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HMDT Music ‘Residency’ in Custody Education Project: An Evaluation

Dr Anthony Gunter

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Author

Dr Anthony Gunter is a Principal Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of East London. During the past two decades Anthony has carried out a number of research studies examining and exploring contemporary urban youth subculture(s) and alternative youth transitions. He is the author of *'Growing up Bad: Black Youth, Road Culture & Badness in an East London Neighbourhood'* (Tufnell Press, 2010), and *'Race, Gangs and Youth Violence: Policy, Prevention and Policing'* (Policy Press, 2017). Prior to his career in academia Anthony worked for over 14 years as a community and youth work practitioner.

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Introduction

HMDT Music's [Hackney Music Development Trust] 'One Spirit' project specifically works with young people/adults caught up in the criminal justice system. Utilising a curriculum designed around music, the creative arts/media and business/entrepreneurial activities, HMDT Music aims to:

- i) develop/enhance the necessary personal, interpersonal, functional and employability skills of young people/adults
- ii) enable them to improve their life options, raise their aspirations, desist from offending behaviour and lead more productive lives.

Since 2010, HMDT Music has been delivering 'Residency' Projects in Custody and 1to1 Mentoring Sessions in Custody in both HMYOI Feltham and HMYOI Cookham Wood. Additionally, the project runs 'Through the Gate' 1to 1 Mentoring sessions (with young people/adults released from custody) which are delivered within relevant community settings throughout Greater London area.

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the HMDT Music project, carried out between 01 September 2017 and 31st August 2018, examining the impact of its 'Residency' in Custody education provision. In her review of education in prison for the Ministry of Justice, Dame Sally Coates (2016 p.3) maintains that education is one of the key 'pillars of effective rehabilitation'. However, she also points out that the 'importance of education in prison seems to have been lost'. In its 2016-17 annual report, Ofsted reported, as has been the case in previous years, that education provision within many young offenders' institutions was less than good. In Feltham A which held 126 16 & 17-year-old boys, at time of inspection:

"The prison was found to not be safe for either staff or boys. There was an increase in serious violence, including multiple assailants and the use of weapons. Because of the very restricted regime and little time out of cells, attendance at lessons was a casualty. In Feltham A's report, we estimated that 19,000 hours of schooling were lost over the year from non-attendance and missed classes". (Ofsted, 2017 p.18)

A major government sponsored review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales (Taylor, 2016 p38), again acknowledged the strong links between education and offending. However, the report went on to further detail that 50 per cent of 15-17-year olds entering YOIs

have numeracy and literacy levels more akin to those of a 7-11-year-old. Approximately 40 per cent of young people surveyed in under-18 YOIs disclosed that they had not attended school since the age of 14 and ‘nearly nine out of ten said they had been excluded from school at some point’. The report whilst acknowledging the recent endeavours to increase the focus on education in custody, noted however that progress has been slow. While public sector YOIS are by law required to provide 30 hours of education per week, in reality young people in these establishments are only getting 15 hours. Ultimately, a combination of staff shortages and escalating levels of violence ‘have prevented this ambition from being delivered, and in some cases children must sacrifice time spent associating with their peers if they are to attend classes’.

There is a growing body of research evidence about the positive impact that arts education programmes can have on offenders – their emotional and psychological well-being, participation in further education/ training and their long-term desistance from crime (Bilby et al., 2005; Ellis and Gregory, 2011). Moreover, music-based arts programmes in prisons have been found to make measurable and substantial impacts on the well-being, relationships and learning of participants whilst they are in prison (Cox and Gelsthorpe, 2008).

Methodology and Context

This evaluation specifically draws upon the self-evaluation and feedback information gathered from young participants at the end of each ‘Residency’ in Custody Project. On completion of their programme each student was asked to complete a self-evaluation form comprising key learning objectives / ‘areas made improvements in’ [e.g. self-confidence, working with others, managing frustration better, feeling better about the future etc], and provide a brief overall comment about their experiences on the programme. In addition, this largely numerical data is augmented by, and cross-referenced with ethnographic research data gleaned from:

- a) direct observations of delivered sessions,
- b) semi structured one-to-one interviews and informal discussions with young people,
- c) informal group discussions with young people,
- d) semi structured one- to-one interviews and informal discussions with members of HMDT Music project delivery team, and prison education staff members/tutors.

