

# **Gift Shop**

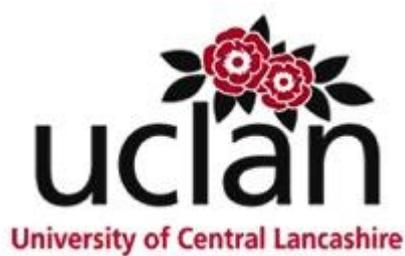
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**Lynn Froggett, John Wainwright, Alastair Roy, Julian Manley**

**Psychosocial Research Unit**

**University of Central Lancashire**

**Preston, PR1 2HE**



**PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT**

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## Contacts

### **Lynn Froggett**

Telephone: 01772 893472

Email: [lfroggett@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:lfroggett@uclan.ac.uk)

### **John Wainwright**

Telephone: 01772 893460

Email: [jpwainwright@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:jpwainwright@uclan.ac.uk)

### **Alastair Roy**

Telephone: 01772 895127

Email: [anroy@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:anroy@uclan.ac.uk)

### **Julian Manley**

Telephone: 01772 893478

Email: [jymanley@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:jymanley@uclan.ac.uk)

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Contacts.....	4
Executive Summary.....	6
Gift Shop .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Research: Aims and Participants.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Key Findings .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Conclusion.....	8
Recommendations .....	9
<b>The Gift Shop .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Report Aims.....	10
What was Gift Shop?.....	10
Participant groups.....	12
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Individual Interviews.....	13
Group interviews.....	13
Questionnaires.....	13
Challenges of the Research.....	14
<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Visitor Responses to the Gift Shop .....	14
<i>Creativity in a Caravan</i> .....	15
Children and Young People’s Responses .....	16
<i>Questionnaire Responses</i> .....	16
<i>Interviews with Young People</i> .....	16
Interviews with Other Stakeholders .....	19
<i>Social Enterprise</i> .....	19
<i>Situated Understanding</i> .....	19
<i>Contributing Creatively</i> .....	21
Responses from Youth Group Leaders .....	21
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Feeling Good about Life: Art as an Expression of Optimism.....	22
<i>Gift Giving</i> .....	23
<i>Engaging Diverse Young People</i> .....	23
Conclusion.....	24
Recommendations .....	24
<b>References.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Appendix 1 – Young people’s questionnaire .....	27
Appendix 2 – Visitor’s questionnaire .....	36

## Part 1. Executive Summary

### Gift Shop: creative social enterprise with young people for mental health and wellbeing

#### The Aim of Gift Shop

Gift Shop was a creative, arts-based engagement project run in Old Trafford by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street between May – June 2015. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is a young person's mental health charity in Manchester with a 30 year track record of providing services and opportunities to young people under stress. It created the Gift Shop project as a way of engaging with young people and wider communities from Old Trafford. .

The idea was to work with young people to enable them to set up their own shop, make their own products and to sell them to their local community. The Shop aimed to introduce young people to the idea of 'Gift Giving' and to the work of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street with any money raised from this venture to be re-invested into local activity. Further, it provided the opportunity for a diverse range of people from the local community to come together and appreciate the talents, time and efforts of young people who are often viewed as troublesome. The community was able to enjoy and benefit directly from the creative things that young people made and sold. Gift Shop thus demonstrated a potential for using this kind of project to break down the boundaries between local residents and young people.

#### Participants

The research findings are based on the experiences of 39 young people, 44 members of the public and 8 professionals who were involved in the Gift Shop project or visited the shop itself. They responded to the questions we posed either by interview or questionnaire.

#### Key Findings

##### *Connecting Young People and the Community*

Gift Shop presented an opportunity for young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds to engage in creative activities and take a pride in what they were able to produce. The fact that these were displayed and sold by a small, temporary social enterprise

and bought by the community was a mark of their value. The sense of achievement that the young people felt not only raised self-esteem and confidence but also gave them a sense of being part of the local community.

### *Countering Negative Perceptions of Young People in the Wider Community*

The behaviour of many of these young people has at one time or another been regarded as challenging and disruptive of the public space. Gift shop countered such assumptions in a novel and useful way, showing that the young participants could be constructive and generous through the pleasure that they took in gift giving.

### *Improving Self-perception among Young People Themselves*

Young people in difficult circumstances are often subject to labels such as 'service user', which position them as 'objects of concern' rather than 'agents of their own change processes'. Gift Shop provided a space in which a diverse group of young people found it possible to think of themselves in a positive and optimistic way, rather than as stigmatised casualties of institutions or systems

### *A space for Sociability, Relationships and support*

and The young people used the opportunity of making things with others in a sociable setting to form relationships with the project staff, and each other. They became aware of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street as a source of help and support in times of difficulty, and some of them took advantage of the forum created through Gift Shop to discuss what was important in their lives.

### *Developing skills for Life and Future Employability*

The creative sessions in themselves demonstrated to the young people the pleasure to be gained in craft and artwork its potential as a means of self-expression. Together with the shop they began to learn new skills which if further developed could enhance their future employability.

### **Key Outcomes:**

*As this was a pilot project we report here on achieved outcomes as well as indicative outcomes that could be achieved if the project were to be scaled up and/or of longer duration.*

- The shop provided an accessible local interface between young people and residents that was greatly appreciated by all parties.

