Paint Up – Evaluation of a community mural project

KEY FINDINGS

Introduction
Paint Up involved the development and painting of two murals on walls prone to tagging near schools in Wellington’s Southern Corridor. City Arts (WCC) managed the project which involved two local primary schools (Berhampore and Newtown), two artists (Tina Rae Carter and Kiri Hiha) and a youth organisation (Eastern Southern Youth Trust). A group of children - 10 from Newtown and 22 from Berhampore - worked with an experienced artist to develop a concept for a wall in their neighbourhood, and design and paint a mural on this wall. They developed this mural through a series of six workshops that explored local cultural and geographical heritage and other topics such as graffiti prevention.

Paint Up was developed in response to the Wellington City Council Graffiti Management Strategy alongside other key strategies and policies such as the Arts and Culture Strategy and the Public Art Policy.

The broad objectives (outcomes) of Paint Up were:
- To up-skill and empower young people in Berhampore and Newtown through participation in a mural project in their community.
- To highlight the social and economic impacts of tagging by adding vibrancy to the streetscape and a sense of ownership and safety for the community.
- To increase the capacity of Wellington’s community arts practitioners to deliver well-constructed arts projects.
- To carry out an in-depth evaluation of the project.

The benefits envisaged were:
- Up-skilling young people by:
  - raising awareness of the impacts of tagging
  - learning about the art of designing and painting murals
  - learning about the cultural and geographical heritage of an area and
  - participating in a collective project that enhances their communities’ environment.
- Building individual skills, promoting understanding of differences, creating a sense of ownership within a local community, and generating a sense of pride, confidence and hope.
- Developing the skills and experience of local artists who want to work with communities
- Contributing to a clean, safe and connected neighbourhood.

Evaluation results - key findings

Project outcomes
All of the intended outcomes of Paint Up were fully or partially achieved.
The project contributed to graffiti prevention in a number of ways: by covering walls that would otherwise have been repeatedly tagged; by developing community pride, unity and stewardship; by giving young people a voice and an opportunity to express themselves positively; and by instilling children with anti-graffiti values and messages.

There was clear evidence from a range of sources that the children involved in Paint Up were engaged, up-skilled and empowered through the project. For example, all but one of the young artists said they enjoyed being involved in Paint Up; 75% said they had learned something new; and 62.5% said that Paint Up had made them feel more confident.

The Berhampore and Newtown murals were very different, but both celebrated diversity, encouraged the young people to explore their own identity, and enhanced community-pride and sense of belonging. A large proportion of the young artists were Maori or from immigrant families, reflecting the diversity of Newtown and Berhampore communities.

All the student learning objectives were met, and the young people particularly enjoyed the unique opportunities to learn about their local area. However more workshop time was needed for creative work and skill development.

Each artist came to the project with a different experience base, and both reported they gained further experience and confidence as community arts practitioners through Paint Up.

Unexpected benefits of Paint Up noted by participants included: school profile-raising; school culture change towards greater valuing of art; and nurturing artistic ambitions of young people.

The murals have added vibrancy to the streetscape, and participants reported positive responses to the project from parents, the school community, and the wider community.

**Success factors**
The key success factors identified were:
- Dedication and skills of those involved
- Project structure and partnership approach
- Communication
- Planning with outcomes in mind
- Youth empowerment approach
- Prior relationships and learning

**Benefits**
The evaluation documents the way Paint Up produced benefits at multiple levels: individual, school community, and wider community. Key benefits at each level were:

**Individual level:**
- Student’s sense of identity, belonging, contribution and confidence were enhanced
- Students were up-skilled; artistic ambitions were nurtured
Knowledge about local area and local pride was increased
Artists were up-skilled and gained confidence as community arts practitioners

**School Community:**
- School pride was enhanced
- Authentic learning opportunities for students were provided
- School profile was raised; connections strengthened with wider community and WCC

**Wider Community**
- Vibrancy of streetscape
- Graffiti prevention
- Possible increase in sense of unity, pride, safety and shared ownership of public spaces

**Lessons learned**
Paint Up was a pilot project, and generated important learning about what works in a project of this nature, and how the project could be improved in future. Six key themes emerged around the need for:

- **Wider Community**
  - Vibrant streetscape
  - Graffiti prevention
  - Possible increase in sense of unity, pride, safety and shared ownership of public spaces

- **School Community**
  - School pride was enhanced
  - Provided authentic learning opportunities for students
  - School profile was raised; connections strengthened with wider community

- **Individual**
  - Student’s sense of identity, belonging, contribution and confidence was enhanced
  - Students were up-skilled; artistic ambitions were nurtured
  - Knowledge about local area and community pride was increased
  - Artists were up-skilled and gained confidence
1. more detailed joint planning
2. greater clarity about roles
3. pre-empting and management of practical and logistical issues
4. better time management of sessions with students
5. good communication
6. appropriate group size.

Budgetary and time constraints were underlying themes.

In addition to the key themes above, participants provided a number of comments and suggestions about, for example: site choice, project timeframe, how to reduce the risk of the mural being tagged during the painting process, the importance of gaining buy-in and input from teachers, and opportunities for enhancing the benefits of the project to students not directly involved.

Recommendations
Based on the evaluation findings, the following recommendations for Paint Up are:

- Keep it simple. Work on simplifying the Paint Up model rather than adding in additional elements or linkages. Keep the number of project partners and the core project team small.
- Ensure that the time allowed for each component of the project is realistic, and that project partners are remunerated and resourced appropriately.
- Match the scale of the project (i.e. the number of schools and number of students) to the resources available.
- Start joint planning early, with input from all project partners including teachers. Ensure there is time for both developing a shared vision, and working through the detail of how to make that vision a reality.
- As part of the planning process, give consideration to the feedback and suggestions documented herein.
- Discuss with school principals and teachers their ideas for enhancing the school-wide benefits of the project, and opportunities for greater integration with the curriculum.
- Consider condensing the timeframe, in particular for the mural painting component of the project. E.g. an intensive 2-3 days of painting, rather than short sessions over many weeks.