

# Creative Scotland, Youth Music Initiative

## Case Study – Hot Chocolate



“Supporting young people to develop their own opportunities”



### About this case study

This case study was developed as part of Creative Scotland’s evaluation of the Youth Music Initiative in 2014/15. The Youth Music Initiative is a national programme which is in its 12<sup>th</sup> year of operation. These case studies demonstrate some of the approaches used by organisations funded by the Youth Music Initiative, and highlight the impacts of this work.

This case study is about Hot Chocolate Trust, a youth work organisation, which provides a safe space for young people to come and make music together in Dundee city centre. The sessions are open to any young person in Dundee, between 12 and 21, although the majority are young people who congregate in the town centre. This community of young people, often face a wide range of challenging life circumstances such as low educational attainment, bullying, unemployment, homelessness, mental health issues, risk taking behaviour and discrimination (a high proportion of the community are LGBT).

The Hot Chocolate Trust embraces a strongly unstructured informal education approach, allowing the activities and programmes to be shaped and led by the young people. Interaction with the young people is on voluntary basis, with three drop-in sessions each week as well as numerous one-to-one sessions and group projects. The music tutor encourages the young people to try different instruments or sing and works with them to build their confidence around musical skills and more generally.

The YMI funded activity is only a portion of the activity that takes place at Hot Chocolate. Other activities at Hot Chocolate include arts activities such as photography and film making as well as music.



This case study was informed through discussion with five young people, the YMI tutor, a Hot Chocolate volunteer and the Assistant Director.

## The approach

Many of the young people and volunteers who attend Hot Chocolate have a strong interest in music. A music student (who had previously attended Hot Chocolate as a teenager) applied to Hot Chocolate to do a community placement. She started volunteering at Hot Chocolate and this brought new life to the music provision. Hot Chocolate successfully applied for and received £5,000 to run the pilot music project. This was successful and subsequently Hot Chocolate has received almost £20,000 from Creative Scotland to fund their music provision for young people from July 2015 to December 2016. This has allowed Hot Chocolate to employ the volunteer as a YMI tutor providing music tutoring and support for 20 hours per week.

In addition, Hot Chocolate has also secured funding of over £500 from the general CashBack fund and £3,792 from CashBack for Creativity to help fund the YMI tutor's salary and equipment for the music room.

**“We always knew that music needed to happen, but we didn't have the resources or the evidence to prove it. That's why the pilot project was so useful.”**

The outcomes Hot Chocolate work towards tend to be softer skills, for example;

- self worth;
- self confidence;
- knowledge;
- have young people accept they can make a positive impact;
- making a positive impact; and
- employment, education and training (including writing a CV, interview preparation and help finding work and training).

## Activities

The music sessions are very informal. Young people 'drop-in' to open sessions held at the Hot Chocolate base, in a church in the centre of Dundee. There are two open sessions on weekday evenings and one on Saturday. The church has a dedicated space for the young people; complete with drum kit and acoustic guitars and other instruments. There is also a computer so young people can record and edit their music. Young people are welcome to attend as often as they choose and are free to play independently, as a group and with or without support from the YMI tutor and music volunteers.

Hot Chocolate estimates Chocolate works with around 300 young people each year, a high proportion of whom will be known by and work with the YMI tutor and music volunteers. There can be between 25 and 50 young people attending an open session, some of whom will receive individual tuition and support from the YMI tutor.

The music tutor has built close relationships with each young person. She works with them to develop their musical skills, while at the same time building their confidence, and self-worth. She mentors them, organises performances for family

and friends to attend and encourages the young people to perform in the streets by taking them busking. She also provides one-to-one lessons if the young person is interested in more intensive tuition. The overall aim is to build the young person's confidence so that they feel more able to perform.

In addition, she helps to signpost young people onto training or employment. For example, some of the young people have since signed up to music courses at college as they felt inspired and confident to do so, since working with the YMI music tutor.

**“I don't think I'm good enough (to sing in public) but they think I can totally do it.”**

**“Often there is a “wow” moment when a young person exceeds expectations and their families are amazed by it.”**

Volunteers attend the drop in sessions to offer help and advice to the young people – either about music, or wider issues. They are a large part of Hot Chocolate and are usually recruited from the participants if they show an interest in a particular area. The age limit for the drop-in sessions is 22 years, so after this age some choose to return as volunteers. Several of the young people are volunteering in the music project and this includes responsibilities such as facilitating groups, buying and maintaining equipment.

Young people have a close relationship with the YMI tutor and the activity is entirely influenced by their choices. This reflects the way in which Hot Chocolate operates as an organisation. The young people are very much involved in planning the activities, making decisions and controlling the budget.

Hot Chocolate runs creative residential weekends throughout the year with eight to ten young people. These are designed to be intensive and give young people a chance to express themselves and develop emotionally. Recently the weekends have involved bringing together young people interested in visual arts with those interested in music to work together collaboratively.

## **Working with others**

Partnership working is important to Hot Chocolate. It specialises in engaging with young people who are often regarded as 'hard to reach' and who choose not to engage anywhere else. Therefore there is close partnership working between Hot Chocolate, the YMI tutor and the volunteers who are all working to build confidence in the young people, and encourage them to have ambitions.

Hot Chocolate works closely with Dundee City Council and YouthLink Scotland and has a good understanding of the Single Outcome Agreement and what the local area is working towards.

**“Hot Chocolate also acts a bridge to specialist organisations for young people and can also be the bridge for services wanting to come in.”**

## Support and training

All new volunteers involved in the YMI funded programme will shadow some of the open sessions, and if they wish to continue, there is a 4-6 week induction period throughout which there are regular meetings with the Hot Chocolate staff.