- The fact that the shop was organised around creative activity, helped to counter any perceptions that young people were merely a destructive nuisance in the area, and showed the potential for the further breaking down of boundaries between them and other residents in their community.
- The community setting helped the young people engage with, appreciate and feel part of their local community. They gained pleasure in contributing generously to the community through 'Gift Giving'.
- The young people's sense of connection to place was enhanced, through the location of the caravan and some of the activities such as map-making which explicitly focussed on this dimension. A more extensive project of this nature could help to build a sense of local identity and responsibility for the area in which they live.
- The young people learnt to work collaboratively with one another and enjoyed the sociability and co-operation of a shared enterprise.
- In the course of making things together positive relationships were formed by the young people both with one another and the professionals working with them. This extended the networks of friendship and support available to them, including their awareness of mental health support services provided by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. The difficult life experiences of some of the young people, which manifested in challenging behaviour, were explored through the informal and convivial setting of Gift Shop.
- The young people learnt new skills around arts and craft, raising their own perceptions of what they could achieve. In a longer project and with sustained engagement this would appreciably enhance CVs. Experience of both creative activities and running a shop would translate into employability skills.
- Young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds experienced creative practice and through this medium, a forum to think, feel and discuss what was important in their lives.
- The groups of which the young people were a part benefitted from a share of the proceeds of the shop, and the young people took pride in this material outcome.

## Conclusion

Gift Shop was a successful example of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street's model of combining mental health support with community based arts and creative activities. For the thirty nine young people who participated, there is compelling evidence that the project met the outcomes set by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and also met with the overwhelming approval of the local residents who visited and enjoyed the project. Gift Shop was a small, innovative, non-threatening, enjoyable, sociable opportunity for young people to learn new skills with others in a creative setting where their contributions to the project could be recognised and appreciated. Through engaging in this project, they were able, for a short period, to gain new horizons and to contribute in a small, but significant way to their own community.

A larger project providing a consistent presence over a longer period of time could capitalise on the enthusiasm that was shown and make a more durable impact on community

perceptions of young people. It would impact on young people's expectations of how they might productively spend their leisure time. A more sustained involvement in setting up and running a shop would build substantial employability skills of self-organisation, reliability and customer relations.

## Recommendations

1. The young people involved would like to be involved in further similar activities to Gift Shop. Consideration should be given to planning future projects.
2. The concept of the pop up vintage caravan was very popular with participants and visitors and could be replicated in future Gift Shop projects. An intriguing suggestion that arose was to make use of the mobility of a caravan to 'tour' the project.
3. The Gift Shop model could be replicated across other parts of Manchester and shared as Best Practice with other mental health charities and housing associations across the country.
4. Consideration should be given to the Gift Shop being run over the summer holiday period when the young people involved would have more time to actively participate.
5. The social enterprise model of 'Gift Giving' had particular resonance with the young people and could be further developed for this and other projects, with an emphasis on enabling participants to take ownership of all parts of the process.
6. Consideration should be given to the cultural and ethnic relevance of the gift making opportunities, to ensure diverse, cultural and ethnic groups of young people can appreciate the relevance of activities to their own lives.
7. The importance of the 'talk' generated in and through the activities should not be under-estimated; there is potential to make further use of this dimension of community based arts project to give a range of otherwise marginalised young people an auditorium and voice.
8. It takes time to plan and execute a project such as Gift Shop, including engaging young people, collaborating with other agencies and evaluating the process. This should be taken into account, if a more extensive project were to be planned.

## Part 2. Full Report

### Gift Shop: creative social enterprise with young people for mental health and wellbeing

#### Report Aims

This report outlines the experiences of young people who participated in the 'pop up' Gift Shop project in Old Trafford as well as the views of the public and other people who encountered or worked with the project. It assesses the value of this kind of work for young people and their communities and recommends ways in which it could be further developed.

#### What was Gift Shop?

Gift Shop was a creative arts-based community project delivered by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in the Old Trafford area of Greater Manchester between March - May 2015. Its main purpose was to engage young people in creative activities, to make items to be sold to community members and to make young people in the area aware of the support services available to them through 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.

42<sup>nd</sup> Street is a young person's mental health charity in Manchester with a 30 year track record of providing services and opportunities to young people under stress.' (42<sup>nd</sup> Street 2015). It created the Gift Shop project as a way to engage young people, who were attending a variety of groups in the area, through arts-based activities. In doing so it provided recreational activity, informal skills development, and an opportunity to collaborate in a small social enterprise. It also raised awareness of what 42<sup>nd</sup> Street could offer to individuals and existing community groups.

The idea was to encourage young people to set up their own shop, to make their own products and to sell them to local community members. The shop was essentially a social

enterprise which aimed to introduce young people to the idea of 'gift giving', with any money raised from this venture to be re-invested into the groups that had participated in the project.

42<sup>nd</sup> Street identified the following objectives for the Gift Shop:

- Enable key organisations to work together to support the needs of vulnerable young people, creating a legacy of integrated work and potential for future partnership development
- Show how engagement in creative practice can positively impact upon young people
- Improve the awareness and take up of mental health services in the area and of the ongoing opportunities that 42<sup>nd</sup> Street provides
- Improve relationships between the young people and the local community
- Collate evidence of the positive impact of creative activity with young people
- Demonstrate to key stakeholders the value of supporting the mental health needs of young people and how this can be achieved through creative methodologies (42<sup>nd</sup> Street 2015)

The project was overseen by Julie McCarthy (42<sup>nd</sup> Street). David Esdaile (Trafford Housing Trust) was involved in the planning phase. The project was managed by Nicky Colclough (freelance artist). Hence, Gift Shop involved a partnership between a mental health charity and a housing trust.

