

Best Campaign

Increasing the amount
of young people involved
with local democracy

Full submission

Objectives

- Increase the amount of 16-17 year olds registered to vote
- Increase the amount of young people who understand local democracy

Outline

The challenge set by Hackney Council's Communications Team was to get young people to engage with democracy in innovative ways. A steering group, including eight young people and eight officers, developed six strands:

1) Councillor training session and school visits

Councillors attended a training session run by the British Youth Council. (See Supporting evidence 1)

A short film by young people introduced the topic: what democracy means; how they would get their voice heard; what they understood the role of councillors to be; how they could vote. ⁽²⁾

The session outlined how councillors can overcome barriers with young people. Following the training 17 visits were made to schools and youth clubs.

2) The play

The play was devised in partnership with local young people and had to:

- Promote understanding of local democracy and its purpose
- Engage young people in the democratic process
- Create an informing, honest production that explored what local democracy is and what it means to young people ⁽³⁾

The Arcola Theatre won the commission and developed the play *Zoop, Zoop, Hackney! Who Aaxed U?*

Three recruitment sessions ran before the summer. The Arcola attended a Youth Parliament

meeting to promote the play and called on ambassadors to recruit their friends. ⁽⁴⁾

The script writer, Benjamin Davies, worked with the groups to explore the concept of democracy. The group had difficulty grasping the concept until a contemporary reference was found. He explains:

"We worked through many ideas relating to democracy, locally, nationally and internationally... they have struggled somewhat with the idea of voting, so we have had to create more abstract ideas of democratic processes, such as 'Big Brother', which has proved to be the most successful as it is a format they are all familiar with. This has become the premise of the play"

Ideas and issues in the play are those raised by the young people during the group sessions, and Davies based some of the characters, the language and delivery, on those in the group.

The play begins in the 'Big Sister' household, where the characters are thrown into the domain of the country's media. Among the housemates is Ross Bass, a local lad from an estate, Deborah Smith, "Mayor of Hackney" and Richard - a PR guru. Ross wins and is convinced by Richard to run for Mayor against Deborah. The story unfolds blow for blow until the grand finale: a debate in the Chamber under the watchful eye of Big Speaker, and a chance for the audience to vote for the winner. (Script and DVD, 5)

3) Scrutiny in a Week

Seven students took on the role of Scrutiny Members, and undertook a Scrutiny review into the issues surrounding youth engagement with democracy. During the week they gathered evidence, designed a questionnaire that went to all secondary schools in the borough, and ran a focus group with five Hackney young people. The group made a film ⁽⁶⁾ to accompany the report ⁽⁷⁾ and the recommendations included:

- The development of young local democracy ambassadors

- Standardised information about local democracy in citizenship classes at school
- Using social internet sites like Facebook and MySpace to recruit / promote

4) Q and A with the Mayor

78 young people set the agenda in the Council Chamber. The panel included Meg Hillier MP, the Borough Commander, Steve Dann, representatives from the PCT and the Learning Trust, and Jules Pipe Mayor of Hackney. ⁽⁸⁾ The debate touched on topics like London 2012, the legal voting age, and tabloid journalism.

5) “Exploring Democracy” event

Hackney Town Hall hosted a public event to promote involvement in democracy. There were information stalls from local and national organisations (such as Operation Black Vote; Ministry of Justice), films, competitions and a performance of the play. ⁽⁹⁾

A competition to design a birthday card was launched. The winning design was by Simrian Guvra, 15. ^(10, 11) The concept created the number 18 out of important democratic acts. The final strap line was: “Appreciate your age. People fought hard for the vote you were born with. So use it.” It is now sent to all young people on the electoral register when they turn 18.

6) Democracy marketing campaign

Young people helped developed the look of the campaign. ⁽¹²⁾

Emails and invites were cascaded to stakeholders and press releases went to local media. Posters and postcards were sent to relevant access points detailing the event. ⁽¹³⁾ Adverts were placed in Hackney Today, Spark (for all VCS organisations), and Contrast (read and edited by young people). Information went online at www.hackney.gov.uk/talk-politics.

Different flyers were developed for the May performances that credited the young people who originally devised the play the year before. ⁽¹⁴⁾ These were sent to key public access points and the PDF email cascaded.

Budget

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£29,000.

