

SOFT TOUCH ARTS LTD EVALUATION BRIEF

We are looking for an evaluator to assist us with planning and carrying out the evaluation of our Mash-Up arts programme for hard to reach young people, presenting the findings to stakeholders and building the capacity of Soft Touch to carry out future evaluations.

Background

Soft Touch Arts was formed in 1986 and is a participatory arts organisation which works in Leicester city and Leicestershire. We are a not for profit company with a co-operative structure. Soft Touch develops and runs innovative creative projects and programmes which aim to tackle issues that affect marginalised and disadvantaged sectors of the community. We have developed a particular expertise in working with young people, especially those who are considered 'hard to reach' and difficult to engage. Our aim in working with these young people is to enable them to participate actively in creative projects, encouraging the development of self confidence and ambition alongside new arts and communication skills.

The company currently has four worker directors responsible collectively for the management of the company, seven employees and seven voluntary directors.

In June 2009 we were awarded a grant of £370,000 from the Department for Children Schools and Families through the Youth Sector Development Fund for the Mash-Up programme. Mash-Up will run to 31 March 2011 to offer a programme of creative positive activities to give young people new skills, aspirations and experiences with the aim of diverting them from crime, anti-social behaviour and dropping out of education and training. There are three strands to the programme:

- A combination of building and street-based activities for 13-19 year olds in New Parks and other outlying west-of-city areas, mainly taking place on Friday and Saturday evenings.
- A Friday early evening creative drop-in session at the Soft Touch premises, for young people who are 'looked after' or have difficulties accessing or fitting in with mainstream youth activities.
- A structured 3-day per week creative mentor programme to give young people the opportunity to develop their creative skills and help organise and support the Friday and Saturday night activities.

This is a capacity building programme which aims to place Soft Touch in a position to continue to deliver positive, targeted activities for young people into the future, for example through commissioning and partnerships.

Purpose

Our funding from the DCSF includes an amount for a consultant to help us build a body of evidence which can be drawn on flexibly, using different models to present the positive impact of engaging young people in creative activities. The consultant's role will be to develop the evaluation methodology, analyse the data collected and present the impacts of the programme in a variety of ways. We wish to take advantage of the consultancy support to build the internal skills of the organisation around impact evaluation and Social Return on Investment analyses and the consultant will work closely with the Soft Touch co-director responsible for evaluation.

Specifically, we would like to develop an evaluation methodology which will tell us:

- How effective the programme has been in delivering its outcomes (as laid out in the delivery profile attached).

- How effective the programme has been in delivering against additional key strategic indicators, such as the Every Child Matters outcomes, Aiming High, NI110 (positive activities delivered by the local authority).
- How far YSDF funding has enabled Soft Touch to grow, attract and deliver additional funding and commissioning, and provide quality and effective services to young people.
- How far YSDF funding has increased the ability of Soft Touch to influence local agenda and strategic planning for services to young people and work in partnership with other organisations.
- The social return on investment (SROI) of aspects of the programme.

At the end of the programme it is intended that there should be a set of evidence which:

- Demonstrates how far arts interventions provide a successful, cost effective way of delivering positive activities, diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour and raising achievement and aspirations.
- Can be presented as replicable, robust delivery models to future funders, commissioners and partners to enable sustainable delivery by Soft Touch of positive creative activities.
- Can be analysed to present as a Social Return on Investment study.
- Links to the monitoring data required by the programme funders.

It is also intended that the process will help to create a system of evaluation which could be adapted and used across a range of Soft Touch's arts projects and programmes in the future.

Tasks

- To develop a SMART evaluation plan for the programme as a whole in consultation and agreement with the Soft Touch worker directors.
- To develop appropriate methodologies for gathering evaluation data, in consultation and agreement with the Soft Touch worker directors, to take into account different levels of participation from young people, eg from those who may attend one or only a few sessions to those who take part in the creative mentors programme over a long period of time, and from those who it is difficult to engage in evaluation to those who are more confident or articulate.
- To develop methodologies for gathering evaluation data, in consultation and agreement with the Soft Touch worker directors, from partners, public sector agencies and other relevant stakeholders.
- To work with the worker director responsible for evaluation to put in place a framework of data collection which will enable a Social Return on Investment analysis to be done at the end of the programme.
- Quarterly review meetings with Soft Touch worker directors.

Outputs

- On-going support and development input into completing the evaluation plan.
- Quarterly reports on progress and analysis of the data.
- Year one report, March 2010
- Year two report, March 2011

Timescale

The start date for the contract will be 1 September 2009. All work will be completed by 31 March 2011.

The brief will be delivered in two main stages:

1. 1 September 2009 – 31 March 2010
Familiarisation with the programme/research; development of the evaluation plan; develop and trial data collection methodology; set up SROI framework.
2. 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011
Review; data analysis, development of models for the presentation of the programme's impacts; assistance with SROI report.

Selection criteria

We are looking for a consultant with:

- Previous experience of evaluating programmes against qualitative and quantitative outcomes.
- Previous experience of designing evaluation methodologies for programmes which target hard to reach people.
- Knowledge of the not for profit arts sector, including issues around selling services to the public sector.
- Knowledge of public sector youth policy issues
- Knowledge of Social Return on Investment.

Application process

The successful consultant will be selected by three Soft Touch directors. To apply send a written proposal stating:

- Your experience of delivering previous similar evaluation briefs.
- Your approach to developing the methodology for gathering the evaluation data.
- How you will ensure that learning around impact evaluation and SROI is embedded within Soft Touch.
- How you will demonstrate your commitment to equalities and inclusion.
- Your timescale for completing the different stages of the brief.
- Your costings, specifying the number of hours/days you will spend - there is a maximum budget inclusive of all expenses of £15,000 September 2009 – March 2010 and a further £15,000 April 2010 – March 2011
- Two recent references with contact details.

You should send your proposal by Monday 7 September 2009 by post or email to:

Helen Pearson
Soft Touch Arts Ltd
120a Hartopp Road
Leicester LE2 1WF
helen@soft-touch.org.uk.

Applications will be assessed on written proposals only. We hope to make a decision by 11 September 2009 and we would like the appointed evaluator to start work by the beginning of October or earlier if possible. If you have any queries you can email Helen or phone her on (0116) 270 2706.

Project management

The contract will be managed by Helen Pearson, the Soft Touch worker director responsible for evaluation. Helen will be responsible for collecting the data in line with the evaluation plan and methodologies. Regular progress reports will be made to the board of directors.

The MASH-UP programme is financed by the Department of Children, Schools and Families through the Youth Sector Development Fund.



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