*42nd Street will bring our successful model of working with high quality artists and experienced mental health practitioners to a partnership with a housing association, enabling us to engage with young people who do not currently participate in arts activity outside of their homes, to raise their awareness of mental health issues and services and improve their mental wellbeing. (42<sup>nd</sup> Street 2015)*

Ed Coyle from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street provided mental health support to participants in group work sessions. Six young people's groups in Old Trafford were engaged (see section on participant groups below for list). Between two and five sessions were held with each of these groups. These included an introductory familiarising session and subsequent workshops involving young people making things to be sold. The items produced included postcards, young persons' eye view maps of the local Old Trafford area, ceramics, painted egg cups and mugs, jam and marshmallows. Children and young people made their own decisions about the things they wished to make. They were intended to capture the imagination and be enjoyable to create.

The pop up shop where items were sold was hosted in a vintage caravan located in front of St John's Centre, St John's Rd, Old Trafford. St John's Centre is a community based voluntary

project, which has been running in Old Trafford for 30 years. The Centre offers a variety of learning opportunities and activities for the community and is well known in the area, providing easy access to residents in the local community. In the caravan, the project workers and young people sold items to the local community as well as making a space available for creative workshops over a period of one week. The workshops reflected the items on sale and included confetti cut-outs, poetry writing and map making. The shop provided the opportunity for artists, mental health practitioners and a housing association to work in partnership with young people, to participate in creative activities outside of their home with the aim of showing how these activities could improve their mental well-being.

### Participant groups

Youth group leaders in the Old Trafford area were contacted by the project workers and invited to participate. The six groups who expressed interest were the Eden Project, a Christian based youth group; Trafford In Care group for children in the care of the local authority; the Alternative Routes Curriculum group (ARC), for young people who were not in mainstream education; a Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Trans (LGBT) young people's group, Greenbank accommodation project for homeless young people and Trafford Domestic Violence and Abuse Service (TDAS). A total of thirty-nine young people from these groups participated.

### Methodology

We wanted to be able to understand the experiences of those young people who had engaged in art-based activities with Gift Shop and to set these in the context of their wider concerns, interests and situations. In particular, we were concerned to explore whether involvement in the project had altered their perspectives and initiated any personal change processes (Froggett et al. 2011). Many of the young people who participated in Gift Shop were from diverse backgrounds and many were on the margins of their own communities and experiencing difficulties regarding their identity, familial relationships and in education and employment. Our methodology builds on other work which has explored the potential of art-based practice for altering people's sense of their own identity and relation to community as well as their wider understanding of the world (Froggett et al. 2011; Hughes, Roy and Manley 2014).

A multi-method approach was used to gain an understanding of the experiences of the young people who participated in Gift Shop, of people who worked with the project, and of

the views of members of the public who visited the shop. Group and semi-structured interviews were conducted and questionnaires were completed by both young people and members of the public.

### Individual Interviews

A total of eight young people were identified from two of the groups for loosely structured face-to face interviews. Interviews for the Trafford in Care group took place at Gorse Hill Studies in Stretford and for young people from the Greenbank Project at the Greenbank accommodation in Old Trafford. The points below are indicative of the questions asked:

- how were the young people engaged?
- did they enjoy it?
- how they feel they benefitted from involvement, if at all ?
- what did they learnt from it?
- what were the best bits of the project and what could have been done differently?
- would they like to take part in similar activities in the future?
- Did they have any suggestions of other creative activities they would like to do?

Eight of the youth group leaders and 42<sup>nd</sup> street project workers involved in the planning and/or delivery of the project were interviewed by telephone.

### Group interviews

The challenges facing these groups were underlined by the difficulty the researchers experienced in contacting the groups after the Gift Shop project had finished. One of the projects had closed and another was struggling to stabilise after a recent change of leadership and could not identify young people to participate in the interviews.

Nonetheless, two young people's groups - Greenbank accommodation and Trafford in Care participated in group interviews. These interviews consisted of facilitated group discussions addressing the questions identified above.

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires (see appendix 1) were also distributed to young people in all six of the groups and 13 young people completed these in total. They were designed to be appealing and to encourage young people to complete them without needing to write much, whilst giving a general impression of their experiences of the project.

Separate Questionnaires (see appendix 2) were provided for visitors to the shop and 44 were completed in total.

## Challenges of the Research

Contracting and research governance procedures took time which meant that parts of the research process took place after the activities had finished. Some of the groups and young people proved difficult or impossible to contact.

The relative engagement of the different group leaders also affected whether the young people engaged in Gift Shop's activities; their sense of ownership and involvement in the whole process; and whether they then participated in the research. The project manager herself observed that there was scope to be more assertive about the young people and groups taking ownership of the shop in order to underline the connection between making the products and selling them to the community.