Total cost

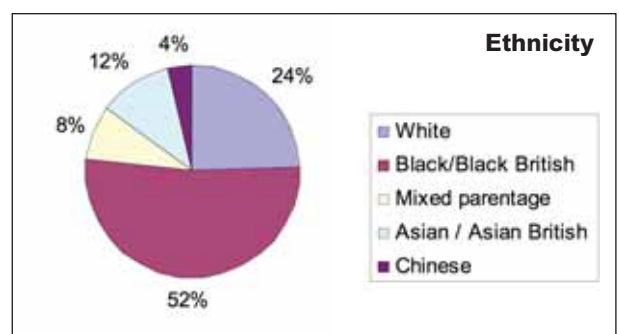
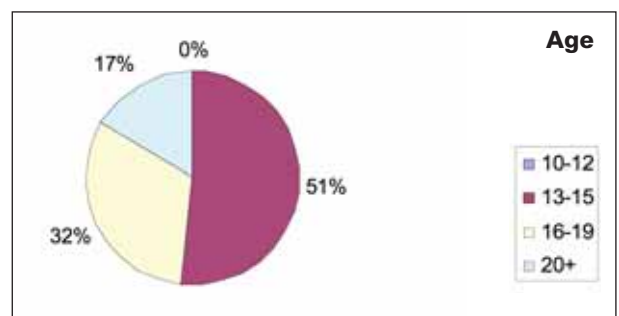
£28,575.22

Communications had no funds for this – the money came from a bid to an Innovations Fund, Team Hackney, and Youth Services. ⁽¹⁵⁾

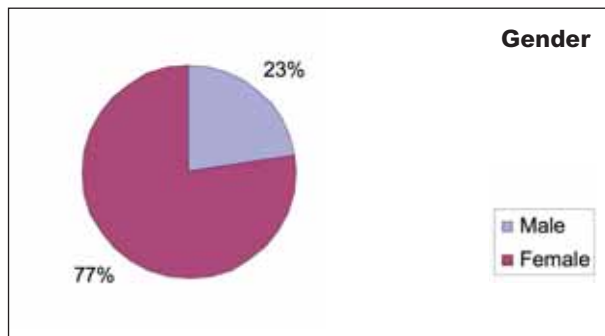
Evaluation

There was a 44% increase in the amount of 16-17 year olds in the Electoral Register (1046 to 1503).

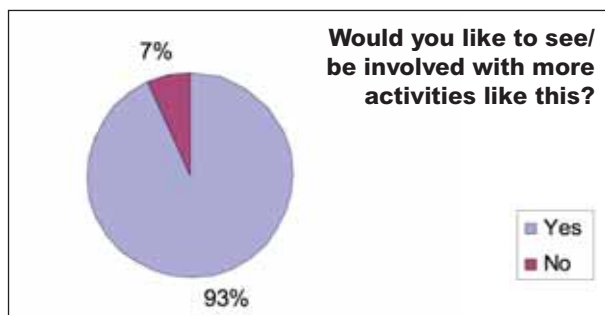
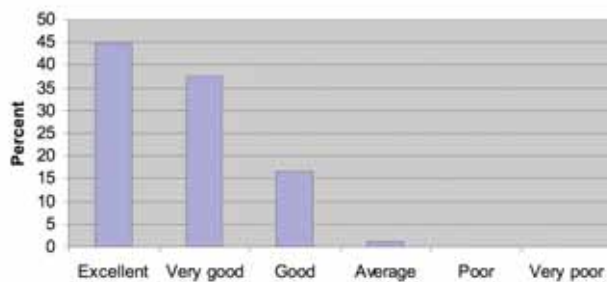
- 366 people viewed Zoop, Zoop
 - Feedback was gathered from the May performances. 91 surveys were completed showing that a diverse group of young people enjoyed the play and over two thirds said it helped them understand democracy:



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How did you rate the play?



- Qualitative feedback included:
 - “The play was well acted, fast paced and informative without being patronising” (Age 20+)
 - “Funny, real, and all about us” (13-15)
 - “Represented Hackney properly” (13-15)
 - “It was real and it told the truth about mixed cultures and how different people can be” (16-19)
 - “It involved some very tough choices and gave me an insight on the way politics are” (13-15)

