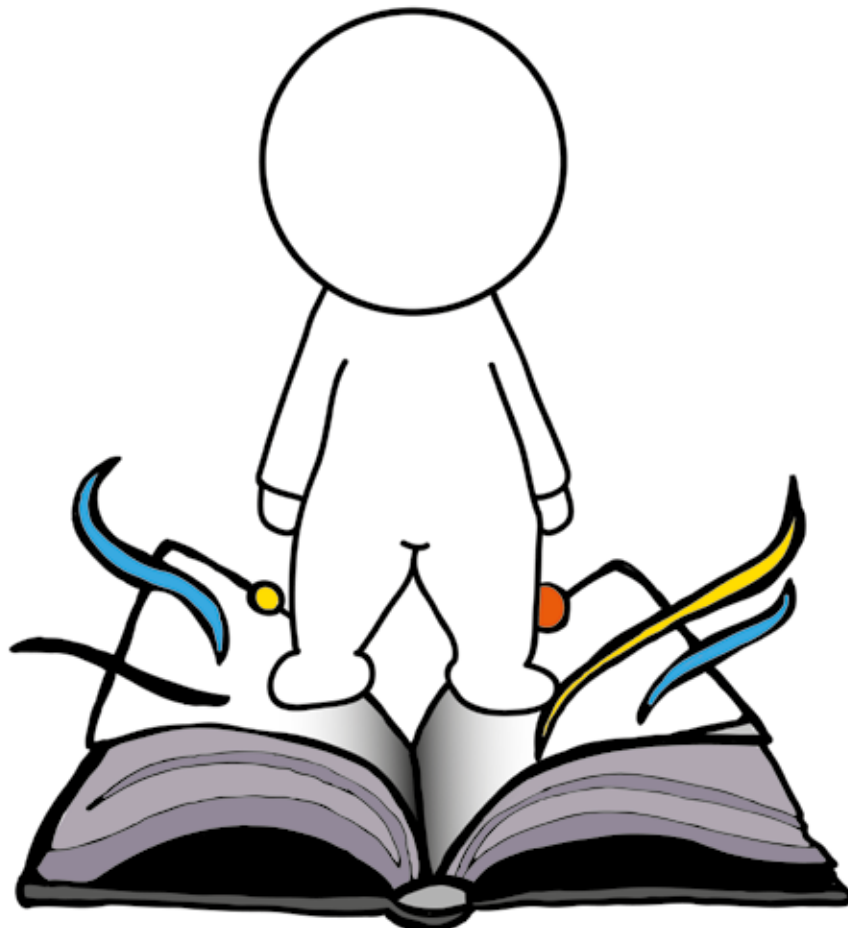


Grants for the Arts Case Study

ASCEL: ImagiNation

Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Case Study Introduction

What will I learn and is it relevant to me?

Themes...

- Libraries and the arts
- Young people
- Reading challenge

Learning...

- Engaging young people in reading and arts activity
- Co-producing with young people
- Working across a region

Relevance...

This case study is relevant to:

- Libraries keen to engage young people in reading
- Artists and management teams interested in co-producing with young people
- Grants for the Arts applicants who want to find out more about funded projects



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ASCEL

ImagiNation

Introducing ImagiNation

ImagiNation is a reading and arts project designed to get 11 - 18 year olds reading for pleasure and responding creatively to books. It consists of a reading challenge recorded through ImagiNation logs, artist-led workshops in libraries and a blog for young people to share creative responses to books.

The project brings together ten library authorities in the East: Essex, Southend, Thurrock, Luton, Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Peterborough, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. It was initially planned as a one-year project but due to an underspend, and permission granted from Arts Council England, ASCEL has been able to extend the reading challenge into 2015 and 2016.

Project planning

A small project team with representatives from Essex, Hertfordshire and Norfolk was responsible for the initial planning and reported back into ASCEL. This enabled us to plan swiftly and develop our funding application. Once funding was confirmed we arranged a full meeting, recruited a Project Manager and set up a training day for library staff.

Involving young people

Young people were involved from the outset. Thurrock recruited volunteers from their Summer Reading Challenge to work with an artist to develop the ImagiNation logo and challenge materials.

Each library authority recruited young planners to help select artists and plan workshops for their libraries. Some did this through existing groups such as 'Young Ambassadors' or 'Reading Activists'. Others teamed up with secondary schools.

Norfolk took on the task of working with young people to develop the ImagiNation blog. They chose the domain name and designed colour schemes and content that reflected the graphics and branding designed by young people in Thurrock.

About ASCEL

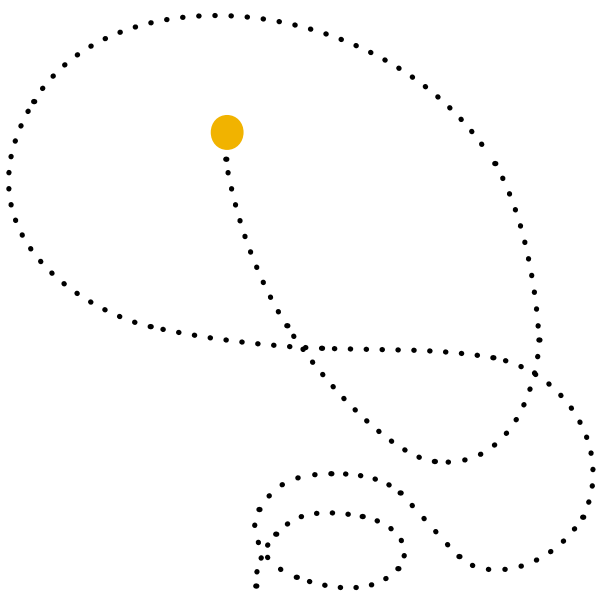
Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians is the national membership network of senior managers in children's and young people's public and school library services in the UK.

