

Culture and development

Carnival Connections- International Carnival Exchange

'I was amazed how enthusiastic and focused the children were. We have behavioural issues to deal with during every single lesson but non at all today' *Class Teacher Waulauds School workshop in Carnival Connections Evaluation Report.*

In the last ten years there has been an unprecedented increase in the understanding of how arts can help breathe new life into run down urban and rural communities. Understandably, such initiatives first emerged in areas of industrial decline where the need was thought to be greatest and the financial means most available. From 2002 to 2005 the first Arts Generate programme was conceived in order to introduce the Luton region to the unique contribution that the arts can make to social, economic and environmental regeneration.

Background

The Arts Generate Programme, Carnival Connections, which takes place in Luton was delivered by the Luton Carnival Arts Department Trust with partners Arts Council England, East, Luton Borough Council and the National Foundation for Youth Music. Carnival Connections was designed to identify and address a number of regeneration issues on the Marsh Farm Estate and the Lewsey Farm and Bury Park areas of the town. These included skills development, educational achievement, social exclusion, community cohesion and motivating young people at risk. The work carried out under the Carnival Connections local programme also sought to raise the level of involvement of the town's diverse communities in the Luton International Carnival and raise the profile of both carnival arts and Luton. Having identified the Marsh Farm Estate as being in particular need of support, this project was designed for students from a Marsh Farm school. The project worked through an extensive carnival arts educational programme in schools and communities, connecting this work to various local borough wide events, such as the Luton International Carnival, Luton Mela, Black History Month, Marsh Farm Festival and an international trip to the Caribbean in 2005. The workshop activities focused on the cross-cultural possibilities of carnival and the teaching of a wide range of making and artistic skills on local estates and in local schools.

12 of the participating students were selected to visit the Trinidad Carnival and take part in mask camps, costume making workshops, learning to play the steel pan and all about the event. Hosted by students of the same age in a Trinidad comprehensive, the scheme encouraged a greater cultural awareness and the development of new skills in carnival. The artists involved range across the ethnic art forms of African drum and dance, Asian drum and dance, carnival costume design and making, Soca dancing, Soca and Calypso music, Samba drumming, steel pan playing and digital urban music. The aim of the programme was to promote cultural exchange and to develop understanding and appreciation of carnival arts amongst young people.

Impact

Of the 1,200 young people and adults who participated in some aspect of the Carnival connections project in 2004/05, 200-300 went on to take part in the Luton International Carnival. In an evaluation report of the project, some of the identified benefits included:

- Direct creative skills acquisition
- Increased self confidence
- Pride in individuals and their communities
- Greater understanding and appreciation of the celebration forms of other local ethnic groups.

The aim of the three-year programme was to introduce the region to the unique contribution that the arts can make to social, economic and environmental regeneration. Each area presented distinct regeneration challenges for which unique arts-led solutions were created. Notable successes in the area were:

- Lea Manor school now has Performing Arts Status
- Luton Steel Orchestra has been established as a partnership between Luton Music Services and Luton Carnival Arts Development Trust
- In 2005 Luton International Carnival attracted approximately 15,000 people and generated over £3 million of economic benefit

Lessons

- By responding to specific local regeneration need, arts based activities are helping people to play a central part in delivering local government social and environment regenerating agendas in the places where they live and work.
- Communities are capable of contributing to a strong and sustainable regional model, whilst also underpinning Government regeneration priorities nationally.