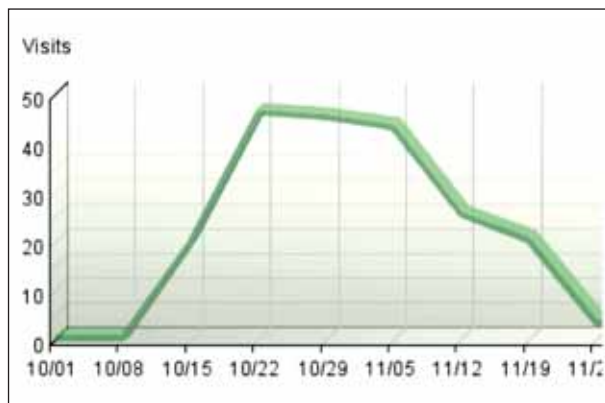
“Because it made me think about things that never crossed my mind...I can relate to it and what the characters were saying” (16-19)

“Because it was funny and it made me think about voting and how important it is” (16-19)

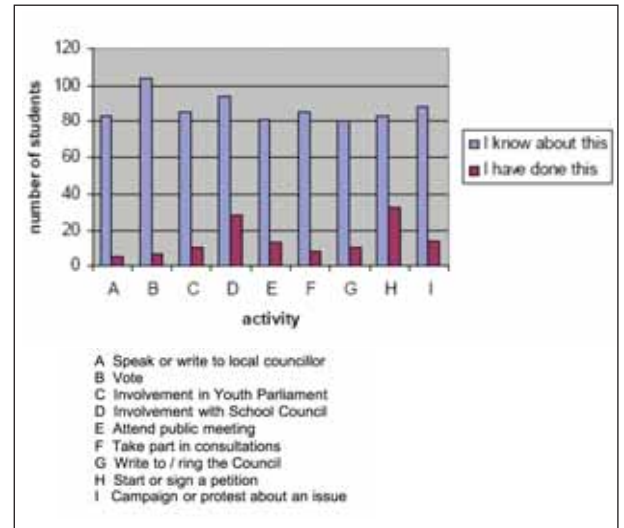
- Sarra Said-Wardell, 12, summed up the views of young people present:
 - “The play was well acted and the characters convincing. It was interesting and different to see a play performed and based around Hackney, my local area...Dowa, 17, thought if you are really determined to have your say in how your town or area is run then you can...The whole play made fun of politics, the media and celebrity – but at the same time it had a serious message that it’s important for young people to get involved in their local communities.”⁽¹⁶⁾
- Its success was reported nationally. Sheila Murray from 24dash.com, said:
 - “The play has been celebrated for tackling difficult local issues in an honest balanced way, with its light-hearted approach and contemporary references making it a hit with audiences of all ages.”
 - (www.24dash.com/communities/29438.htm)
- The Hansard Society entered the play into the Channel Four Political Awards. It was shortlisted for the ‘opening up politics to new audiences’ category. the play appeared on C4 in January and helped raise the reputation of the Council.⁽¹⁷⁾

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- The campaign and event got a lot of coverage:
 - Information went to every household in the borough (over 105, 000) through Hackney Today and the Youth A-Z ⁽¹⁸⁾
 - 3000 flyers and 150 posters distributed;
 - Hackney Today; Hackney Gazette; and OBV's website
 - The 'Talk Politics' site received a lot of daily hits (www.hackney.gov.uk/talk-politics):



- 78 15-17 year olds attended the Q and A:
 - MP Meg Hillier praised the event ⁽¹⁹⁾
 - Reported in Hackney Gazette and Hackney Today ⁽²⁰⁾
- 103 questionnaires fed into the Scrutiny recommendations. (www.hackney.gov.uk/the-young-scrutiny-group-project.htm) The questionnaire revealed that:
 - 62% knew a little about democracy and politics
 - 64% Would like to know more
 - Awareness is high, participation low:



- 17 councillor visits were made to schools and youth clubs
 - Katie Harrington from Our Lady's Convent, said:
"It was a great opportunity for the Government and Politics students, and both they, and the staff present found it a very interesting talk"

Team

Paul Knipe, Kiran Ramchandani, Sylvia Arthur, Communications;
Ben Todd, Arcola Theatre;
Michael Connors, Youth Services;
Nicola Baboneau, Learning Trust;
Michael Summerville, Electoral Services;
Stephen Mutton, Mayor's Office;
Ruth Garland, Team Hackney;
Lorraine Brook, Members Support;
Clair Bantin, Scrutiny;
Sarah Jones, Tosin Fatusin, Yinka Jimoh, Jake Boston, Angelique Amoake, Youth Parliament;
 2x Schools Councils representatives.

Contact

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Supporting evidence

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