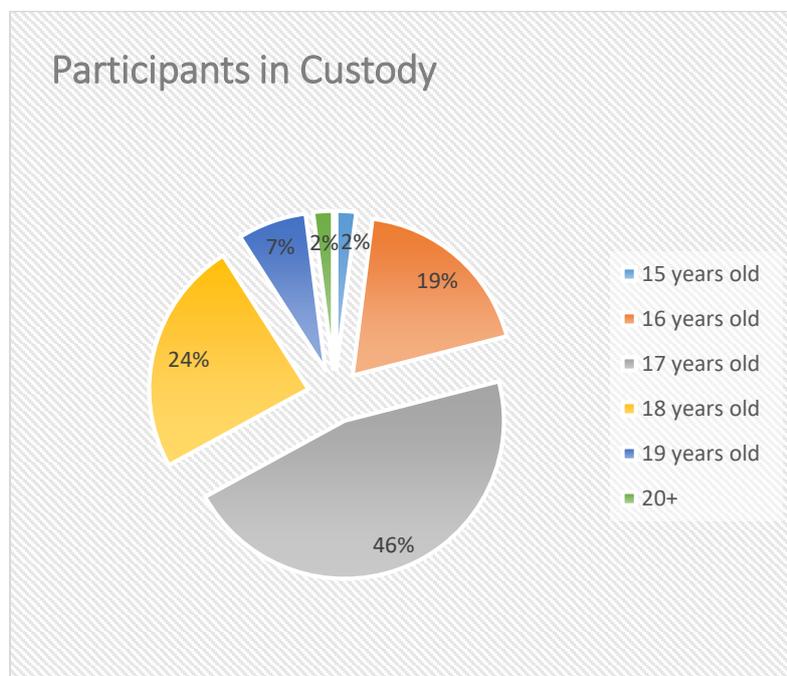
The Residency Projects in HMYOI Feltham and HMYOI Cookham Wood that this evaluation focusses on engaged the young participants by utilising a range of personal, social and technical development learning activities incorporating:

- a) Warm up games & focus exercises / group discussion & debate / sharing work & evaluation/feedback.
- b) Level 1 & Level 2 Sound & Audio Production / Advanced Music Production (Logic Pro X)
- c) Resettlement Activities - centred on personal finances, weekly survival plan, career choices / starting & running own business.

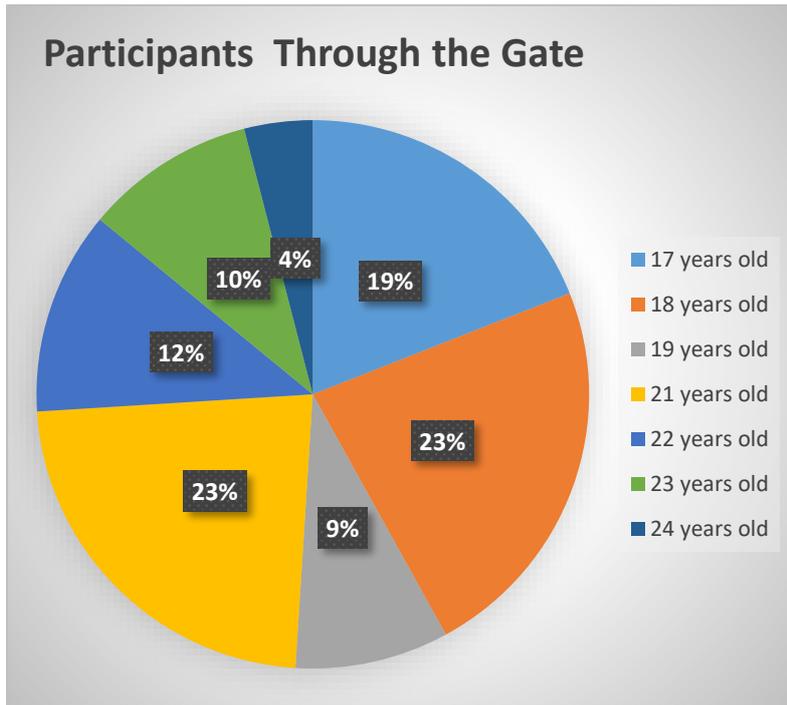
HMDT Participants

During the 12-month research period covered by this evaluation, HMDT Music worked with 120 young men: 89 participants were in custody; 48 were engaged via the HMOI 'Residency in Custody' Projects, and 41 were engaged through 1to1 mentoring sessions; whilst 31 participants were released and engaged via 'Through the Gate' Mentoring.

