

Sandwell Youth Offending Service

A case study of Artsmark in a youth offending team

Who we are

We work with young people aged 10-17 who have committed a criminal offence. More often than not, these young people can lead very chaotic and complex lives, and present with a number of issues including speech and language issues, a number of ACES (adverse childhood experiences) and learning difficulties, some undiagnosed.

We listened to young people and wanted to develop our offer to include alternative methods to support them. We wanted to work with young people more creatively and increase engagement, whilst offering them new ways to express themselves when exploring their past behaviours.

Wanting to work in a completely new way presented the service with a number of challenges and questions including: Would it work? What creative arts should we offer? Will staff want to be involved in such a big culture change? Will others take it seriously?

How Artsmark has worked for us

Advocating for our vision

With more questions than answers we began our journey by reaching out to organisations that could offer support and advice. Our Bridge Organisation, Arts Connect, offered us excellent support and were the first real advocate of what we wanted to achieve. They recommended that we use Arts Council England's Quality Principles as a baseline and later the Artsmark Self-Assessment Framework.

Setting achievable goals

The framework helped us to identify our strengths, whilst also identifying areas that needed attention that would not ordinarily be part of a youth offending team. Completion of the self-assessment steered us to clarify and strengthen what we wanted our future goals to be and enabled us to create an action plan alongside the Statement of Commitment that felt realistic and achievable.

Developing cultural connections

We were proud to be the first youth offending team to achieve an Artsmark award and this really helped put us on the map by sending a strong signal to arts organisations and individual artists that we are serious about our arts and cultural offer.

Artsmark helped us grow our networks and open up conversations between ourselves and cultural organisations. At the start, it felt that we were chasing organisations for them to work with us, now organisations are beginning to approach us for collaboration.



We'd recommend...

The support and encouragement that we received from Arts Connect during our journey was invaluable and we would recommend to any setting starting their Artsmark journey to reach out to their local Bridge Organisation.

Initially, Artsmark felt like it didn't quite fit our service and was more suited to a traditional educational environment. If you are a specialist setting like ourselves, we recommend you consider Artsmark because you can develop a realistic and achievable offer for your youth offending team or Service within Artsmark's flexible framework.

Have conversations and discussions with your young people throughout your Artsmark journey to identify what works and doesn't work for them, after all these are the people that really matter!

Ask your Bridge Organisation about similar services that have achieved an Artsmark award and ask for their advice.

Lastly, have fun and let your creative imagination run wild! This creative energy will be reflected in your staff, young people and your wider community as a whole.



For further guidance about how Artsmark can work for you please see our specialist settings guidance.

<https://www.artsmark.org.uk/support-specialist-settings>