'Ethically important moments' inevitably arise in sensitive research such as this (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). The researchers collaborated with 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in a cycle of planning and reflection. This was critical to the realisation of an ethical research practice, considered in advance but delivered in the moment and reflected on afterwards (Roy et al. 2015). The research plans and methods for this project were reviewed and approved by the Psychology and Social Work Ethics Committee at the University of Central Lancashire. All potential participants were provided with written information about the focus of the study, confidentiality and data protection a few days beforehand. Verbal consent was taken in all cases. Details that would potentially identify the young people to those outside the organisation have been changed.

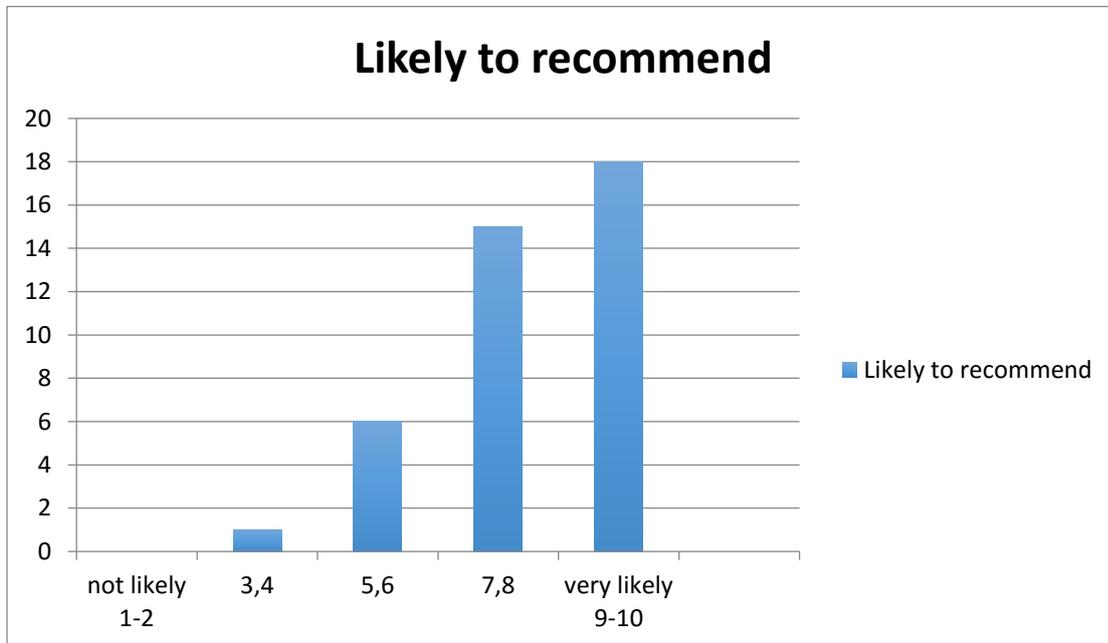
## Findings

### Visitor Responses to the Gift Shop

86% of visitors were 'very positive' in their first reactions to the shop. Less than 10% said they didn't know about who had made the items and why. This suggests that the reason behind the gift shop was understood by those who visited it and was also seen as important. There was universal agreement amongst shop visitors that it was a good idea to involve young people in this kind of activity, and general support for activities that positively engage young people in the community. Overall this was a very positive response, especially as there was wide variation in relation to the question 'how often, if ever, do you attend community arts events?' 32% of the respondents answered this question with 'sometimes'

or 'not at all often'; 36% replied 'moderately often'. Nevertheless people clearly supported community arts based activities for young people.

The chart below demonstrates that the vast majority of visitors were enthusiastic enough about their visit to the Gift Shop to want to recommend it to others.



61% of respondents thought that the shop was something people would both want and need. Less than 10% answered that this sort of project was something that was only needed. This seems to indicate a balance between the pragmatic and practical 'need' of a community as opposed to enjoyment or desire, with the balance being more on the side of want rather than need.

68% of respondents were extremely, or very likely to support future shops of this kind, further emphasising the enthusiasm and support expressed above.

### Creativity in a Caravan

Many of the respondents liked the location of the Gift Shop (outside a well known community centre) and that it was presented in a vintage caravan:

*The caravan is a very novel way of presenting the goods on offer.*

More than two thirds of respondents felt that creativity of the project was very appealing and enjoyable to experience and were aware of its links to mental health.

*[I like] the concept behind it: i.e. using creativity and producing products the public would like to buy as part of a therapeutic approach to managing mental health problems.*

At the centre of visitors' enjoyment and appreciation of the project was the importance of community involvement in planning, making gifts and setting up the caravan as the Gift Shop.

*The fact that it involves things made by young people from the community.*

*Relaxed, community feel, friendly and feels good to support other local groups.*

Along with the sense of community, the items made by the young people and put on sale in the caravan were seen as attractive and of high quality:

*The products were all of high quality and very visually appealing.*

There was also an appreciation that the staff in the shop were very friendly, welcoming and professional - this encouraged people to enter the caravan and experience a really warm ambience whilst browsing.

## Children and Young People's Responses

### Questionnaire Responses

The enthusiasm for the shop was also reflected in the young people's responses in their questionnaires. 13 young people completed questionnaires with nearly all confirming that they enjoyed participating in the Gift Shop project, both making their gifts and also the experience of doing this with other young people in their groups. Over three quarters of the young people stated that they would like to be involved in a similar project again and that they would recommend this activity to other young people.

