facilitators to fight
35
36 familiarity (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995; Morriss, 2016). The researcher's lack of familiarity
37
38 with the programme meant that the facilitators were less likely to leave out important insights
39
40 due to assumed shared knowledge. Participants were asked in advance of the interview to
41
42 consider how they could use metaphors to express changes they had observed in the young
43
44 people during the project. Metaphor work has been used successfully in previous studies
45
46 (Shinebourne & Smith, 2010), and this approach encouraged participants to take time to
47
48 reflect on this question. The interview lasted for 1 hour and generated 13,202 words of
49
50 transcribed data.
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54 Young people wrote up elements of the activities and their experience of participating in a
55
56 reflexive diary to collate evidence of engagement for a certificated Arts Award. These diaries
57
58 were used to extend the data generated with young people in the post-arts programme
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2
3 interviews with all the young people and their foster carers. Interviews were conducted by
4 researchers who had attended the arts sessions to facilitate a level of rapport and trust.
5
6 Young people's reflexive diaries were used as a focal point in the interviews to reduce the
7
8 need for prolonged periods of eye contact between the researcher and the young people,
9
10 which can often leave participants feeling uncomfortable and pressured into providing a
11
12 response (Corbett, 1998). Conducting the interviews in this way offered something different
13
14 to more formal interviews experienced by young people in care. This was important as
15
16 those within the care system are likely to associate formal interviews with negative
17
18 experiences, which often include difficult conversations about their lives (Mannay *et al*,
19
20 2017b). The interviews generated over five hours of conversation and 55,184 transcribed
21
22 words.
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26
27 Inductive thematic analysis was facilitated by hand, allowing codes, categories and themes
28
29 to be generated from the empirical data produced with the participants (Braun & Clarke,
30
31 2006) and the reflexive diaries and fieldnotes were considered in the analysis to clarify and
32
33 extend the associated interview transcripts. Data production and analysis were conducted
34
35 concurrently, with emergent themes being explored in future interviews. Accounts
36
37 emphasising reasons for engaging, favourable aspects of the programme and suggestions
38
39 for improvement were further explored across the data set as a whole; and connections were
40
41 made with previous literature in the field. The data was initially analysed by the researcher
42
43 who had conducted the interview and then explored further by the principal investigator,
44
45 where the principal investigator conducted the initial analysis this was then re-examined by
46
47 another member of the research team. Participants' accounts covered a range of themes
48
49 including education, relationships, identity, and well-being. However, the findings presented
50
51 here focus on participants' subjective experiences of engaging with and taking part in the
52
53 arts-based programme.
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Facilitating Engagement: The Role of Foster Carers

Young people can access arts provision autonomously, but carers often play a key role in supporting engagement. Resonating with previous studies (Gilligan, 1999; Gibson & Edwards, 2015, 2016; Salmon & Rickaby, 2014; OPM, 2013), foster carers' accounts emphasised their central role in involving young people in extracurricular activities, and in encouraging them to attend the Confidence in Care project at the Wales Millennium Centre.

I had sort of said to her you know it's exciting; it looks as if it's going to be fun ...

There's been a few blips where they've said actually, I don't want to go. And I've sort of said you know we've come this far; we've still got [War Horse Play] at the end and look at all this that's going to help with schoolwork with Drama [Foster Carer]

The foster carers in this study were part of wider networks and organisations related to foster care, which is how they were invited to the project. They actively developed strategies to encourage their foster children to take part, and provided practical and emotional support including facilitating enrolment, travelling with young people to the sessions, and encouraging reflection and discussion about the programme. Accordingly, they can be situated as 'engaged' foster carers (Mannay *et al*, 2017a); however, this raises questions about how to involve young people if they do not have the support of an 'engaged' foster carer (see also Salmon & Rickaby, 2014).

The motivations for foster carers bringing young people were embedded in the belief that their involvement could potentially generate wider benefits.