It aims to lead excellence in library services for children and young people and schools so that:

- every child and young person visiting a library should be inspired by an exciting environment which makes reading for pleasure irresistible
- every school has access to a high quality school library service

www.ascel.org.uk/about-us

www.imaginationeast.org.uk



Working with artists

Once the young planners were in place, we advertised for artists through Arts Jobs. They were asked to respond to a loose brief of ‘working with libraries and young people to inspire responses to books’. The young planners then selected the artists they wanted to work with and developed activities with them.

Among the different artists, we observed three distinct approaches to working with young people. Artists came with:

1. a fixed idea of what they were going to do and just tested the idea with the young people
2. a small selection of ideas and invited young people to choose
3. an open mind, keen to respond to young people’s ideas

The third option was by far the most successful. If we were to repeat this process we would specify this way of working.

The resulting workshops ranged from filmmaking, animation and radio to sculpture, manga, creative writing, sonic art and performance.

Recruiting participants

We advertised the project on our websites and through social media channels. Some library authorities placed advertisements in the press or went to visit heads of art in secondary schools. Others worked with citizenship and youth services to reach young people from deprived areas. Press releases also proved effective in reaching parents.

72% of survey respondents in 2014 said they had heard about ImagiNation from the libraries. Library authorities agreed that, time allowing, building stronger links with secondary schools would be beneficial for future projects with this age group.

Participants joined up in their local library and were issued with an ImagiNation Log to complete. They had to read two books and record creative responses to them in the log in order to gain a certificate. The logs gave space to express ideas through drawing, photography, poetry, music or any other artform. Young people were then invited to share those responses through the blog.

Managing the blog

The blog created a virtual space that brought the region together. The key issue in the development of the blog was providing a safe space for under-13s who are barred from conventional social media. We identified Edublogs as a suitable provider.

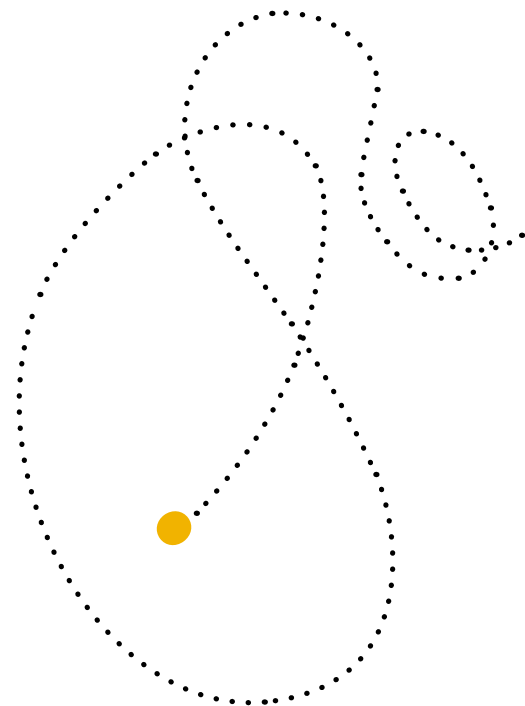
The young people who developed the blog wrote the first posts so it was already populated before the launch. Library authority staff then took turns to moderate content to ensure it wasn’t an onerous task for anyone.

Cost

The total cost of the project was over £100,000, of which £93,000 came from Arts Council England’s Grants for the Arts.

Libraries bought £8,000 of books between them. Otherwise, the main areas of expenditure were:

- artist fees
- Project Manager salary
- printing of folders and posters and certificates for the ImagiNation logs
- volunteer expenses



Results

Across 2014 and 2015:

- 14,808 young people signed up for the ImagiNation log and 4,122 completed the challenge by returning to the library with their logs and artwork
- 82 workshops were held across 24 libraries in 2014, with 570 workshop places filled
- 54% of workshop participant survey respondents said they would go on to 'find out more about arts activities in [their] area'
- 337 young people posted work to the blog (226 of those in 2015)
- The ImagiNation website/blog attracted 12,566 page views in August 2014 and 2015 combined (2,634 in August 2014 and 9,932 in August 2015)
- 5 authors commented directly on the blog in response to art inspired by their books and more responded on Twitter with tweets or retweets

Working with artists and young people has stimulated new ideas about the kind of activities we can do through libraries. One group created book dens, for example, which was simple to do but generated real excitement in the library and was something we'd never thought of doing.

Young people and library staff have developed new skills and confidence in working together. Working across the region has also enabled staff to learn from other library authorities and to compare experiences.

Recommendations

Plan a longer project - being able to extend ImagiNation has enabled us to respond to feedback and build on the success of the first year to create a more established initiative.

Cost it carefully - we overestimated some of the costs so would always get estimates in future to ensure an accurate budget from the start.

Always have a Plan B - we experienced delays in recruiting a Project Manager and had to put interim arrangements in place.

Work with young people from the outset - they will tell you what they want and it's much easier than guessing. Make sure that you involve young people at both ends of your target age range to ensure that your activities and materials are suitable for all.

Develop clear progression routes - mapping out progression routes for young people is a great way to ensure you're able to signpost participants to the next opportunity and keep them engaged.

Build relationships with Secondary Schools early on - several of the library authorities struggled to reach the right school contacts for this project and felt they needed longer to build relationships with appropriate schools for the target age group.

Feedback

'I think the ImagiNation idea was a very good one and I think it should carry on as it encourages us to read more and share our opinions about the books'
Participant, aged 13

'The young people brought characters and concepts from their chosen book to life. Through the process they learnt how to communicate and visualise their imaginative ideas and be inspired by one another.'
Artist