The recognition of friends and family was an important means of validating the young people's contribution to making the Gift Shop a success. Over half of the young people said that their family or friends were going to visit the Gift Shop and that they had felt enthused in the whole process of making and participating in the project. However, a third of young people indicated that recognition from friends and families was less marked.

### Interviews with Young People.

Two young people from Greenbank (age range from 16 to 21) and six young people from Trafford In Care group (age range between 11 and 17) participated in the group interviews. Both groups were visited on two occasions. The following themes arose in these sessions:

### **Creative fun**

In the group interviews, all the young people explained that they had enjoyed becoming involved in the Gift Shop and indicated that it was good fun.

*The first time we were involved in the Gift shop somebody came down (from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street) came down and played games with us ... (Jenny 15)*

Another commented on the characteristics of the project worker who visited them,

*He was dead loud and funny with curly hair, and we had to say something... like compliment the person next to us. (Kate 14)*

The young people exuded a sense of pride and appreciation that they had been given the opportunity to demonstrate genuine creative and artistic ability in their products. On the day of the researcher's visit, one group of young people proudly showed a selection of post cards that they had made,

*We also made post cards which was fun... and chose different colours as background, purple, blue and they had glitter and magazines. (Clare, 14)*

*We made candles and sweets and all different things in the pop up shop. (Jess 15)*

*I enjoyed making the ceramic and the egg cup. Yeah, I like doing that sort of stuff. (Nathan 17)*

### **The Joy of Giving**

As well as making the items, all the young people expressed pride in being involved in something that gave back to the community. The idea of 'gift giving' engendered a positive sense of self-esteem.

*My favourite bit was visiting the Gift shop and seeing people buy things that we made. That made me happy. (Jenny 15)*

*I liked meeting other people there and making the post cards. (Clare 14)*

These responses reflect those of all the young people who attended the Gift Shop and were interviewed, and highlight their satisfaction in having their creative art sold. With one group in particular, there was an expression of fulfilment that the gifts that they had made had been sold to the community, and the money raised was to be re-invested and shared among the young people's groups that had participated in the project. The notion of creating something to reinvest in the community captured their imagination.

Young people were also enthused about the idea of participating in future gift making, and had further suggestions.

*I'd like to make cups, pictures, candlesticks. . . what else? Chocolates, jams, candles, key rings. (Jess 15)*

*I really like sewing, you know like when you get fabric and sew and make letters and stuff like that . . . (Clare 14)*

Most of the young people involved found the experience unequivocally positive. However, the following other themes raised (below) identify some ambivalence, not with the experience of the Gift Shop itself, but in how it chimed with what was most important in their lives

### ***A Platform for Airing Issues about Cultural and Ethnic Difference***

An unanticipated and interesting result from two young black women interviewed was the way they used the project, and the opportunity to talk about it, to voice issues that were of paramount importance to them. They were very preoccupied with their experience of being looked after by the local authority and this informed their worldview.

*Excuse me, we are in care and we need somewhere to go to seeing as you think we are going to end up as drug dealers, or whatever . . . and labelled as children in care and expect us to have horrible clothes from charity shops and like, excuse me! (Naomi 15)*

*If they are so concerned about children in care, then maybe they should listen to like what we are saying more ... (Aisha 15)*

This was a reflection of their feelings of being in care and how the wider community treated them, rather than a comment on their experience of Gift Shop. However, being in care, being black and different in a predominantly white school shaped the way they viewed the Gift Shop experience, themselves and the wider world.

*My friends (are important to me) but sometimes if feel like I don't know how to be black, if you know what I mean. First of all, I have been with so many white carers it is unbelievable. I have been to schools, where there was only me and my brother, only four black people in the whole school. (Naomi 15)*

*That is another thing in our school there is only a handful of black people . . . and they want me to go to that school. (Aisha 15)*

These interviews raise the interesting possibility that projects like Gift Shop can provide an opportunity through community-based channels for young people to voice pressing concerns which at first sight seem to have little to do with the project itself.

## Interviews with Other Stakeholders

### Social Enterprise

Interviews were conducted with the project manager and development worker, a youth involvement worker from Trafford Housing Trust and a local community development worker connected with St John's Centre. These workers all talked about the concept of young people being involved in artwork and the products of their labour being sold and re-invested back into their own community.

*The idea was superb; For young people to be involved and own the experience of creating something and investing it in the community through their artwork and resources. (Community Artists 1)*

The community setting helped the young people engage with and appreciate their local community.

*The caravan idea was excellent idea and engaged the young people and the local community where it was parked up outside of a church ground which was a lovely setting to work in. (Community Artists 1)*

The workers saw this as a creative social enterprise venture for the young people, which they saw as being a rewarding experience for the participants in the project.

*A key part of it was to make your own things and to sell them and to reinvest in the community. The idea of social enterprise, to create things and then sell to the community and then put the money back into the community. (Youth Involvement Housing Worker)*

All the workers were positive about the purpose of the shop and the outcome. They emphasised the importance of young people making things in the spirit of Gift Giving whilst simultaneously raising awareness of mental health issues and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street's services.