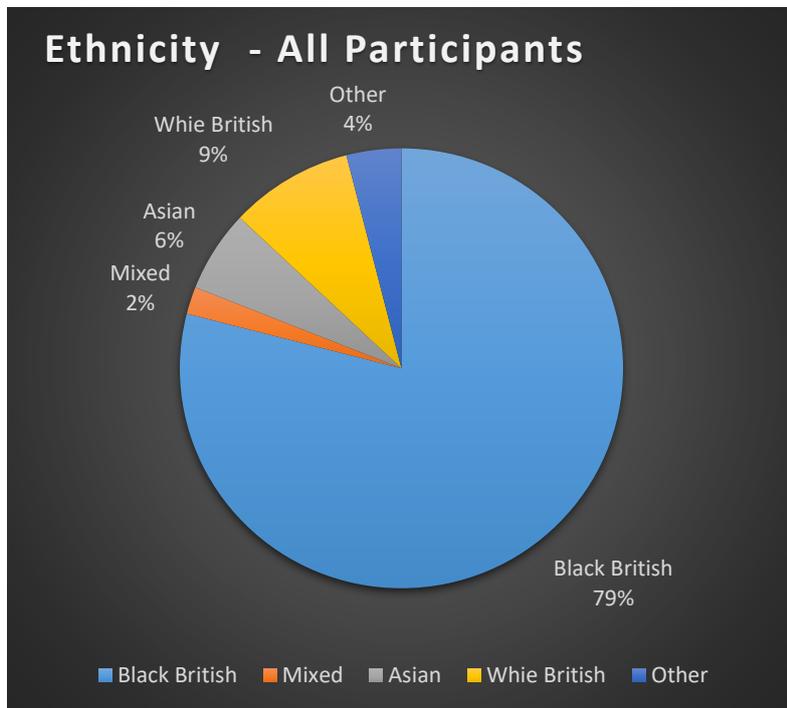
89 per cent of the participants in custody aged 16, 17, or 18.



65 per cent of released participants aged 17, 18, or 21.



Nearly 80 per cent of all 120 participants self-identified as Black British.



Research Sample

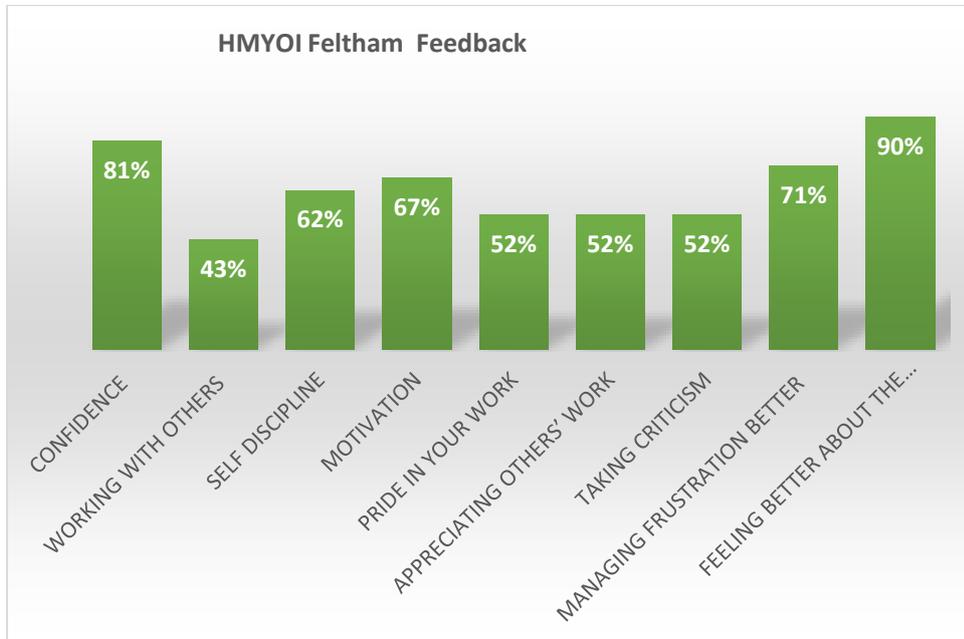
This evaluation is based on data derived from HMDT Music's work with 48 young men who were engaged via the 'Residency in Custody' Projects.