All Hot Chocolate staff and volunteers, including the YMI tutor, are PVG checked and given a handbook and training on care and protection services and how to manage challenging behaviour. In house there are more training sessions available on specific areas such as mental health and debt counselling. They run eight sessions like this every year. There are also two residential weekends for workers which involve training, reflection and team building.

After every drop-in session, the staff and volunteers gather for a 'debrief'. They discuss the evening and share advice on how things could be done differently.

## Impact on young people

The young people have a good relationship with the staff and are invited to share their views and give feedback regularly. This is either face-to-face or via social media.

One of the key differences that the young people mentioned during our visit was the increase in their confidence and self esteem. The one-to-one work that they have been able to do with the YMI tutor has led to increased self worth. Several young people said that the YMI tutor was the 'best thing' about Hot Chocolate.

**“[YMI Tutor] – she’s the reason I keep coming; she’s built my confidence.”**

**“Me and [YMI Tutor] wrote a song about expectations. She wrote the lyrics, I wrote the music and we performed it together. Having a music worker has made a huge difference to Hot Chocolate – the music room’s a lot busier and there’s always something going on, which has helped me do what I really love to do.”**

Source: Hot Chocolate Annual Report 2013/14



### **Case study**

L is a singer. She has been coming to Hot Chocolate for six years. She said that she has always been interested in music and found out about Hot Chocolate through some friends. She said that when she recently performed at one of the open nights she initially found the experience overwhelming.

**“It was terrifying – the worst experience of my life.”**

But then she got such a buzz from performing she is already planning her next session.

**“You do it once and then you get the adrenalin buzz and you want to do it again.”**

L also plays guitar and comes to Hot Chocolate to do art projects.

Other young people we spoke to were grateful to have a place to go and to meet their friends. Some had made new friends since coming along to Hot Chocolate as there is a mix of ages, and young people from different schools across Dundee attend.

**“I’ve been coming here since I was 14 (six years ago). I like how chilled out it is. I can just play whatever.”**

Some of the young people we spoke to had recently started a college or university course in music, or were hoping to enrol. Many had been enthused and encouraged by the work of Hot Chocolate and the support they received from the YMI tutor. The assistant director stated that support around education, employment and training were the areas that young people wanted help with the most.

**“I’ve just applied to do applied music at college, and [YMI Tutor] said I could come in whenever and practice.”**

**“And I get to do audition pieces with [YMI Tutor] – she helps me to study music.”**

### **Impact on deliverers and the youth music sector**

The staff and volunteers felt strongly that Hot Chocolate and the music activity that takes place there had “changed their lives”. Those volunteering said they could not imagine doing anything differently with their time and found the process rewarding.

**“It’s the most rewarding job I’ve done.”**

Hot Chocolate is having a strong positive impact on the local community. It has built strong links with the Police and local shopping centre. These locations are affected

by crime and anti-social behaviour. Since Hot Chocolate began in 2001, some of the young people have had long terms bans at the shopping centre or have been known to Police.

Hot Chocolate works with the shopping centre to try to find the young people jobs and apprenticeships and to try and re-build the relationship with the young people. The Police and the shopping centre have trust in Hot Chocolate that they will know when a young person is ready to be released from their ban.

At present the staff and volunteers do not feel that that the wider sector of youth music has been impacted by the work at Hot Chocolate. However, now that funding has been secured for the next two years; it is hoped that this will change.

**“We would like to grow and change. We’re pretty new to professional music but we have an awful lot to share of working with young people and best practice.”**

## **Successes**

Key successes of this programme include:

- the safe environment so that people feel safe to speak up and challenge one another;
- attracting young people who might never have considered attending a ‘youth club’ but who have now found an outlet for their creativity;
- the involvement of the young people in running the organisation; and
- giving young people the opportunity to push themselves with their performance and consequently build their confidence.

The assistant director considered the YMI tutor to be a “living testimony” to the value of Hot Chocolate as she was previously an attendee and is now a full-time music student and works at Hot Chocolate.

The wider value of music has certainly been revealed through Hot Chocolate as some young people have felt that music has had a significant impact upon their lives. This was particularly valuable for those with personal issues to overcome as they are able to express themselves through music.

**“Music saved my life. And if I ever make it as a musician, I’ll only have this place to thank.”**

**Source: Hot Chocolate Annual Report 2013/14**

### ***One great thing....***

The community created by Hot Chocolate has allowed young people to come together “where they are not judged”. This has led to their increased confidence and many young people immediately feel comfortable in the Hot Chocolate premises because of this attitude.



Voluntary engagement is central to Hot Chocolate's approach and non-judgement is at the heart of this. Finding a place where they are not judged has given young people the security to continue returning.

**"They can be themselves and feel safe. We won't force anything on them."**

Seeing young people increase in confidence and flourish by finding something that they are good at, such as music was felt to be a key success. Particularly because for many young people it is the first time that they have found something that they feel they can do.

## **Lessons learned**

The main recommendation from Hot Chocolate is to put young people first and allow them to lead. The co-production ethos of Hot Chocolate is key to the success of the project. This was felt to be the way for young people to get the most out of it, by making the decisions themselves.

**"The relationship has to come first and the activity should be borne out of the relationship."**

## **What's next?**

Hot Chocolate has recently undergone a restructure where it has created a new post of 'volunteer manager' to invest in the potential of volunteer capacity. It is also working on establishing more learning opportunities for young people and other practitioners by creating a learning hub.

Due to the nature of Hot Chocolate, future activity is determined by young people as and when they need it. It is anticipated that there will be more gigs and more music recording in the future. Hot Chocolate hopes to secure more funding to help update its recording equipment for this purpose.

The YMI tutor is also considering creating a choir within Hot Chocolate.

**"In ten years time, I don't think it really matters what we are doing as long as we are creating a community of happy young people that feel good."**