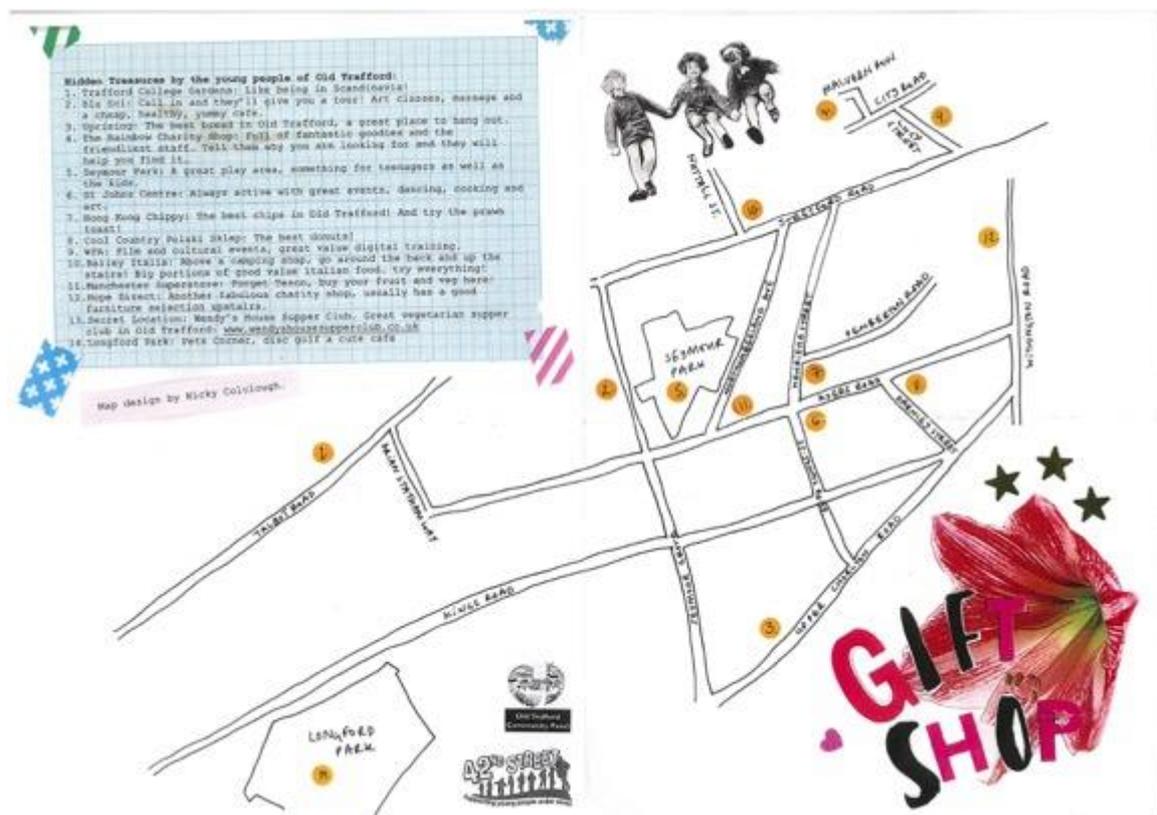
*The Gift shop provided a vehicle for young people to be made aware of mental health ... but, then going beyond making it. Being self-sufficient and coping with life's challenges by doing something ... (Youth Involvement Housing worker)*

### Situated Understanding

The stakeholders felt that through making the gifts and encouraging the young people to visit the Caravan to participate in selling the goods, the young people experienced a sense of

being part of a Gift Giving process in their own community. This was exemplified in the maps of the local community that some of them created. In negotiation with one of the community artists, the young people developed a map (see next page) of the important and interesting places to visit in Old Trafford

*We worked with some of the young people to draw up a local map, you know, of the places that they visited and liked in the community. You can see how they made pictures on the map to identify places they like . . . (Community Artist 2)*



**Figure 1: Map of Trafford produced by Young People and Community Art Worker**

This enabled the young people to explore through art the spaces and places that were important to them in their local area. The map and the centrality of the local area in their lives, chimed with locating the caravan pop up shop, in the middle of the community in Old Trafford. It also enabled the young people to express a *situated understanding* of who they were, what was important to them, and how they related to it in their community.

## Contributing Creatively

The workers on the project talked about the difficult life experiences of some of the young people that manifested in challenging behaviour, and how their positive potential could be expressed through art.

*Some were excluded from school and were difficult to engage. But we introduced the idea of gift giving, what they had to offer as personalities, as young people. Some were noisy and loud and lacked discipline, but the Gift Shop gave them the opportunity to make things. (Community Artist 1)*

*How their personalities, be they noisy or loud can be turned into something good for people.. . So instead of feeling bad about themselves they could see how they could offer some things . . . (Community Artist 1)*

Although the work with the young people was productive and rewarding in building relationships with them as they made things, it was felt that perhaps some of the group leaders could have been more engaged in the process by attending the Gift Shop workshops.

*The importance of coming to the shop was really missed by (some of) the group leaders – it hadn't been prioritized – perhaps they didn't feel engaged or responsible. (Community Artist 2)*

The project team spent on average four sessions with each group. However, with a longer preparation time it was felt that more could have been achieved with the young people.

*I think the development work could have been longer with the groups... so that we could get to know the groups for a bit longer to build relationships with them before we started the work.*

## Responses from Youth Group Leaders

Four of the six young people's group leaders were also interviewed. The responses echoed the positive experience of the Gift Shop for the young people and the sense of fun whilst being creative.