She lacks social skills... so anything that involves group participation I'll try and get her involved in... So that's why I put her name forward [Foster Carer]

We are all concerned about their education, their maths and their English and things but let's get the social skills first... I would put every penny I had to try and just get her out and about, out and about and learn from other people [Foster Carer]

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3 It's more about self-confidence and self-esteem [Foster Carer]
4
5

6 She's so vulnerable so I think the more that we can bring them to things like this to
7
8 try them... she's always with me and [partner] so she's not having the opportunities
9
10 then to build up those social skills [Foster Carer]
11
12

13 Whilst foster carers did not speak extensively about art or creativity, there was a tacit
14
15 recognition that being involved in arts activities with other young people potentially improves
16
17 young people's confidence, self-esteem, and social competencies. In this way, their
18
19 expectations aligned with the findings from previous research (Coholic *et al*, 2012; OPM,
20
21 2013), and the Welsh Government's (2019: 13) position that Expressive Arts learners will
22
23 develop 'self-confidence, self-esteem, independence, communication skills, and social and
24
25 cultural awareness'. The extent to which these expectations were met will be examined next.
26
27

28 29 'Breaking Free': Reflections on the Value of Engagement

30

31 Facilitators acknowledged that the programme supported young people in building the skills
32
33 in drama, music, character development, and design, which they had been tasked to enable.
34
35 However, resonating with the accounts of foster carers, facilitators' recollections placed more
36
37 importance on the development of 'soft skills', which could potentially support young people
38
39 in their everyday lives beyond the programme. These included 'confidence', 'being able to
40
41 collaborate with each other', 'making friends', 'having fun' and 'becoming more confident in
42
43 being themselves'.
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46
47 Reflecting on the project's contribution to developing these soft skills, the facilitators
48
49 emphasised the central role of routines and familiarity - there was a consistent staff
50
51 presence, sessions took place in the same building each week, and followed the same basic
52
53 structure. The flexibility of the arts programme meant that the facilitators could avoid the re-
54
55 creation of 'schooled subjects' and 'schooled docility' (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008: 506)
56
57 and they reported that developing supportive non-hierarchical relationships and emotional
58
59 connections within the group helped the young people to feel secure. As in Thomson *et al*'s
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2
3 (2019: 247) study with teachers, the facilitators could also be positioned as 'arts brokers', as
4 they 'embodied what it means to be culturally engaged' and situated creativity as integral to
5 everyday life, actively communicating this centrality to young people.
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10 All the facilitators noted the development of skills, experience, confidence, and social
11 networks, but also what they interpreted as transformative forms of self-development
12 (Gilligan, 1999). In observing the sessions, the researchers also noted how young people
13 shifted from being reticent or reluctant, to embracing the activities and involving themselves
14 in the group. One facilitator used the metaphor task to communicate this process of change.
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21 [Initially] they were like walking really slowly and like can't really see where they're
22 going, all like grey, green kind of muddy colours. And then week by week there would
23 be like less crustaceans on them like stuff like coral would be coming off of them and
24 they could like move a little bit like swifter or more kind of, everything got easier. And
25 then with like all these bits coming off you would see their normal, like their natural
26 colours and it would like by the end, they're kind of like you know neon colours and
27 like shiny and bright and they kind of like glisten in the water. And like the words that
28 kind of stuck out for me is like individuality, like personality like shining through ... like
29 you could see like their true colours, the person that they really wanted to be able to
30 show but are so kind of stuck together by all of these crustaceans, it's almost like
31 they're like breaking free [Facilitator]
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45 Resonating with this metaphor of 'breaking free', increased confidence was also noted by
46 foster carers and young people.
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50 Like confidence for like most of them has changed. Like they were quite shy at the
51 beginning, then their confidence grew [Foster Carer]
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54 I think it could bring them out of their shell and then you could, as a foster carer you
55 could pick up ideas on what was done in the sessions to make someone carry on
56 with it at home and everything [Foster Carer]
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3 The references here about change and 'bring[ing] them out of their shell' again speak to the
4
5 transformative potential of the arts programme. The foster carer's comment about taking
6
7 ideas and activities from the context also indicates that the programme could engender
8
9 some form of sustainability, which will be returned to later in the paper. Young people all
10
11 reported aspects of positive change.
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14
15 I was surprised how quickly I fitted in because when I don't feel comfortable where I
16
17 am I won't eat and I don't think [Foster Carer] realised the first time because she was
18
19 like oh [you] pizza. I love pizza but if I don't want to be there, I will not eat. But I
20
21 noticed on the second one I started to feel okay [Young Person]
22
23

