

## **Dance Connect – Central Foundation School for Girl's June 2003**

**Dance Connect** – is unique project offered to 13 – 19 year olds in deprived areas to promote dance and other art forms, such as, video making, singing and song writing, design, and journalism. All the art forms incorporated into Akademi's programme for schools are designed to stimulate learning and support the schools existing curriculum.

This evaluation will be focusing on Central Foundation Girls' school.

### **Participating group**

#### **Central Foundation for Girls**

##### **School contacts**

Lesley Bara- Bara ( Learning Mentor)

Sally-Ann Donaldson (Community Arts Manager)

##### **Artists**

Anju Sharda

Joan Pires

Roswitha Cheshier

Total participants = **17 Girls**

Total from ethnic minorities – **94%**

##### **Others**

Sarea Hidskes – Valora – Work experience Akademi – Student placement from The London Contemporary Dance School.

### **Aims of the project**

- The core aims of the project are to build up the participants' self-esteem, confidence and equip them with skills that will aid them within school and work.
- The girls were offered a choice of three art forms: dance, video and singing/songwriting.
- After the development and production phase of the project the different groups would come together and showcase the final piece to the school. They would also take the performance to the Bull Theatre in June 2003.
- The young people would focus their work around the theme of conflict and resolution which was decided on the two taster days. The artists would try and focus their work on exploring the themes and creating work that reflected the young people's thoughts and feelings.

The artists would stimulate, support and challenge the young people, allowing them freedom of artistic expression. The young people would lead the work produced through their own ideas, and the artists would guide them to achieve the best of their potential in all art forms.

### **Accessibility and how the young people were chosen for the project**

This was a very challenging project for the artists and the school. The children were chosen by different teachers from across the year from different classes. The group was a complicated mix of young people with serious problems with attendance, truancy, the ability to work with others and respect authority. The majority of young people were Bangladeshi, Muslim girls a few came from African and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds. Some of the girls had serious conflicts with their home and school life. The girls' individual problems and issues would surface throughout the project, making it difficult for artists to continually balance the individual and the groups needs.

The group was supported daily by the artists and a support teacher plus the Learning mentor, Lesley Bara- Bara who focused on the issues that affected the young people's lives, their home life, lateness, truancy and the school. Sally- Ann Donaldson, (community arts manager) main role was to oversee the whole project and to liaise with the teachers and students.

### **The video project was led by Roswitha Chesher**

#### **Pupil Outcomes**

The young people learnt a variety of technical skills, how to use the equipment, shot sizes, camera movement, how to do story board and plan a video shoot. Ros supported the young people well, offering them guidance and praised them when they achieved their aims. But at times individual pupils were disruptive, and changed the group dynamics having a negative affect on those who trying to work well. Some of the girls were constantly late this impacted on team building skills and on their individual learning.

Attendance was also an issue and difficult to sustain. But on the whole the group met its aims and worked well together. Some of the girls were very enthusiastic and relished the opportunity that they had been given. The highlight for the group was learning to edit and shoot a pop video with the singing group as well as documenting the progress of the dancers.

The last day of filming for the group was difficult with one or two members of the group being easily distracted and finding it difficult to listen to instructions. But Ros tackled this situation thoughtfully, by giving them a less technical role and offering them the opportunity to direct the shoot and take responsibility for the running of events. This bought their focus back to the task set and they took on the new role with greater responsibility. Therefore the role of a Director became a useful tool to make the video project a positive learning experience for all the young people, and especially for those who found it difficult to focus and challenge their energy in a constructive way.

