



RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS 2023/4

Anna Cutler and Sarah B. Davies

THE
MILDRED
FUND

The Mildred Fund builds young people's personal, social and creative confidence through art. It supports visual art institutions to work with schools and community groups to provide 13 to 19-year-olds with creative skills for them to thrive.

www.mildredfund.org

THE BENEFITS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The benefits for young people participating in the arts programmes funded by the Mildred Fund include:

1. **Increased confidence:** Participants experienced growth in personal, social, and creative confidence. This included greater self-esteem, improved social skills, and enhanced creative expression.
2. **Personal growth:** Young people developed resilience, self-assurance, and a sense of agency, becoming more comfortable in their own stories and identities.
3. **Social skills:** The programmes fostered a sense of belonging and acceptance, enhancing participants' ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively with others.
4. **Creative skills:** Participants gained confidence in using materials and equipment, experimenting with ideas, and taking creative risks. They developed a sense of ownership and pride in their artwork.
5. **Wellbeing:** The programmes supported overall wellbeing by providing a safe and inclusive space for personal and creative exploration, leading to meaningful personal growth. This led to improved academic performance for some participants.

THE BENEFITS FOR GALLERIES

The benefits for galleries leading the arts programmes funded by the Mildred Fund include:

1. **Organisational change:** Through developing long-term programmes that seek to positively impact young people's wellbeing and confidence, engagement beyond the learning teams into the wider gallery operations resulted in small but significant changes in organisational behaviour and processes.
2. **Strengthened community ties:** Collaborating with schools and community groups helps galleries build stronger relationships within their local communities, supporting young people at a time of critical need.
3. **Innovative practices:** Engaging in process-led and inclusive arts programmes allows galleries to explore and innovate their practices, leading to new methodologies and approaches that are found to have benefit for young people and the other organisations involved.
4. **Professional development:** Staff and artists involved in these programmes gain valuable experience, knowledge and skills in working with diverse groups, enhancing their professional development and capacity to deliver impactful programmes.

Photo: Artist Harold Offeh with students from East Kent College at Turner Contemporary

Credit: John Sainsbury, courtesy Turner Contemporary





Credit: John Sainsbury, courtesy
Turner Contemporary

WHAT CREATES THESE BENEFITS?

1. Trust and relationships

Building trust early in arts projects and maintaining it through consistent support is essential for successful engagement. Trust is foundational for collaboration and requires an empathetic approach that considers the backgrounds and experiences of young participants.

Questions raised:

Trust as a catalyst: How do trust, attentiveness and confidence work together? Is trust a catalyst for how arts programmes operate?

2. Attentiveness

The research emphasises a specific form of attentiveness that involves a strong focus on the needs of young people in the use of art as a medium for engagement. This includes creating supportive environments, addressing individual needs, and fostering a sense of care and understanding.

Question raised:

Prioritising attentiveness: What are the most effective ways to maintain attentiveness throughout the programme and beyond?

3. Confidence and wellbeing

Confidence is a key outcome of art programmes, developing across personal, social, and creative domains. The research suggests a strong link between confidence and overall wellbeing, raising questions about their interdependence and the potential for further exploration.

Questions raised:

Centrality of confidence to wellbeing: Is confidence central to wellbeing, and can one exist without the other?

4. Artistic processes

Effective artistic processes are slow-paced, process-led, and judgment-free, focusing on the value of the process over outcomes. These processes encourage collaboration, creativity, and personal expression, and are responsive to individual preferences, while introducing challenges to encourage risk-taking.

Questions raised:

Impact of art on confidence: Why is confidence often one of the first outcomes from art programmes, and how does it manifest across personal, social, and creative domains?

5. Sustainability and continuity

While not the primary focus, the research highlights the potential for lasting impact on confidence and wellbeing by fostering environments where young people feel safe, valued, and empowered. Sustaining these benefits requires ongoing relationships and opportunities for engagement.

Question raised:

Sustainability of outcomes: How can the confidence and wellbeing gains from the programmes be sustained beyond their duration?

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Our programme research has been developed through interviews and reflection sessions with project teams and facilitators, as well as a range of enquiry research methods undertaken by individual organisations. These include observations; discussion and conversation; surveys and interviews; group reflections; learning journals; and creative responses to key questions.



Cover image: East Kent College students viewing Beyond Form: Lines of Abstraction 1950-1970 at Turner Contemporary © John Sainsbury