24
25 I learnt how to overcome challenges and to have fun. Learnt how to be confident
26
27 around others [Young Person (reflexive diary)]
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31 When we first started the session I was really scared to talk to anyone but when I
32
33 started talking to them more and often, I got used to it [Young Person]
34
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36
37 These comments, along with other data in the interviews and observational fieldnotes,
38
39 suggest that the programme engendered space where young people felt socially and
40
41 emotionally safe and supported. One young person noted their surprise at fitting in and being
42
43 comfortable so quickly, which could relate to how the programme was configured. In addition
44
45 to the attention paid by facilitators to building consistency, routine and non-hierarchical
46
47 relationships, it is worth noting some additional contributory aspects.
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50
51 In the initial sessions foster carers joined in for the preliminary activities, then left the session
52
53 space but stayed in or close to the venue. This progressed to them bringing young people
54
55 but not joining the session activities. Drawing on developmental discourses, we suggest that
56
57 this feature of the programme provided a reliable 'secure base' which encouraged
58
59 participants to safely explore the wider world (Bowlby, 1988; Schofield & Beek, 2005). The
60
61 presence of foster carers was noted in some young people's accounts, for example 'Like I
62
63 felt more comfortable with [Foster Carer] there, with the adults'; and young people also noted

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2
3 how the gradual withdraw of foster carers from being full participants to being on the
4 periphery was also a conducive to them establishing more independence, and wider
5 relational support systems. This easing in process resonates with earlier research that has
6 emphasised the importance of foster carers both promoting trust in availability and autonomy
7 to provide children with a secure base (Schofield & Beek, 2005).
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14 Another salient feature was that the young people were all in foster care [3]. It has been
15 argued that having a project group consisting of both those with experience of the care
16 system and those without can be beneficial for relationship-building and preventing the
17 occurrence of stigmatisation (Salmon & Rickaby, 2014). However, other arts projects have
18 noted the benefits of groups consisting exclusively of care-experienced individuals (OPM,
19 2013) and wider work with young people has suggested that mixed groups intensify social
20 difference and mark young people out as 'looked after' (see Mannay *et al*, 2017a). In this
21 study, foster carers contended that having a dedicated space for care-experienced young
22 people to come together was advantageous;
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34 I think they accept doing something like this because they know they're all in the
35 same situation. When you take them to activities I think that's why [foster daughter]
36 hasn't got friends because she goes [other activities], she's been going for years but
37 there's no connection because obviously they're all so different to her so I think when
38 she comes here she feels that much more confidence because she knows that
39 everyone that's here is in care [Foster Carer]
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48 Emond (2012) has documented care experienced young people's awareness of their care
49 status and their strategies to manage this identity within school peer cultures. Similarly,
50 previous studies with children in foster care have noted the difficulties of disclosing care
51 status, the value of having friendships with others who are in care, and the importance of
52 providing opportunities that bring fostered young people together to socialise (Rogers 2017).
53 Friendship serves as a protective factor for care experienced young people (Ulset, 2016),
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3 and arguably the configuration of this arts-based programme meant that identity
4 management was less problematic because children shared the same care status, making
5 interactions with new peers less challenging.
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10 Young people did not explicitly cite having a dedicated space for care-experienced young
11 people as a valuable aspect of the programme. However, the foster carers' accounts and the
12 field observations indicated that this was central to the forging of new friendships, which was
13 cited by the young people as key to their enjoyment of the programme:
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19 When we went it was like, yes, get in! Because it's nice to meet new friends and
20 hang around with them as well [Young Person]
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22

23
24 I made friends yeah, but only one person I made contact with outside [Young Person]
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28 I think it's just like fun activities, you socialise, you make new friends, and it feels like
29 we're in one big family, that's what I think it is [Young Person]
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31

32
33 The metaphor of 'one big family' aligned with the field observations, which noted the
34 supportive atmosphere that characterised the group and their interactional practices.
35
36 Additionally, the informal, less-hierarchical and relaxed environments created by the
37 facilitators, and activities that required participants and facilitators to work collectively and
38 collaboratively, were reported as engendering a space that was more conducive to
39 friendship development. This was important as foster carers and young people discussed
40 difficulties around making friends in school and other activity based groups, and the
41 comment about maintaining contact suggests that some friendships endured beyond the
42 programme. Art sessions have been previously reported as spaces where students felt they
43 'belonged' and could find like-minded others (Thompson *et al*, 2018). Consequently, the
44 value of arts practice in itself should not be overlooked.
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3 Foster carers also built supportive networks with each other during the programme,
4
5 emphasising the fundamental importance of trusting relationships (Ruch *et al*, 2017) for
6
7 adults as well as young people;
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10 I like meeting other foster carers and I especially like meeting them from other areas.

