

West Dunbartonshire Council Holyrood to Hollywood

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote innovative ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local and community groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about West Dunbartonshire Council's Holyrood to Hollywood project, funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims and objectives of Holyrood to Hollywood, the achievements of the project and lessons learnt by West Dunbartonshire Council.

The grant

West Dunbartonshire Council is a small urban Scottish authority serving citizens in the conurbations of Clydebank, Dumbarton, the Vale of Leven, Balloch and Alexandria. The Holyrood to Hollywood project was a partnership between the Arts and Education Links Programme of West Dunbartonshire Council and Theatre Replico. The Arts and Education Links Programme strives to use arts participation to help the educational, social and emotional development of young learners in West Dunbartonshire. Theatre Replico is a local organisation dedicated to the sustainable development of drama in primary and secondary schools across Scotland.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £7,580 to West Dunbartonshire for the Holyrood to Hollywood project and an amount of **£7,437** was paid out. The primary aim of the project was to explore democracy and citizenship through the arts with primary and secondary students using drama and theatre to illustrate how a body

of people can take action, make decisions and express opinions in order to make a difference in society.

The Commission's grant covered costs for one project leader for nine months, and materials and resources required to deliver the workshops and to film the students' final theatrical productions. Holyrood to Hollywood ran from October 2003 to May 2004.

Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of Holyrood to Hollywood were to:

- promote active citizenship and participative democracy;
- stimulate discussion and ideas about citizenship in the past, the present and the future;
- use dramatic and theatrical devices to illustrate how a body of people can take action, make decisions, and express opinions in order to make a positive difference in society; and
- look at local, national, and international democracies and comment on the state of

the nation from a Scottish child's perspective.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were for 66 pupils to:

- have a wider knowledge of democratic processes;
- have a wider knowledge of citizenship issues; and
- demonstrate and articulate an increase in confidence and self-esteem.

Evaluation

West Dunbartonshire Council appointed Agness Macintosh of First Class Training to conduct an independent evaluation of the project upon its completion. A project steering group was also established at the outset of the project to monitor and record progress for the final evaluation.

The following research methods were used:

- observation by staff of pupils' participation and engagement with the project;
- a post-project questionnaire completed by 15 of 21 secondary students who took part in the project;
- short semi-structured interviews with five staff who delivered the project; and
- a post-project questionnaire completed by teachers from the seven secondary and two primary schools participating in the project.

Deliverables

Over the nine-month project, Holyrood to Hollywood delivered the following:

- two weekend residential experiences for 21 secondary students from seven West Dunbartonshire area schools;
- a DVD recording of secondary student performances at the culmination of the two weekend residential experiences;
- creation of a Pupil Council Congress with the 21 secondary school participants as the first representatives; and
- seventy-eight primary school students from Christie Park and Linnvale Primary schools participating in workshops.

Resources and project management

Eona Craig, Arts and Education Links Officer at West Dunbartonshire Council oversaw all aspects of the project. Records of budgeted and actual income and expenditures were maintained at West Dunbartonshire Council.

The project delivered the above activities within the agreed budget as documented below:

Project staff	£3,810
Workshop preparation	£1,500
Video work	£1,500
Evaluation	£500
Office costs	£127
Total	£7,437

How successful was the project?

Short-term outcomes

After a delay in starting the project at the most appropriate time for the school calendar, the Holyrood to Hollywood project re-focused its activities toward reaching the secondary and primary students separately rather than as one target group as originally planned.

During this process additional funding was secured through the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund to support the secondary students' participation in two weekend residential experiences. This experience brought the secondary student group together in a focused way, and provided concentrated time to engage with the project's aims and objectives.

The activities of Holyrood to Hollywood achieved a number of outputs and short-term outcomes towards the project's original objectives.

The first of these was the production of a DVD showcasing the secondary students' theatrical performances at the conclusion of their two weekend residential workshops. The DVD documents the students' exploration of issues important to their lives and attempts to weave their interpretations and views of democracy into a number of scenes.

Two of the 11 scenes attempt to address democracy and democratic processes, one of which deals with young people's views on voting, and

the other simulates a debate in Parliament over the issue of corporal punishment in schools. Other issues covered in the DVD include racism, gossip, bullying, sibling rivalry, and anti-social behaviour.

