



**SURF Awards Workshop Presentation**

**Hazel Wotherspoon - Chief Executive**

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**Who we are:**

Toonspeak is a Youth led Arts organisation based in Glasgow. Pre Covid we were working in three areas within the City area in the bottom 6% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, helping children and young people thrive in the spite of the complex Intersecting disadvantages they face bringing participants to us from across the City. Our work was:

**Physical** - delivered in community spaces and theatre venues

**By referral** - working closely with referral partners including pastoral care in schools, NHS and Social Services

**By Word of Mouth** - participants bringing friends and family

**Free** - Transport from across the City to our courses and classes provided by taxi. Food and refreshments provided

**Toonspeak's standard tripart programme is called INSPIRE, TRANSFORM, PROGRESS**, an extensive range of developmental and creative learning activities that stage early interventions and nurture, build confidence and transferable skills, and provide progression opportunities towards arts careers and paid work experience.

- The decisions we had to take in March 2020

And then Covid really kicked in..... Along with the fear.....

## Working with Fear and Uncertainty - Re-locating the Power Source

- **Making a plan - the fears and anxieties we had to deal with/they needed fully acknowledged:**
  - What would happen to the vulnerable children and young people we work with in a lockdown? Many were already struggling.....
  - We are funded to directly deliver physical work - what was going to happen to our funding?
  - Who actually are we if we are not physically delivering?
  - How will we stay in contact with our young people?
  - What will happen to our freelance work-force
  - 'Don't furlough me please!'

- **Making a plan - the fears and anxieties we had to deal with:**
  - What would happen to the vulnerable children and young people we work with in a lockdown? Many were already struggling..... **We will be an anchor organisation and apply for funding to deliver a response programme**
  - We are funded to directly deliver physical work - what was going to happen to our funding? **We will communicate with our funders we will let them know what we are doing rather than what we are not (amazing support and flexibility has come from this)**
  - Who actually are we if we are not physically delivering? **Our Mission is to change lives through creativity - our Values are Excellence, Empowerment, Progression, Advocacy, Listening & Learning. Let's do this differently!**
  - How will we stay in contact with our young people? **We will call each and every one of them individually and check-in**
  - What would happen to the freelance work-force - **we will devise a response programme that offers employment for artists**
  - 'Don't furlough me please!' - **I won't, we've got a plan and work to do!**

**Our Response Programme - which we built from acknowledging and working through the fear factor and re-powering:**

**Creative Calm** - was our response to the anxieties, concerns about the future and loneliness we knew many young people would be feeling....

*For many of our already-vulnerable participants the extreme context of lockdown created new issues and/or exacerbated pre-existing difficulties in their living situations or relationships. Creative Calm has offered young people a series of interventions, beginning with a check-in call and progressing to 1:1 and group creativity sessions (via Zoom). Delivered by drama, music and art therapists who are qualified counsellors, this work offers a space for much-needed reflection, emotional support, and a sense of meaningful connection with “the outside world.”*

**We initially didn't get the response we expected from our participants - it took time to build trust in a this type of work digitally. The plan for a greater number of check-in sessions was replaced with a need for a longer time period being spent with individuals**

**Projects By Post** - was our response to children and families being locked down at home

*This part of our response programme was designed to bring a structured craft and creative arts programme to our Hello Barmulloch families, younger Toonspeak Participants and referral partner young people. Participants received an art kit bag which included good quality basics along with speciality materials that allowed them to take part in the artist designed activities.*

***We planned to make up and deliver 300 packs and 6 weeks of activities***

***We actually delivered 1,728 packs and 10 weeks of activities***

**Access to Digital Creativity** - was our response to a world which became predominantly Digital and therefore less accessible to many of our participants

*Access to Digital Creativity was designed to help young people get online, removing financial and technological barriers, and providing support, guidance and tools to get creative, with assessment-based access to a fund to equip them for participation - from headsets and data, to the purchase of computer hardware and sound equipment, and even instruments.*

- **We had expected this project to be particularly appealing to ages 14-17 - it changed completely - the actual age range was from 1-24.**
- **Across the programme the engagement from vulnerable families was very high 102. The Digital Equipment included that for 68 families and included specific bundles to support younger siblings we became aware of on the zoom set up calls.**
- **It included 178 referrals from partner organisations a far higher number that we would ever have worked with pre Covid**



## **What happened next?**

We had originally conceived our response programme as something standalone, a programme which would only exist in the time of the pandemic, something that we would naturally move away from, get beyond as we entered into our Recovery Phase. However the learning for us has been huge, in responding we have become more responsive to the core needs of our participants, through Zoom we have been invited into their homes and their lives.

We had intended to move through our staged approach:

- Response
- Recovery
- Renewed

### **What's Changed for us?**

- *We continued with Creative Calm beyond the funded period and have only recently wound down this programme - the need for it has changed as restrictions have lifted*
- *We have continued with our Digital Creativity programme supporting children and young people to connect and create, we have equipment and data to distribute and support people to use.*
- *We are continuing to Progress young people through digital 1:1 interventions and have begun to physically meet them through our Progression Associate*
- *We are continuing to re-think how we evidence our work - challenging our past mode of evaluation which concentrated on monitoring*
- *The workforce - Pre Covid we relied on a smaller number of community artists to deliver our weekly classes. We are now employing an increasing number of specialist artists who were not normally be available to us, this has greatly enhanced our Progression of Young People.*
- *The team - we have learnt to be more mindful of each other to be actively caring and active in supporting our wellbeing.*

**What does it all mean?**

As yet we are not clear how it will all 'land' and that can still feel uncomfortable, it is still difficult to plan with certainty.

To Toonspeak what we had perhaps thought of as a linear journey from **Response, Recovery and Renewal** is a deeper journey which may see some departure from the standard programme but is stronger than ever before in delivering on our Mission and upholding our Values and this is really key.

We are more Youth Led than ever before, young people are able to choose their individual path. The missing **R** in each stage that we are building more formally into our planning is **Reflection**.

**The Now and The Future:**

- **Protest Lab - A summer film programme**
- **Culture Collective**
- **A new term in the Autumn**