OPEN WINDOW OPEN VOICES

FINAL REPORT

About this project:

As part of the Hubs Y-Collective I created a display sharing the voices of 30 local young people who explored one simple but important premise:

What gets in the way of getting creative?

My name is Libby, I am 17 years old and I have been involved in the arts for most of my life and first came to the Hub in 2019. For me art is "a place of expression, where I can feel free and escape the pressures of everyday life." Inspired by my own experiences, I wanted to understand why some young people engage with the arts while others don't.

The research uncovered both the benefits of taking part and the barriers that can prevent young people from getting involved.

Read on to view my findings

Libby Smith - 26-10-2026

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Click here to view a reel of the window-decorating process



The research shows that young people see creativity as a valuable part of their lives, offering enjoyment, developing their interests, encouraging self expression, and providing an opportunity to maintain wellbeing and socialise with others. Creative spaces provide a welcoming environment where young people can meet others, engage in new activities and express themselves. However, participation is not always accessible. Cost, transport, time constraints, and a lack of awareness were frequent barriers. Others described uncertainty about finding the "right fit" within groups/clubs. Overall, the findings suggest that, to encourage more young people to engage in the arts, young people need awareness of opportunities that are affordable, accessible and welcoming.



Social connection

"It's a good social place .... I love seeing my friends there."

"A really good way for people to communicate with each other"

"A nice place to do stuff that interests you"

Creativity as a hobby

"I've mostly been doing arts as just a bit of fun."

"I do it as a hobby."

Expression and wellbeing

"It helps with mental health."

"It's easier to draw your feelings than to voice them."

" Without art, there'll be nothing to kind of express yourself with and show how you're feeling."

Safe and welcoming space

"More places where you can just go interact with people and meet new people who also do the specific subject."

"If it's a positive environment for me to be... it'd be great for me to join."

Anxiety around the unknown

"It'd be nice to go somewhere where we know what's happening and know what we can do and what we have to do there. Like a schedule."

"We again didn't know what we were going to do."

"I don't know if it's gonna be the right group for me."





Cost and affordability

" There's the cost aspect of it."

"Sometimes they're a bit expensive... maybe make it cheaper."

"I think it's quite a lot" (the price)

Transport and distance

"Because I live quite far away from the Hub, to actually get there is a struggle."

"There should definitely be more transport to get there, especially like buses."

"That's like thirty minutes away (YMCA Newark) ... I was looking for more of something based in Lincolnshire."



Lack of awareness and information

"I don't really see anything advertised around Sleaford."

"I don't think people are aware of the stuff that can be done."

"If nobody is there to spread the message... people don't know."

Time and competing commitments

"I've not got the time because I'm really busy with school and stuff and other projects and sporty stuff as well."

"It's a space and time problem."

"With me being in school... I have a lot of activities."

The findings from Open Window, Open Voices closely reflect the emerging national picture presented by Arts Council England's Creative Young Lives Survey. The national survey of around 30,000 children and young people and their parents/guardians found that 74% of children consider creativity important to them and 87% would or may like to do more creative activities. This strong appetite for creativity is reflected in our local interviews, where young people described creativity as enjoyable, a hobby, a means of self-expression and an important source of wellbeing and social connection.

The local research also identified transport and distance, competing commitments, lack of awareness and uncertainty about available opportunities. These findings add valuable lived experience to the national picture, demonstrating that access is not simply about whether creative opportunities exist; young people need to know about them, be able to reach and afford them, find opportunities that reflect their interests, and feel confident and welcomed when they arrive.

However, both the national and local research highlight a significant gap between valuing creativity and being able to access it. Cost was a particularly strong common barrier: nationally, 32% said cost prevented them from making more visits to cultural places and 55% said making creative activities more affordable would help them participate more. Locally, young people similarly described lessons and activities as too expensive and highlighted the impact of cost on family budgets.

The Creative Young Lives figures above are from Arts Council England's 2026 survey of children and young people in England; the survey was reported as involving around 30,000 children/young people and parents or guardians.

Arts Council England – Creative Young Lives Survey