Findings

Feedback Highlights

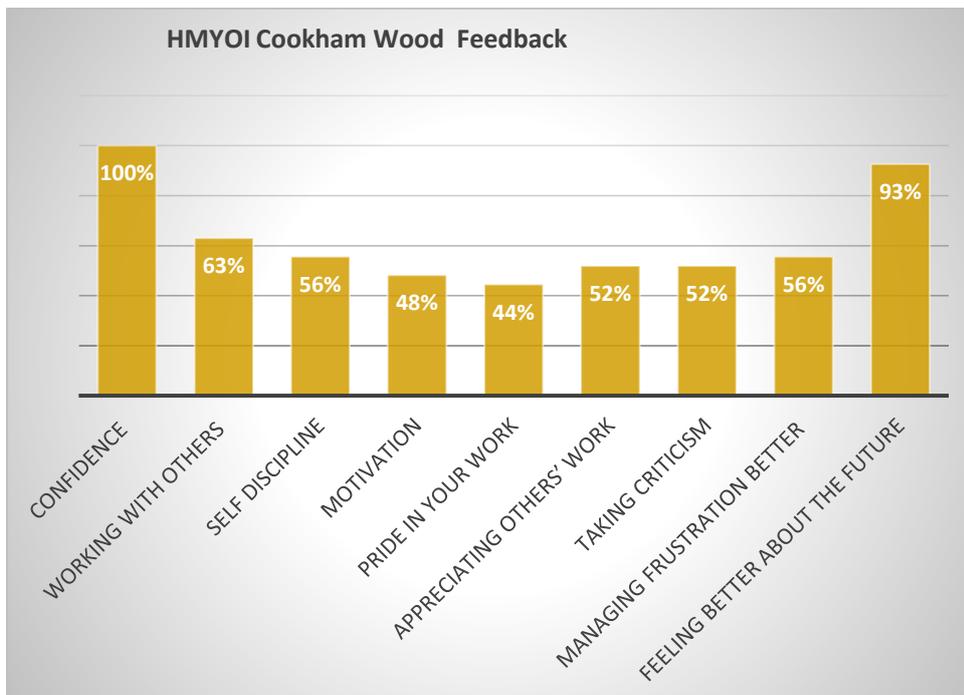
Of the 21 participants from HMYOI Feltham:

- 90 per cent felt better about the future
- 81 per cent felt confidence had improved
- 71 per cent managed frustration better
- 67 per cent identified improved motivation



Of the 27 participants from HMYOI Cookham Wood:

- 100 per cent felt confidence had improved
- 93 per cent felt better about the future
- 63 per cent able to work better with others
- 56 per cent managed frustration better



Of the 48 participants from HMYOI Cookham Wood and HMYOI Feltham:

- 92 per cent felt that their confidence had improved
- 92 per cent felt better about the future
- 63 per cent managed frustration better
- 58 per cent identified improved self-discipline
- 56 per cent identified improved motivation
- 54 per cent able to work better with others
- 52 per cent were better able to appreciate others' work
- 52 per cent were better able to take criticism

Engagement with Participants

HMDT team effectively engage and inspire the young men through the forging of strong relationships and bonds that are built in very difficult and challenging circumstances. By the beginning of each session, the team will have made plans about the areas to be covered [e.g. starting work with a new group or continuing the work of an established group]. But always the team will have to plan for the unexpected and hope that the session will not be cancelled at the last minute due to circumstances beyond their control. I had been sitting with the project delivery team [for more than an hour] unaware as to whether the session is going ahead or not, only to be finally informed by prison education staff that the session had been cancelled. On this occasion there had been a violent assault which resulted in a young person being taken to an A & E department at a local hospital; all scheduled education classes that morning had been cancelled. There is always the possibility of education classes being cancelled, often due to Prison Officer staff shortages [e.g. no one available to escort young men down to the sessions] or because of a violent incident that has taken place between groups of young men on the way down from the accommodation units to the education block.