**“I was picked to do this project because I’m not very confident. I’ve enjoyed the filming and editing and I’ve learnt how to use a camera. I’ve also met new people. I’ve also liked working with the artists in small groups. I think the project has helped me with my confidence and I can use this experience when I leave school.” Stevee, 14 years old.**

**“I always do singing and dancing so I thought I’d pick something new instead. I’ve learnt how to edit, focus the camera and shot sizes. I’m going to use my camera skills to film my holiday. The artists are helpful and they treat us normally not like children. I would like the project to be longer, over two weeks.” Mandesa, 14 years old.**

### **The singing/song writing project was led by Anju Sharda**

#### **Pupil outcomes**

The girls were all enthusiastic and excited about the week ahead. All four loved singing and writing lyrics to songs. The lessons were well planned and covered a breadth of topics, breathing, relaxing, singing, writing and creating a melody. The young people led the sessions and were confident to express their ideas and share them with the group. The girls felt more confident working alone than with each other. But as the week progressed they were working well as group and became team players. The group focused well on the theme of conflict and resolution as they brainstormed ideas and experiences to help them write the lyrics of their song. The song that was created incorporated the ideas of all four of the girls and they felt great pride and ownership over their work. Anju was very supportive and stimulated the girls to think for themselves and express their emotions.

The girls in Anju’s group did have a problem with lateness and attendance, and this caused disruptions at times. The group also lost focus in the afternoon sessions but eventually got their energy back and co-operated well.

The highlight for the group was joining up with video group and making a pop video. On the day of filming one of the girls turned up half way through filming, the group felt let down and they felt this affected their performance. When the girl finally turned up she was persuaded to join in and get something out of the work she had put in during the week. Anju handled the situation well and supported the other young people to carry on and perform professionally. The girls learnt a lot about group dynamics and team work.

**“I enjoyed the week. I’ve learnt how to relax, breathe properly and sing in a group. I already write my own songs but other members of my group have had the chance to do this. I hope this week will help me with my music career; I’m already recording my own songs at a studio. We don’t get a chance to make a pop video or dance at the school so this project has given us all the opportunity to do something different.” Sabina, 14 years old.**

**“I think this project allows you to show your talents. I picked singing because I listen to music everyday and write my own lyrics. I’ve loved the workshops and listening to each others ideas. I think what we’ve written is really interesting and the whole group contributed lines to the final song.” Lucky, 15 years old.**

### **The dance project was led by Joan Pires**

#### **Pupil outcomes**

The dance group was one of the most challenging groups to work with. The young people had conflict within the sessions which Joan used positively to focus the group on the theme of conflict and resolution. The group worked hard and learnt a lot about South Asian dance. The young people were very keen to dance and perform to the rest of their peers. Joan used a variety of techniques to stimulate the young people to think about movement, posture, and poses. She was excellent at offering the young people choice and incorporated their ideas and helped them to translate them into dance steps. Joan was very creative in her method of teaching using visual drawings, brainstorming and general discussion to tease out the young people’s own ideas. She also used their energy to create a strong dance piece.

The dance project was very inclusive, all sixteen young people were given the opportunity to dance and be in the final piece. The dance project threaded through all the other art forms and integrated them into a whole. The dancers collaborated with the singers to produce a joint piece of work. This proved difficult at times when the two groups merged, some the young people would lose focus. But on the whole they produced a thought provoking final piece of work.

The main problem with the group was behaviour and focus. Some of the individuals in the dance group were late and had poor attendance; this did not help the groups progress.

The group worked hard and Joan had a challenging task, working with different young people from all the groups to produce a dance. The highlight was the performance on the last day. The dancers found it hard to concentrate and channel their energy after a week of intensive work. The performance was a good tool to highlight the commitment needed by the whole group if the performance in June (at the Bull theatre) was to be a success. The project was successful in highlighting the importance of team work and co-operation.

