



Seen and Heard: The Long-Term Impact of Arts Projects on Young People Living in Poverty

“It is imperative that the long-term impact of quality arts projects to mediate some of the effects of poverty are acknowledged, and they are given the place they deserve in terms of funding and within policy contexts” (p. 11).

1. WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about the long-term impact of arts projects on youth who are living in poverty. Poverty is attributed to a complex blend of structural issues relating to macroeconomic factors (including the labour and housing markets, and social and political factors) and individual factors (including capacities and choices). For young people living in poverty, arts initiatives provide space to **be seen and heard; increase overall wellbeing; reduce isolation; help build confidence;** and may even open up career pathways.

2. WHERE DID THE RESEARCH TAKE PLACE?

The research took place across Scotland.

3. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

This research is about youth, aged 16-22, living in poverty in Scotland.

4. HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE?

This work was carried out by a researcher and the organization [Media Education](#), which uses participatory film, podcasts, and arts to enable people to tell their own stories, often to impact relevant services and/or policies. They used an *appreciative inquiry model* (a strengths-based, positive approach to leadership development and organizational change) and adopted a modified *Success Case Method*, which sets out to identify the most and least successful cases and examine them in detail. Only the successful cases were focused on in this research, defined as those organizations that had worked effectively with Cashback (an initiative that reinvests money seized by the authorities to benefit Scotland’s youth) for over 10 years and across digital, dance, and music arts.

Staff within six arts organizations across Scotland recruited participants that they believed will experience long-term impacts from their participation in arts programs and projects. Thirteen young people between the ages of 16 and 22 participated in this research. Eleven of the participants took part in semi-structured interviews, and four participants were supported to create their own films to understand how developing skills in photography, filmmaking, and journalism contributed to developing their creative identities.

Both the films and the transcripts for the interviews were thematically analyzed. This process consisted of **six phases**: *becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report*. Researchers hosted an event to screen the films and review the report with participants, and included representatives from local authorities, government, and the service sector from across Scotland. Moreover, participants took part in a question-and-answer session with attendees that enabled them to feel seen and heard. Participants also worked collaboratively with researchers to refine the identified themes.

5. WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS?

This research determined that access to the arts can be attributed to **positive outcomes** overall. Key themes were surfaced, illustrating how access to the arts **mediates against the effects of poverty** and **promotes wellbeing** by:

- i. **reducing isolation and loneliness** through building relationships and connections
- ii. helping youth **deal with or escape from home and family issues**
- iii. helping youth **deal with anxiety**
- iv. supporting youth in **gaining confidence** and **building self-worth**
- v. supporting youth in **finding purpose and direction**
- vi. **shaping a young person's identity** and **bringing hope for the future**

6. WHY DOES THIS RESEARCH MATTER FOR YOUTH WORK?

This research is important for youth work because it demonstrates the importance of access to the arts and how this engagement can lead to positive outcomes for young people facing adversity. Access to the arts also teaches young people new skills and can open up pathways to education and employment opportunities, a powerful tool for youth living in poverty.

Youth workers should support young people in accessing opportunities for **exploration, creativity, and network-building**, as this can help youth overcome barriers linked to poverty. Youth workers should also be sensitive and open to listening to young people when working with youth who face adversity.



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