

The Baring Foundation

CREATIVELY MINDED AND YOUNG

A selection of arts and mental health projects with,
by and for children and young people

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Kids in Control

Active in:

Belfast and surrounding areas in schools, communities and youth groups.

Age groups we work with:

12-18 years all-ability youth & young adults with disabilities.

Kids in Control (KIC) is a physical theatre company for young people of all abilities and backgrounds. They have worked with the Suicide Awareness and Support Group on theatre projects supported by the Arts Council Northern Ireland's ARTiculate funding programme: FYI (For Your Information) (2018-19) and TBH (To Be Honest) (2019-20).

ABOUT THE PROJECTS

Both FYI & TBH were 10-month phased, incremental physical theatre creative learning programmes for marginalised young people in North and West Belfast, which enabled participants to identify and explore challenges around mental health, specifically around social media use, while seeking creative ways to harness its power to communicate positive messages and important information.

The projects were developed from focus groups we held with teens who identified social media as having a profound, pervasive and formative influence on their lives. The group found that teens are peer led and seek advice/support from each other. They have a high level of concern about social media impacting on mental health but feel ill-informed to support or guide each other.

Through the projects we wanted to raise awareness, reduce stigma and strengthen resilience.

We developed and delivered both programmes in partnership with the Suicide Awareness and Support Group (SA&SG), a community organisation which supports families who have lost loved ones to suicide and individuals who are in suicidal crisis, and raises community awareness around the issue of suicide. Both Kids in Control and SA&SG seek solidarity within the community sector, bringing different skill sets and networks, and an eagerness to develop a healthy society through sharing and learning that strengthens early intervention opportunities for youth.

The programmes were delivered in four phases:

Phase 1: was recruitment/familiarisation and we held outreach taster workshops in multiple community settings, providing opportunities for young people to sample physical theatre and engage with the subject creatively.

Phase 2: in the second phase, we worked with a group to develop their ideas through creative skills development, trust work, group building, storytelling/devising activities. Participants received suicide awareness training and developed a work-in-progress podcast.³¹

Phase 3: focused on enhanced skills development around personal development and emotional intelligence. The young people also produced a short film³² and resource pack and launched the film on social media.

Phase 4: in the final phase, we held one-off resilience workshops in schools and community groups around the film and resource pack the young people had made, involving peer leaders from the programme.

³¹ FYI's podcast by Kids in Control is on their Facebook page here: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=304905103660302, and a podcast by TBH here: www.facebook.com/kicproject/videos/281556156024629.

³² A short film made by the FYI project was featured on BelfastLive here: www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/belfast-teens-release-film-tackling-15274693.

The number of young people in both FYI and TBH varied, with a core group of 15 and 16 respectively. We estimated we reached a wider audience of 30,000.

OUR IMPACT

We saw a wide range of positive impacts from the projects.

Young people became comfortable and empowered to discuss issues around mental health and suicide, feeling confident they knew how and where to direct others feeling down or suicidal. During the programme, four young people unconnected to the project had appropriate interventions put in place as a result of learning within the programme.

“The most important thing I’ve learned is how to deal with situations like these and where to go for help.”

Participants also became more attentive to their own mental health with more empathy for others:

“The project has brought me more awareness about the sort of help and support I could get.”

Feedback highlighted that using arts as a vehicle to open discussion made the subject accessible and engaging, and using physical theatre that is high energy and fun supported participants to feel comfortable in their bodies and to make the connection between physical and emotional wellbeing.

The projects reduced isolation for participants who formed new friendships and felt part of a group. They developed exceptional teamwork ability, keen to share their creative skills and be a positive role model for their peers.

The process of exploring ideas developed self-esteem and confidence and participants gained a sense of control through recognising their strengths, as well as a sense of achievement and pride over the work they produced.

Recognition of their achievements has given them confidence to get involved in other arts projects.

Guardians were also proud of participants’ achievements and reported that this showed in other areas of their lives:

“This film was about the struggles young people face online and with thoughts of suicide. My son has faced and overcome a lot with his own mental health and I couldn’t be prouder of him and the confidence he has gained.”

LOOKING FORWARD...

Our vision is that *young people are engaged, empowered and their voices amplified to lead the change in how mental health is discussed and perceived in our society.*

KIC and SA&SG would like to secure an ongoing rolling creative programme that focuses on mental health, led by peer leaders and participants who bring the content, thus ensuring that there is always relevance and meaning for their peers. FYI & TBH have helped us to reimagine how we communicate with teenagers about mental health, and we need the scope to continually explore and identify new and relevant early intervention creative strategies.

“The ARTiculate programme and in particular the use of creative processes has allowed us to get our message out to a wide and diverse audience. In particular it has allowed us to reach a teen audience, which is always challenging. The arts are definitely a vehicle we will continue to use to support us in our aim of reducing stigmas and building resilience.”

Margaret Walker, SA&SG