

# Youth Arts Best Practice

## What is youth arts best practice?

Youth arts best practice refers to methods of working with young people in the arts that respect them and their rights and that bring about maximum outcomes.

It's important to be aware of the diversity that exists among the youth population. However the youth population does have some general characteristics and holds a certain place within society. The most effective and appropriate way to approach and work with and for young people may differ to when working with other age groups. It's not possible to set universal rules for working with young people, but there are definitely some fundamental principles that act as a guide to achieving best practice.

Following is a brief summary of some elements of best practice when working in youth arts.

## Inspiration

Many people see consultation as the first step in getting young people engaged in the arts. But asking someone what they want when they don't know what the possibilities are is pretty limiting. If you asked young people "what is the arts?" would they list hip-hop, fire dancing, comic creation, circus and wearable art as some of the possibilities? So before you work with young people to sort out what they want to get into, find ways of exploring what they could get into. Get them to arts events. Give them access to videos, books, artworks, etc. Put together an energising project that involves bringing a range of artists in to give young people a taste of what's possible.

Keep in touch with what other groups are doing. And talk to them about how they are doing it - remember that the people who develop and get youth arts happening need inspiration.

## Consultation and Evaluation

It's important that any youth arts project, program or initiative is relevant to the young people at that time and in that place and that the relevancy and effectiveness of your program continues and develops. How do you achieve this?

- Consult - keep in touch with the young people you will be working with as to where they're up to and what they're into. What are the issues they're facing with themselves and their communities? What art form sparks an interest? How should something be structured so they can access it?
- Evaluate – get feedback on and assess the stuff that you get out there. What did the young people think? What outcomes were achieved in relation to your objectives? How can it work better next time?

Have a think about your methods of consultation and evaluation. A traditional written survey might not go down so well. Consult and evaluate during projects as part of the artistic process when energy and inspiration are high. Go beyond the written response option. Film or tape young people's comments. Get them to express what they thought or what they want through a piece of artwork.

## Control

Like all groups, young people have the right to self-determination in their arts and cultural expression. Youth control of how they engage in the arts is crucial. The young people you are working with may not be ready and it may not be appropriate for them to completely develop and implement a project, program or group themselves. If they are, it could be a positive experience through which they develop skills and self-empowerment. But if they're not, there are many other avenues within a process for youth to exert control and in doing so gain a level of ownership such as:

- informing the shape or content of a program at the consultation stage
- sitting on a board to bring a youth perspective to the way an organisation runs
- taking responsibility for different tasks associated with a project

Young people should always have complete control over the way their artistic product is presented. An individual may create art for many different reasons and whether or not and the way in which it is showcased must be informed by the artist.

### **Accessibility**

Not all young people want to sit on a board or take responsibility for organising an event, they may just want to turn up on the day. Not all young crew want to participate, they may just want to watch. Adults generally have many different choices in relation to what level they engage in the arts, all of them valid. It's important that the same variety of access points are offered and promoted to youth. Some of the factors that need to be taken into account when considering the accessibility of youth arts activity are:

- Limited money and transport options
- Generational or cultural boundaries - a particular person, venue or situation not being deemed approachable or comfortable by a young person.
- Timing or structure of projects - young people who can only commit to a drop in basis. Language and literacy levels are other accessibility factors.

Make sure that you identify the target audience for any organisation, group, program or project and maximise its accessibility in relation to their needs and wants. Organisations and larger programs may have an obligation to be as accessible as possible to the entire youth population. Smaller groups or specialised projects may not have the resources or intention to plan for broad youth access or may focus in on a particular segment of the youth population.

### **Youth Arts for different reasons**

Why do we develop and implement an arts project or program? To bring groups of people together, develop arts skills, provide a means of expression or personal development or to produce high quality art product...Sometimes the objectives are more personal or community orientated, sometimes more industry related and sometimes a mixture of both.

Like the general population, young people have a need to and should be given the opportunity to engage in the arts for a range of purposes. While some youth arts activities will have an emphasis on personal and community development, others should cater to young people who want to develop their skills and create work in the context of the arts industry. Both types of youth arts objectives are valid. The process and structure you use will differ depending on the emphasis of the youth arts initiative.

### **Where to from here?**

For a copy of their *Young People and the Arts Policy* contact:

**The Australia Council** – Freecall: 1800 226 912, Web: [www.ozco.gov.au](http://www.ozco.gov.au)

For more information on best practice in youth arts contact the following state bodies:

**Propelarts, WA** – Phone: (08) 9328 5855, Web: [www.propelarts.org.au](http://www.propelarts.org.au)

**Youth Arts Queensland** – Phone: (07) 3252 5115, Web: [www.yaq.org.au](http://www.yaq.org.au)

**Carclew Youth Arts Centre, SA** – Phone: (08) 82675111, Web: [www.carclew.on.net](http://www.carclew.on.net)



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