11 See how things differ and how things are done differently [Foster Carer]
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14
15 It's always nice [to meet other foster carers]. It's nice to hear everyone's stories
16
17

18 [Foster Carer]
19

20 And hear the stories and offer support [Foster Carer]
21
22

23 To ask what I should do, because I've been awake all night worrying about it [Foster
24
25 Carer]
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28 Foster carers discussed the possibility of self-organising to continue meeting after the project
29
30 had finished, but also suggested that if a similar project ran in the future, the carers'
31
32 meetings could be more formally incorporated into the programme by providing a dedicated
33
34 space for them to spend time together while the sessions were taking place. As with young
35
36 people, in schools and extra-curricular activities foster carers are often seen as or perceive
37
38 themselves as 'different' from other parents, and the programme offered them an opportunity
39
40 to share knowledge and experience, and provide mutual support. This related benefit was
41
42 not highlighted in the previous studies reviewed but it could be built on in future programmes
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44 to maximise the value of arts-based provision.
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48 Suggestions for Future Programmes 49 50

51 Overall, the programme was evaluated positively but there were some practical issues,
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53 which are discussed in more detail in the project report recommendations (see Mannay *et al*,
54
55 2018). For example, the lead facilitator received specialist training but suggested that in
56
57 future programmes preparation to work with care-experienced young people should take
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59 place earlier in the process, before the sessions were designed, and that it should be
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3 available for all facilitators. As noted, foster carers proposed a dedicated space for foster
4 carers to network, and there were also points raised about foster siblings. One of the families
5 involved has a foster child and biological child of the same age, and although the
6 programme was marketed as an opportunity for young people in foster care, they were both
7 offered a place. However, if future programmes do not have this flexibility it could act as a
8 barrier to engagement.
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16 There was also the contentious issue of food provision. As reported in earlier studies (Rees,
17 2019), there was recognition that the provision of food could be useful in terms of bonding
18 and bringing the group together. However, facilitators commented that sometimes food
19 became a distraction. Foster carers were concerned that the project did not take into
20 account the young people's difficult relationships with food, which they attributed to past
21 experiences of neglect, deprivation or uncertainty around access to food. They suggested
22 that clearer boundaries and routines around food were needed, such as the types of food,
23 how much was provided and when it was made available.
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34 Young people did not have the same view. Overall, they were happy with the programme,
35 commenting 'There's nothing I would do differently' and 'I don't want to change anything ...
36 Nothing to change'. However, where there were suggestions for improvement recorded in
37 the reflexive diaries, these were about bringing pizza back after this was replaced with a
38 healthier alternative, 'Next time I would change the food to pizza', 'Pizza at the end of the
39 session ... Next time PIZZA'. Similar sentiments were expressed in the interview
40 discussions.
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50 We had pizza. That was the best thing ... Because it's free Domino's pizza. If you go
51 into the place and they say right here's an orange, you don't like it's an orange but if
52 someone they give you like Dominos pizza then you're going to go, oh now that's
53 good innit? ... No, no one got fed up of the pizza it was because they [foster carers]
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3 wanted something more healthy... Who wants something more healthy? [Young
4
5 Person]
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8 The centrality of food in foster carers' and young people's accounts suggests that it would be
9
10 useful for future programmes to consider catering. There needs to be a balance between
11
12 health concerns and the preferences of young people, and further reporting and evaluation
13
14 could build expertise and evidence in this under-researched area. Another concern raised
15
16 was in relation to the project ending, and facilitators questioned how this could be
17
18 negotiated.
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21 What happens to them now... It feels like, it feels like something has ended and that
22
23 makes me nervous about like what happens to them now. Where does what they've
24
25 learnt go? So like follow-up for me is something that is maybe missing like you know
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27 it's you know the bond that we have created, built, with them and with each other like
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29 this can't be the end now ... Yeah, it's just the kind of, that after-care [Facilitator]
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33 The facilitators made amendments to the project to address this abrupt ending and consider
34
35 'after-care' by offering an 'add-on' session to finish any remaining work on the Arts Award
36
37 and to mark the end of the project and the young people's achievements. Facilitators
38
39 suggested that in future years this could be extended in two ways. Firstly, by acknowledging
40
41 young people's achievements with a 'graduation' celebration, and secondly by inviting them
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43 to return in future iterations of the arts programme and speak to the next generation of
44
45 participants. Foster carers also noted that the short-term nature of this project would leave
46
47 the young people feeling 'miserable' and 'miss[ing] it'. They discussed the possibility of self-
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49 organising a meeting during the summer but agreed that this may prove difficult due to their
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51 geographical spread, and that the lack of structured follow-up would mean the young people
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53 felt the loss of the weekly sessions. The intensity of loss may be accentuated for care
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55 experienced young people as they will have experienced more transient relationships with
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3 caregivers in relation to initial separation from their home of origin, and other placement
4 moves with the care system (Girling, 2019).
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8 Concluding thoughts 9

