

## The role of creative practice to support young people at risk of offending

Ross Gibson, CYCJ

The era of austerity sparked by the 2008 global financial crash has seen a UK wide [reduction in public spending](#), with local authority funding in Scotland having “fallen in real terms by 9.6 per cent between 2010/11 and 2018/19” ([The Audit Commission, 2018 p. 10](#)).

In light of this and [other challenges](#), local authorities are urged to take action on the use of funds, seeking creative ways of responding to the needs of their constituents ([Christie, 2011](#)). Imaginative use of [unpaid work and other activities](#) is one way of doing so, in addition to inventive, flexible application of [Movement Restriction Conditions](#). The use of arts can also provide a way to support young people involved in crime ([Vallance, 2017](#)). Some local authorities have developed creative services by accessing additional funding via the [CashBack for Creativity](#) schemes.

The need for creativity within social work settings is not a new phenomenon, with [Lymberry \(2003\)](#) discussing its role alongside competence as a way for practitioners to deal with complex and challenging situations. [Some research](#) has shown that social workers are not necessarily educated in a manner that cultivates creativity, [citing](#) the drive towards technocratic, problem-solving approaches, despite [student desires](#) for alternative models of learning.

Although described as “an essential requirement for social work” ([Fazzi, 2016 p. 91](#)), creativity in this field lacks the same degree of attention as other branches of the profession, and “this problem is exacerbated by the absence of a theory of creativity. The absence of a theoretical framework makes it doubly difficult to articulate what creativity in social work practice involves” ([Nicolas, 2016 p. 47](#)).

It is perhaps easier to illustrate examples of creative practice rather than provide a vague account of its features. Two case examples are therefore offered as a means of showing the benefits of providing musical and sporting activities to young people encountering risk, contrasting with the traditional case management or CBT based approach often adopted in this field. Music and sport have specifically been chosen given their widespread availability throughout the country and the likelihood that practitioners have some pre-existing understanding of the activities.

### Music

Based in Kilmarnock, [Centrestage](#) is a charity set up in 2006 to support people of all ages and abilities, using their expertise and knowledge in the field of music to provide community and group activities. They now have contact with [over 2,500 people](#) each week and support young people who are at risk of becoming involved in offending, in addition to working with individuals with learning difficulties and the elderly. They do this through

drama and music productions, where young people are offered the opportunity to assume a role in performance or production. Centrestage's work extends into prisons, with their Catalyst programme leading to music groups being established in HMP Kilmarnock. The groups have proven successful in supporting individuals upon release, when Centrestage offer assistance in "various aspects of their lives; helping with needs as well as building strengths, for example, helping with housing and developing creative and digital skills" ([Nugent & Escobar, 2017 p. 20](#)).

Rather than adopting traditional approaches to addressing offending behaviour, Centrestage offers a space and opportunity for people to [connect to their community and engage in music](#). Whilst empirical evidence of the efficacy of music based interventions are less established than others, qualitative studies have found an improvement in "confidence, self-esteem, self-concept, education/work performance, dyslexia, interpersonal relationships, social skills, mental well-being, emotion, mood and anger" ([Daykin et al., 2013 p. 200](#)). Such achievements would seem to fit well within the [Good Lives Model](#). Music based interventions, allied with mentoring, have in [some studies](#) been found to successfully lower youth crime rates, and may assist the [reintegration process](#) for released prisoners.

Centrestage seeks to address food poverty through their connections with [The Trussell Trust](#) and local businesses, responding to some of the [highest levels of poverty and deprivation in Scotland](#). Recognising this need, and understanding that "hope, expectation and confidence fade quickly on an empty stomach" (McNeill and Weaver 2010 p. 4), Centrestage adopt a model of ensuring that nobody leaves their building hungry.

## Sport

Formerly known as A&M, [Achieve More Scotland](#) has been running since 2009, providing free access to youth clubs, dancing, gymnastics, cricket and football, amongst other parts of their service. Working within areas of [significant poverty across Glasgow](#), Achieve More are mindful that poverty is often the [greatest barrier](#) to sport participation and provide lunch to those attending their sessions and run summer and Easter camps throughout school holidays. Achieve More's delivery of football sessions during evenings and weekends has been a major success over the past nine years, leading to over 300 participants in their Friday night league and 40 coaching sessions per week in areas that fall within the 5% most deprived under the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#). Alongside this is youth work provision to those who choose to come along to the sessions but do not wish to play. Community and friendships are therefore developed.

Whilst increasing sporting activity itself is an admirable ambition, sport is used as a hook by which relationships are fostered, leading to progression on to [employment support](#), the opportunity to attain volunteering qualifications and the chance to study youth work abroad, as has been the case for over 70 young people who have taken part in [Erasmus+](#) programmes.

Sport has been a means by which children in trouble "have been responded to since at least the 19th Century" ([Kelly, 2012 p. 262](#)). Furthermore, sport is a way of casting off the label of 'offender' and adopting that of teammate (Baumer and Meek, 2018). It likewise serves to respond to the views of young people themselves, who cite lack of sporting opportunities as factors that lead to crime (Deuchar, 2009), as recently discussed with [Vicky Glover](#).

Despite some [criticisms](#) of the efficacy of sport related interventions, it has been shown to be successful in responding to [gang related violence](#), [antisocial behaviour](#) and [reintegration following time in custody](#), as well as having [broad benefits](#) to the individual's welfare and [physical health](#). Diversionary activities such as those offered by Achieve More seek to change the trajectory of a young person's life, as highlighted by [McAra and Mcvie \(2010\)](#).

w [www.cycj.org.uk](http://www.cycj.org.uk)  
e [cycj@strath.ac.uk](mailto:cycj@strath.ac.uk)  
t [@CYCJScotland](https://twitter.com/CYCJScotland)