**“I’m really into Bollywood dancing but I’ve learnt some more traditional moves. I feel more confident and I’m looking forward to showing my work to my friends. I think this week will help me to get into the music industry. It’s good not to do academic subjects all the time.” Polly, 15 years old.**

**“I’ve never really danced, I’m a tomboy but I’ve always wanted to learn some dance steps. I’ve learnt how to work in a group and that if you miss a day of the project you missed a lot of work. I also have a lot more confidence now.” Nebi, 14 years old.**

### **The schools' perspective on the Dance Connect project**

The school was supportive to the artists and appreciated the difficulties that the artists faced during the week. There were mixed reactions about the young people chosen for the project as a few of the young people flouted the privileges given to them and continued to misbehave. The head of year had wished to pull some of the young people out of the project for breaking school rules but was persuaded to give them another chance. Lesley Bara - Bara felt that these children had complicated issues at home and at school and that for one week they should be given every chance to succeed.

**“Truancy is big issue in this school as well as drugs and crime. These girls feel as they don’t have an opportunity to succeed. They will get married young and have no real future. They have a lot of restrictions placed on them. This project is therefore a great opportunity for them and the girls have been very excited about it. One of the girls in the video project has been so focused and I’ve never seen her like that in school. I am hoping that the girls gain confidence and see that there are alternatives in life. Also it’s great to see the Bangladeshi girls working with the Somalian, African and Afro-Caribbean girls. These groups tend to keep themselves separate in school.”** Lesely Bara - Bara, Learning Mentor.

**“The main benefits of this project are for the young people to see something through from start to finish. They see something come out of the work that they put in during the week. Some of the young people chosen for this project are not doing well in school, and this project has given a boost to their confidence and motivated them. It has been great to see the young people feeling ownership of their work.”** Sally-Ann Donaldson, Community Arts Manger.

### **Recommendations for the future**

- The structure of the day to be set at the start of the week allowing the young people to familiarise themselves with the change in the school week. And for the days that followed not to deviate too far from the structure. This would support young people who already have a problem with truancy and lateness.
- Artists to be made aware of school rules and policies and to discuss these in relation to the project.
- Artists to be given guidelines and training on disciplining young people, for example can you ask young people to leave your session.
- A key figure of authority and respect needed from within the school to support and motivate young people throughout the week alongside the artists.
- Respect for the artists needs to be encouraged throughout the project.
- Dairies to be an integral part of the project and for all young people to complete them on a daily basis.
- Better planning with the school. The aims of the project and what kind of support and materials the artists may require during the week
- The schools to be encouraged to liaise with all necessary staff that maybe affected by the project.
- Support staff (from within the school) working the artists to be given the room to express their thoughts and concerns at end of day.
- Artists to be given rooms within the school that will cause the least disturbance to other staff members at the school. If this is difficult, to discuss the possibility of taking the project off site.
- Artists to be given a brief on all of the young people attending workshops, especially special issues that affect the participants that may help the artists in the sessions. For example, a recent bereavement, ill health, long period of absence from school etc.
- A strict adherence to ground rules made by the young people during the start of the week. The consequences of the breaking the rules must also be highlighted to the participants.

- Dance connect project should be balanced alongside academic learning at the school. This would make the young people more aware of the value of the project. It may help them to appreciate the opportunity that they have been given,
- No uniform can cause friction within the group; Uniform could help maintain unity and cohesion. The young people could be given the carrot that if all goes well during the week they can wear what they like on the day of the performance.

#### **Comments from the artists evaluation forms**

**“The young people got a sense of being heard through performing to a school that branded them ‘misbehaved lot’. Performing, exchanging stories, support encouraged teamwork for future acceptance.” Joan Pires, Dance tutor.**

**“I believe my singing group achieved a sense of pride having written their own song. The group as a whole bonded well although there were instances of friction due to established gangs, leadership. The group wanted their performance to be perfect and therefore disciplined themselves to rehearse and worked well as a team,” Anju Sharda, singer/song writer.**

**“I think the participants gained new skills, learning dance, video and singing/song writing. Being focused for that long on one project was an achievement for many. They found it difficult to keep attention sustained. They practised their co-operation skills and teaching each other. Showing work at the end was great, although a bit difficult.” Roswitha Chesher.**

**Report by Kausar Butt, June 2003**