*Although those that did attend the shop, they did well to keep them engaged in the work. They were given a choice in all the things they could do, different creative art type of things and the young people enjoyed trying it out. (Youth group leader A)*

*Then we had the sessions themselves, I think we did three in total. The young people enjoyed it and were quite pleased with making the postcards and proud of what they*

*actually produced. And that the cards were put on sale and actually made some money. They were pleased ...* (Youth group leader A)

*It was ideal for the young people to make things that were creative and which enabled themselves to make things that made them feel good about themselves and what they could do, could contribute.* (Youth Group leader B)

The timing and duration of the project was also a consideration and could be adjusted to further strengthen outcomes in future projects.

*Maybe if it was run over the summer there may have been more young people getting involved and engaged in it. It is difficult for young people working all day to take on extra activities such as this, but in the summer they would have more time.* (Youth Group leader C)

In sum, both the community centre and youth workers felt that the young people found the Gift Shop to be a positive experience, with the opportunity to be creative and learn and grow together. They felt particularly, that enabling the young people to be involved in a social enterprise and re-investing the fruits of their labour in the community, was very rewarding for them. A longer period of working with them may have been even more productive.

## Discussion

### Feeling Good about Life: Art as an Expression of Optimism

Gift Shop presented an opportunity for young people from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds to engage in the making of creative objects and through this medium, the forum to think, feel and discuss what was important in their lives. The creative sessions with the young people provided the place and space to explore how art can be a conduit for positive emotional expression and also manifest the identity and character of those who participated. This is evidenced in the choice of the items made, for instance conveying a young person's perspective on the important landmarks in Old Trafford in a map of the area. The project provided an opportunity for the young people to express their situated understanding of the area where they lived and a forum to talk about how they felt about their local area and community. It also enabled them to demonstrate a pride in what they produced and to think about the things they liked doing in their local area. For example, one

group of young people, worked together creating different coloured postcards, with images which were evocative of something significant in their lives, whether animal(s), nature, or a particular person who had resonance for them.

The shop was also an opportunity for the young people to engage in art as a cathartic or quasi-therapeutic process, through the experience of doing, chatting as well as learning new skills. The process combined the familiar and comfortable - talking and socialising with friends – with the new and unusual - the sensory feeling of using hands and minds to create something personal, new, different and saleable.

Vulnerable young people often have a difficult relationship with the communities in which they live. Young men are often seen, but seldom heard in the public landscape and young women are often completely absent (Back, 2007). They are also too often subject to labels such as ‘service user’, which position them as ‘objects of concern’ rather than ‘agents of their own change processes’ (Roy and Christensen, forthcoming). Gift Shop provided a space in which a diverse group of young people found it possible to think of themselves in a positive and optimistic way, rather than as stigmatised casualties of institutions or systems. Whilst some of the young people had been excluded from school and were (self) perceived as angry and/or violent, they could use Gift Shop as a space to explore the positive side of being loud, gregarious and angry, discovering that art can both help explore these attributes and provide a visual representation of them. The shop, therefore, showed the young people that art provides a space in which a range of emotions can be productively worked with, changing self-perception and relationships with others through the use and co-production of a creative space.

### Gift Giving

The young people also demonstrated a ‘vicarious pleasure’ in contributing generously to their community through ‘Gift Giving’ (Spandler, Roy and McKeown, 2014). The project created a space in which a diverse range of adults could engage with and appreciate the work produced by the young people. Through coming together in groups, making high quality creative items and subsequently in visiting the caravan and participating in selling and buying the goods, the young people demonstrated a genuine pride and satisfaction that they had been able to produce something of such good quality, that it could be sold to people from *their* local community and be re-invested in *their* local youth groups. It is evidence of social enterprise in its most effective form, where young people enjoy participating in the creative workshops and through the selling of these products are able to own and reinvest the benefits of the resources made through the sale.

### Engaging Diverse Young People

Young people were given a platform to discuss their experiences of Gift Shop and most demonstrated a sense of enjoyment through participating in this cultural activity. Those

who experienced a disconnect between their own cultural and racial experiences and those of the workers and the products that they made use of the opportunity to talk about the issues that most affected them. Whilst they enjoyed making items for sale such as jam, they did not feel it was representative of the important issues in their lives, whether racism, school, or being in care, and they made this very clear. For the future this demonstrates the importance of thorough consultation and ownership in designing creative workshops and their products, but also the potential use of projects like Gift shop as a listening device and platform for young people who may feel alienated from institutions of education and care.

The shop provided the forum for the children and young people to invest in something they could own. It enabled them to realise their own creativity and normalised the process of making things. It demonstrated the potential for informal learning for the young people, not only in creative practice, but in exploring relationships with themselves, others and the wider community. The opportunity to learn about setting up a small enterprise could be more thoroughly explored in future projects. Importantly, it gave the young people the opportunity to express their feelings about who they were, what they were doing in their lives and how they related to their own community. In other words, through the medium of enjoyable creative activities, they could explore their location in time, space and place, in the here and now, the creative caravan and their local community.

## Conclusion

For the thirty nine young people who participated in Gift Shop, there is compelling evidence that the project met the outcomes set by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Young people experienced how making creative objects, working with community artists, collaborating with partner housing associations and young people's agencies could help deepen their understanding of the importance of their own mental health, and how creative activities could contribute positively to their mental wellbeing. By becoming aware of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street they could identify an important source of support for the future, should they need it. Furthermore, Gift Shop was an innovative, non-threatening, enjoyable, sociable opportunity for children and young people to learn new skills with others in a unique setting where their contributions to the project could be recognised and appreciated. Through engaging in this project, they were able, for a short period, to gain new horizons and to contribute in a small, but significant way to their own community.