When the young men arrive at the sessions they are eager to discuss and recall amongst themselves and staff team the events that had occurred earlier that morning/afternoon or the night before. As such, on greeting the young men at the start of any session, the HMDT Music team will have to contend with a small group of individuals who are in a wide variety of emotional and behavioural states ranging from being: "hyped-up", "excitable", "elated", "eager", "angry", "upset", "agitated", "disinterested", "disengaged", "worried", "depressed", "low on energy". Regardless, the team manage to calm the young men down [if hyped up, excitable or agitated], motivate and inspire [if disengaged or disinterested], listen and offer

support [if upset, worried or depressed]. The impressive and inspiring work of the project delivery team – in building strong relationships and bonds with young men, in order to facilitate personal, social and technical learning development – should not be underestimated or undervalued. This work is only possible because of the unique combination of personal, professional and technical skills and experiences that are possessed by all the members of the delivery team. HMDT Music are positive male role models to the young participants and they are able to be effective because in their practice they are: “non-judgemental”, “knowledgeable”, “dependable”, “empathetic”, “challenging”, “skilled”, “committed”, and “experienced”. Many of the young men who end up in custody will have had complicated and chaotic lives up to this point, and very few positive adult male role models. It is for these reasons that the work of the HMDT Music team is so important and successful:

“I was transfixed with how [one of the young men] was connecting with ...[HMDT tutor] there are many females working here, so the fact that [HMDT tutor] was a man and spoke the lingo was really good”. The [HMDT] team had the young men focussed and engaged for the entire session. In the team meeting I spoke about how impressed I was with the work One Spirit were doing with the young men” [HMYOI female staff tutor]

Curriculum Design and Delivery

“I feel our approach and aims need to focus on well-being first and let that lead to the growth in employability and non-reoffending”. (HMDT Tutor B)

“...there has always been a consistent, underpinning need running through all the groups we have worked with: a need to feel good about themselves and their futures, and this is the need that I have always been mindful to address first and foremost, before any other learning or meaningful activities can occur”. (HMDT Manager/Tutor)

The learning and teaching activities that are utilised by HMDT Music are very successful and provide the hook with which to meaningfully engage the young men. Many of the participants’ experiences of formal education had been negative and problematic up to this point. However, the young people’s experiences of HMDT Music’s education projects are very positive, even in those instances where they have not chosen to attend the sessions but have been identified by YOI education/welfare staff. Former student who is now released but is currently engaged with HMDT Music’s ‘through the Gate’ mentoring programme:

“I wasn’t really interested in music back then didn’t think I was gonna pursue it in the future or anything like that. I didn’t even want to attend the sessions, just wanted to keep my head down, do my time and come out sort of thing. But those few months attending the project working with ...[HMDT tutor] changed my life. Seriously.” (HMDT Participant)

The curriculum is “innovative”, “challenging”, “appropriate”, “enjoyable”, and “multi-faceted”. Students are not just expected to make beats [via development of technical and musical skills] and write/perform rap lyrics. Rather, they are also required to work together: on generating ideas and cooperating [re achieving individual learning aims], writing and producing marketing and promotional campaigns and materials [online or via radio etc], and develop business plans with full financial costings. Consequently, under the guise of ‘fun’ arts-based activities students working alongside tutors are developing literacy and numeracy skills as well as interpersonal and group work skills. The tutors are constantly cajoling and challenging the students to keep focussed and motivated. Many of the students have very short attention spans and are constantly looking for distractions [“dissing” each other, getting up and walking over to chat to someone else, getting up and crowding around the window to watch and discuss an “attractive” female Prison Officer as she walks past] particularly when they are required to undertake an activity that they might find challenging. At this point the work of the tutor is seen at its most important; they need to be supportive and flexible yet unerring at the same time.

In one of the sessions a young man had showed his rap lyrics to one of the tutors, from here the young man was pushed to his creative limit as his work and performance [in recording booth] was deconstructed and supportively critiqued. This was an essential learning experience for this young man that could not be quantified in a traditional sense. The arts business is not ‘fun’, it is hard work and graft and the young man was getting a real-world taste of the demands of the ‘music business’; in addition, he was getting a level of feedback that would propel his musicianship and performance to a whole new professional level.



“The session is very calm and I like the work that goes on here” (HMDT Participant)

“I enjoy working with the Hackney Music Team. It’s very productive and I hope to gain as much as possible from what I’ve been taught and use it to do something constructive” (HMDT Participant)

“I engaged in everything and enjoyed the session” (HMDT Participant)

“Hackney Music is a great pathway that should happen more often” (HMDT Participant)

“Looking forward to working with you lot again” (HMDT Participant)

“It was really good to work with ...[tutor] and his colleagues as they boosted my self-discipline and other aspects” (HMDT Participant)

“I feel more confident because I was working with other young people and it made me feel confident and help from staff” (HMDT Participant)