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11 Despite some minor, yet important, areas for improvement, such as the timing of training for
12 facilitators, project endings, and the provision of catering, overall, the arts-based programme
13 was viewed positively by young people, facilitators and foster carers. This supports the
14 earlier literature considered, which suggested that arts-based methods are effective tools for
15 engaging care-experienced young people (Coholic *et al*, 2012; Hopkins, 2004; OPM, 2013;
16 Salmon & Rickaby, 2014). The reported benefits for young people included improved
17 confidence, self-esteem, and creative and social skills. Both young people and foster carers
18 were able to establish peer networks, and some of these relationships endured beyond the
19 programme. Additionally, two of the eight young people went on to join a drama-based
20 activity supported by the Wales Millennium Centre, which was open to all young people, and
21 foster carers discussed drawing on session activities at home. This suggests that the
22 programme acted as a springboard for further involvement with the arts for some
23 participants.
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39 The success of the programme raises questions around how this form of provision can be
40 offered to a wider range of care-experienced young people. The Fostering Network in Wales
41 facilitated further sessions as part of Confidence in Care, which were informed by this
42 research. Similarly, the Wales Millennium Centre have drawn on this study to explore how
43 they can better engage young people in care and care leavers in their future programming
44 and provision. However, there is an argument that opportunities for arts-based engagement
45 need to be considered at a national and international level (Wyness & Lang, 2016). In
46 Wales, the Welsh Government (2019) are invested in the Expressive Arts Area of Learning
47 and Experience as the entitlement of all learners. This is yet to be implemented and
48 evaluated; but school based provision may not be an adequate solution for all care-
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3 experienced young people. Many young people in care have difficult relationships with
4 schools, characterised by transitory placements and educational pathways (Girling, 2019),
5 and face barriers to engaging with in-school sports opportunities (Quarmby *et al*, 2019) and
6 with accessing after-school extra-curricular activities (Woodhouse, 2018). Additionally, they
7 are overrepresented in Pupil Referral Units, which can only deliver a restricted curriculum
8 that may be unable to support this renewed emphasis on art and culture (Smith, 2019).
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16 Young people, foster carers and facilitators positioned the programme as a safe space, with
17 one participant describing it as 'one big family'. The low numbers of young people, expertise
18 of the staff, involvement of foster carers, and provision focussed on those with experience of
19 care could not be mirrored in a school setting. The opportunity to build peer relationships
20 without the need to manage identities and negotiate the stigma of 'in care' status seemed to
21 be an important factor of the programme, and the need to invest in social spaces for care
22 experienced young people has been advocated for in previous studies (Rogers, 2017;
23 Mannay *et al*, 2015). For this form of provision to be extended it would need significant
24 investment from governments, the third sector and individual arts-based organisations.
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36 Internationally, care-experienced young people face complex barriers and inequality in
37 outcomes. As such this paper calls for practitioners such as social workers, teachers, and
38 independent reviewing officers to actively signpost arts-based, and other extracurricular
39 opportunities to young people. This may be particularly pertinent for young people in
40 residential care or other settings where they do not have the individualised support of foster
41 carers. Engagement with the arts can be transformational (Thomson *et al*, 2018), but the
42 ways in which programmes are designed to best support the needs of care-experienced
43 young people also needs to be considered. With careful planning and effective resourcing,
44 there is a potential for care-experienced young people 'becoming more confident in being
45 themselves' and 'breaking free' from the marginalisation that often characterises their wider
46 educational and social trajectories.
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42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 Notes

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53 1. Arts Award facilitates young people to develop arts and leadership talents. In this
54 programme the Arts Award was offered at an introductory level and young people
55 recorded their reflections about the activities they participated in within a diary, which
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3 was used to evidence their learning to receive the award certificate. For further
4
5 information see: <http://www.artsaward.org.uk/site/?id=64>
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- 7
8 2. Foster carers were involved in the interviews with young people as a condition of the
9 approval for the study required by Cardiff University's Social Sciences Research
10 Ethics Committee.
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14 3. One young person was the biological child of a foster carer and foster sibling of a
15 young person in her parent's care.
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For Peer Review