The final student questionnaires indicate the students felt they knew more about how democracy works by the end of the project, and feedback from the project leaders suggest the students increased their political literacy and gained a wider knowledge of democratic processes through participating in the mini-sessions, workshops and debates over the two weekends. Results from the student questionnaire and staff interviews also demonstrated that students gained confidence, self-esteem and media skills during the project.

However, there is little evidence about the extent to which changes took place in the students' knowledge of and attitude towards democratic institutions over the course of the two residential weekends. The majority of performances on the DVD do not link the issues young people in West Dunbartonshire are most concerned with to concepts of democracy and citizenship. It is therefore difficult to judge how much the project was able to increase their understanding of these areas.

Although it was not one of the original objectives of the project, the most relevant outcome for the secondary students' involvement in this project in relation to raising

awareness about democracy appears to be the creation of a Pupil Council Congress. This congress established all 21 project participants as members, and was intended to serve as a link between youth and the council of West Dunbartonshire. Although the Congress had not yet begun any work with West Dunbartonshire Council at the completion of this project, it has since met on two occasions and aims to constitute itself and meet three times a year.

The primary students' portion of the Holyrood to Hollywood project, which was delivered separately from the secondary students' residential workshops, had far less clear results and outcomes. Beyond a few anecdotes from project staff and teachers who felt it had a positive impact on their students' understanding of democracy, there is little indication of what the 78 students actually experienced, what level of learning occurred, and whether or not this aspect of the project would be worth replicating elsewhere.

Longer-term evaluation

There are currently no plans to roll out Holyrood to Hollywood or to continue monitoring its impact for either the primary or secondary student groups.

The formation of the first West Dunbartonshire Pupil Council Congress would be worth tracking over time, as it appears to be the most relevant product of the project in relation to the aims and

objectives of the New Initiatives Fund. Longer term monitoring by West Dunbartonshire Council would illustrate the extent to which the students become more active in their local community and what role they take in representing their peers' views and concerns to decision makers. If the secondary students become more actively involved with local democratic processes and institutions, this by-product of Holyrood to Hollywood will have a longer-term impact.

Conclusions

Through the evaluation of this project, it is clear the students gained confidence, self-esteem, and knowledge of theatre and media skills. They also spent time discussing issues important to their daily experience.

Holyrood to Hollywood appears successful at bringing young people together in a new environment and using a new medium to address issues important to their lives. The students' performances in the DVD brought the workshop discussions and debates to life and clearly demonstrated their interest in, and commitment to the project.

However, Holyrood to Hollywood appears to have been less effective at addressing concepts of democracy and citizenship during the students' discussions and performances.

The questionnaires and staff interviews only briefly address the students' increased knowledge of citizenship and democracy, and only a few

students said they intended to become more involved in their community beyond joining the Pupil Council Congress.

A more thorough integration of how democratic processes and electoral systems relate to the issues important to the students' lives would have had a more significant impact, and provided greater evidence of the knowledge gain and attitude change that occurred amongst the students.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice and 'lessons learnt' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

Good practice

- Adjusting the project activities to fit limited time schedules helped focus project staff energy on what could be realistically achieved, rather than spreading resources too thinly.
- Conducting a questionnaire among local secondary students prior to delivering the workshops helped provide project staff with an understanding of what issues were important to the students' lives and what would get them engaged during the two weekend residential experiences.

- An effective method of creating the Pupil Council Congress was to appoint the project participants as inaugural members during the workshops.
- Documenting the activities of the project on film provided West Dunbartonshire Council with an opportunity to share the results of the project with others.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- When conducting a weekend residential workshop with young people it is important the chosen space be separate from outsiders to limit distractions and external influences.
- When evaluating a project for the purpose of demonstrating impact, questionnaires and interviews should reflect the primary objectives and target outcomes to ensure quantitative and qualitative data collected demonstrates the extent to which those primary aims have been achieved.
- When reporting final results of a project, all aspects should be represented.

New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Eona Craig from the West Dunbartonshire Council: eona.craig@west-dunbarton.gov.uk or visit their website at: www.wdcweb.info/home/.

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

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