Fundamentally, the sessions always start off in an upbeat and enjoyable way, and this sets the mood for the remainder of the session. The warm up sessions are particularly enjoyable and insightful, the young men take this very seriously and competitively (in a fun almost child-like way), and this has particular significance and importance:

“Many young men have no positive adult relationships in their lives, so when they play the warm up game for example, this is probably the first time or one of few rare occasions where they’ve played a fun game with an adult”. (HMDT Project Manager/Tutor)

Feedback & Evaluation & Process

For HMDT Music to deliver its programmes to young men in difficult and challenging environments, it is essential that there is a robust and transparent feedback and evaluation process. All the processes and systems observed as part of this evaluation are indeed robust and transparent and the practices that feed into these processes are consistent and professional. All paperwork is in order [re monitoring data], moreover there are informal feedback processes that seek to continually involve the young men throughout the sessions. This process also includes all staff team members, although the Project Manager has oversight of all aspects of the development and delivery of the HMDT Music programmes, this is done in consultation with members of the team and partners in the relevant HMYOI Education departments.

Leadership and Vision

HMDT Music delivers innovative and inspirational learning activities and mentorship to vulnerable and marginalised young men in ‘Custody’ and ‘Through the Gate’ – in no small part because of the vision, commitment and leadership qualities of its Programme Manager. There is no existing template for the varied and stimulating arts and music-based programme of activities offered by the HMDT Music project. HMDT’s projects have evolved into becoming largely music based. However, in the beginning its programmes were initially developed and delivered as part of a multi discipline arts curriculum; incorporating drama, dance, art & some music. Since the first HMDT Music ‘Project in Custody’ held at HMYOI Feltham in 2010, the Project Manager has utilised his professional contacts in the arts and music industries [specifically targeting individuals who had experience in education and working with young people] to bring together a team of skilled facilitators. The development of HMDT Music’s mentoring scheme [‘in Custody’ and ‘Through the Gate’] stemmed from the Manager’s vision:

The first project [HMYOI Feltham, 2010] was a resounding success and led to us delivering ...three times per year throughout 2010, 2011 and 2012. After the first project I highlighted the need for a follow up contingency; creative arts projects always run the risk of leaving participants 'high and dry' once they complete, and especially where a performance or showing is undertaken, emotions can reach a high level and have nowhere to go when the curtains come down. I suggested that as part of a follow up plan we should enable a mentoring scheme, which would follow those young people who had really engaged in the project throughout their sentence and then offer them the opportunity to continue to engage with us and receive pastoral support when they left custody. [HMDT Manager]

The Manager is an experienced and highly respected professional musician and music producer in a world that many of HMDT Music's young participants are aware of via older relatives and community contacts; as such the Manager has immense cultural capital within the socio-cultural worlds of these marginalised young men. However, this professional experience is allied to strong pedagogical and group work skills and a care and concern for the well-being of young people. The team of tutors brought together and led by the Manager are equally skilled [as professional musicians/engineers/producers and tutors] and committed to working with young people caught up within the criminal justice system.

The prospect of being part of the HMDT One Spirit team was a dream come true for me having spent 8 years running the music department at...[HMYOI]So when I left my role as Head of Music in 2015, I jumped at the opportunity of being part of a very successful team which had for a number of years, supported both myself and my students through some fantastic projects as well as individual mentoring sessions. (HMDT Tutor A)

Impact

"It can be hard to effectively measure the full extent the impact our work has. I feel there are the obvious successes that can be quantified (such as positive case studies, rate of reoffending etc) But there are some day to day impacts in forms of conversations, behaviour changes, perspective shifts etc which are much harder to monitor. However, for me it is those very impacts that make the work at HMDT so vital and ultimately keep me going in the job" (HMDT Tutor B).

Arts and music-based education programmes can be viewed by some as being incapable of producing hard outcomes [e.g. the type of academic qualifications that are respected by red brick universities and blue-chip companies]. Such 'soft outcomes' led projects are viewed as fun and enjoyable but are of "no use" in the "real world". Moreover, marginalised young people

are more than likely to have not engaged in formal education and as such struggle with basic numeracy and literacy – within this context, what good is it if a young man can “rap” and “make beats” on a computer but has no GCSEs in Maths and English? HMDT Music are unique in that they use music and the arts as a tool to engage with marginalised young men who, despite their “bravado” and “front”, lack confidence and the social capital to function [never mind achieve] in mainstream society. Interestingly, when talking to the participants it is quite apparent that many of them are not really interested in making a career out of music as a rapper or producer; indeed, a small number of them didn’t even initially choose to come on the HMDT Music programme.