## Recommendations

1. Young people made it clear that they would like to be involved in further similar activities to Gift Shop so consideration should be given to planning similar projects.
2. The concept of the pop up vintage caravan was very popular with participants and visitors and could be replicated. An intriguing suggestion that arose was to make use of the mobility of a caravan to 'tour' the project.

3. The Gift Shop model could be replicated across other parts of Manchester and shared as 'best practice' with other mental health charities and housing associations across the country.
4. Consideration should be given to the Gift Shop being run over the summer holiday period when the young people involved would have more time to actively participate.
5. The social enterprise model of Gift Giving, had particular resonance with the young people and could be further developed for this and other projects, with an emphasis of enabling participants to take ownership of all parts of the process.
6. Consideration should be given to the cultural and ethnic relevance of the gift making opportunities, to ensure diverse, cultural and ethnic groups of young people can appreciate the relevance of activities to their own lives.
7. The importance of the 'talk' generated in and through the activities should not be under-estimated; there is potential to make further use of this dimension of community-based arts project to give a range of otherwise marginalised young people an auditorium and voice.
8. It takes time to plan and execute a project such as Gift Shop, including engaging young people, collaborating with other agencies and evaluating the process. A longer lead in and set up time would be beneficial in the future.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Young people’s questionnaire



PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT



## Gift Shop

We want to know what you think...  
Please answer some of these questions



**Thank you!**

## Q 1

If you made something for the shop, did you enjoy making it?

### Answer

Choose from (a) to (d)		
a) Yes, I enjoyed it. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b) I thought it was ok. ↑	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c) No, I didn't really enjoy it. ↓	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d) Was a waste of time. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Q 2

How did you make your gift shop item?

### Answer

Choose (a) or (b)		
a) On my own. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	

b) With the help of others.



### Q 3

If you enjoyed the project, what did you like best?

You can tick more than one box.

### Answer

Choose from (a) to (e)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
a) Making things. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b) Helping to set up a shop. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c) Doing things together with others. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
d) Learning new skills. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	

e) Other, please specify...

e) Other, please specify...	
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## Q 4

How would you have spent your time instead of doing this activity? You can tick more than one box.

### Answer

Choose from (a) to (h)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
 <p>a) with friends</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
 <p>b) gaming</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
 <p>c) outdoor activity, like sport</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
 <p>d) reading, writing</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
 <p>e) with family</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

 f) watching TV		
 g) online/mobile		
h) Other Other, please specify...		

## Q 5

Would you like to do this sort of thing again in the future?

### Answer

Choose from (a) to (d)	☐	
a) Yes, definitely  		
b) Maybe  		
c) No, probably not  		

d) Never, no way 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
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## Q 6

Are your friends or family going to the shop?

Answer

Choose from (a) to (c)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
a) Yes 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b) No 	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c) Don't know 	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Q 7

Would you recommend this activity to others?

### Answer

Choose from (a) to (d)	☐	
a) Yes 		
b) Maybe 		
c) No 		
d) Don't know 		

## Q 8

Thanks! Is there anything else you want to add?

We would like to interview some people on what it was like to take part in the Gift Shop Project. We would prefer to do this by having you show us around your area. We will ask questions as we move around:

Which places are important to you?

What do you do there?

Who do you meet?

Are there enough things to do?

What activities would you like to have available?

Do they include art and creative things?

Did you enjoy the Gift Shop Project?

What do you think you might have learnt from it?

Will it be useful to you in the future, and if so How?

What you say may raise other questions we haven't thought of yet.

We want to discover what matters to you in terms of activities in your area.

If you would like to be interviewed for this research please let us have your e mail address or Telephone Number and a researcher will contact you. You can then ask any other questions you like, before you decide whether or not to take part.

E mail Address:

Telephone Number:



PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT



## Gift Shop

We want to know what you think...  
Please answer some of these questions



**Thank you!**

**1. What's your first reaction to this shop?**

Very positive
Somewhat positive
Neutral
Somewhat negative
Very negative

**2. Do you know who made the items and why?**

Yes
I know something about it
No
Don't care

**3. Do you think it's a good idea to involve young people in this kind of activity?**

Very good
Quite good
Neutral
Not very good
Bad

**4. How often, if ever, do you visit this kind of shop?**

Extremely often
Very often
Moderately often
Sometimes
Not at all often

**5. Do you think this shop might make a difference to the community?**

Extremely likely
Very likely
Moderately likely
Not very likely
Not at all likely

**6. How likely is it that you would recommend this shop to a friend or family?**

Tick or circle on a scale of 1 – 10

1=Not at all likely  10=Extremely likely

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**7. When you think about this shop, do you think of it as something people might NEED or as something people might WANT?**

Need
Want
Both equally

**8. How likely are you to support future shops like this one?**

Extremely likely
Very likely
Moderately likely
Not very likely
Not at all likely

**9. In your own words, what are the things that you like most about this new shop?**

**10. In your own words, what are the things that you would most like to improve or change in this shop?**

**Thanks!**