The curriculum provided by HMDT Music, firstly: offers participants a safe space to reflect upon themselves, their attitudes, behaviours and their views about the world around them; secondly, it provides them with an opportunity to articulate their thoughts and feelings, again in a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space; thirdly, they get the chance to learn new technical and musical skills; lastly, the young men are required to develop and utilise literacy, numeracy and verbal communication skills. HMDT Music only work with the young men for a short period of time, but the work undertaken during this period is powerful and potentially life changing. In the short-term the young men see their confidence and general well-being improve, and with the right support [particularly when released via ‘Through the Gate’ mentoring] after the project, there is a chance for them to access further education or employment-based training opportunities. Fundamentally, however, HMDT Music is can only do so much – the HMDT Music project is a great start that needs to be further harnessed by mentoring and other wrap around support services in the community that HMDT Music has no control over.

“It was great getting advice from experienced people, whom are understanding to your situation” (HMDT Participant)

“It was great to get an outside opinion on my work and goals in life, it was a good opportunity” (HMDT Participant)

“Inspirational talk, advice on uni/apprenticeships” (HMDT Participant)

“HMDT helped me and other young people talk about what we are going to do when we come out of prison. If we want to go to a university or do an apprenticeship” (HMDT Participant)

“Very good sessions helped to make us have more self-esteem and I look forward to a crime free life” (HMDT Participant)

Concluding Comments

It is apparent that HMDT Music through the delivery of its 'Residency in Custody' projects in HMYOI Cookham Wood and HMYOI Feltham successfully:

- i) Develops and enhances the personal, interpersonal, functional and employability skills [also the emotional and psychological well-being] of young people/adults, and as such provides a solid platform which;
- ii) enables them to improve their life options, raise their aspirations, desist from offending behaviour and lead more productive lives.

The HMDT Music team effectively engage and inspire the young men they work with.

The learning and teaching activities [curriculum design and delivery] that are utilised by HMDT Music are "innovative", "challenging", "appropriate", "enjoyable", and "multi-faceted".

The feedback and evaluation process employed by HMDT Music is robust and transparent and the practices that feed into these processes are consistent and professional.

HMDT Music staff team works well together as a strong cohesive unit and is effectively led and supported by the project manager. All tutors are skilled technicians and professional artists who are, passionate about and, committed to working with young people caught up in the justice system.

HMDT Music ['Residency' in Custody] work with the young men for a short period of time, but the work undertaken during this period is powerful and potentially life changing.

Of the 21 participants from HMYOI Feltham: 90 per cent felt better about the future, 81 per cent felt confidence had improved, 71 per cent managed frustration better, 67 per cent identified improved motivation

Of the 27 participants from HMYOI Cookham Wood: 100 per cent felt confidence had improved, 93 per cent felt better about the future, 63 per cent able to work better with others, 56 per cent managed frustration better

"In spite of the difficulty of the work, the 'greyness' of the environment and the apparent, almost invisibility of what we do it does feel like we are in the premier league of services providing support to neglected, poorly educated, marginalised, disaffected and incarcerated young people" (HMDT Project Manager).

Recommendations

To further build on work currently being undertaken with young people 'in custody' by exploring possibilities around (a) how the skills they are learning could be validated, and (b) extending the delivered programme:

- so that deeper literacy and numeracy skills could be embedded more effectively within the music production context;
- to allow young people to further develop skills which can be built upon when released which provide a viable progression route to Level 1/Level 2 Functional Skills or similar. With this in mind, it would be worth considering the possibility of approaching an Awarding Organisation to develop a contextualised regulated qualification to reflect the skills and learning outcomes the young people are currently working towards on the programme. They could then be certificated and start to build educational currency for use in the outside world;
- thus, enabling young people to begin to identify for themselves a potential Employment Education and Training progression route beyond their custodial sentence.

Explore funding opportunities for developing a 'through the gate' peer-led research programme focussing on a cohort of young people who were engaged by HMDT Music to (a) document their experiences, (b) examine the specific challenges faced on release, and (c) identify potential preventative solutions to recidivism.

Explore funding opportunities to further develop and expand HMDT Music's 'through the gate' mentoring provision and strengthen partnership working with external wrap around services in the community – in order to provide more cohesive and holistic support to young people when released from custody.

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