



The Immortals: Key Learning

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Addaction has produced this report as a member of the Young People's Health Partnership (YPHP), a seven strong consortium of organisations working to raise the profile of young people's health in England. YPHP works with the Department of Health, Public Health England and NHS England as strategic partners to raise the profile of the health agenda across the voluntary youth sector.

Introduction

The Immortals started life in 2012 as a project created by four young people from Barnsley and as a partnership between Creative Recovery and Young Addaction. The Immortals puts together alternative nights out for people aged between 14 to 18 years old. The project aimed to make information about drugs and alcohol accessible to young people and holds drug and alcohol free events for young people involving music, art, crafts, food and a safe place for young people to socialise and have fun. The events were organised for young people, by young people.

Through tracking the development of The Immortals from 2012-2016, we have attempted to create a narrative and tell the story of the project and to develop a learning tool that can be used in other localities to develop similar projects for young people. This report is not an in-depth evaluation of the project nor should it be used as a guideline. The report provides indications of the approach that has been used in one locality, which could be factors that influence the shape of similar projects in other localities.

Executive Summary

The project began in 2012 when there was a need identified to provide more for young people to do in Barnsley. The young people wanted "something cooler" than a youth club environment and initially envisaged regular, well-attended nights for young people which didn't involve alcohol. In the last four years, the benefits to the community and to the young people taking part in The Immortals have been far-reaching:

- Over 600 young people were reached via the launch event, 100 young people engaged with Immortals music events and pop-up events, for 10 – 14 year olds, engaged hundreds of younger children.
- Older participants learnt how to become peer mentors with training designed especially for them.
- 100% of participants reported an improved sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.
- 100% of participants felt more active in the community
- 100% said the project had had a positive effect on their lives
- 78% said they learned new skills by being involved including event planning, promotion and communication skills.
- 89% felt more confident.

The Immortals project's "hands-off" style of key worker approach inspired young participants to engage enthusiastically with its aims. The young people worked together in a supportive, fun atmosphere to achieve creative goals and this developed organically into a relaxed network of mutual aid and peer mentoring. The Immortals offered an attractive alternative option to young people who might have been vulnerable to harmful peer pressure. In addition, the shared creative goals, challenges and opportunities to make new friends helped them to build self-esteem, confidence and resilience skills for life.

While many young people may not necessarily relate to the concept of recovery, the project has shown their willingness to engage with 'community recovery'. The Immortals has enabled the Young Addaction service in Barnsley to focus on developing and building community capital amongst young people.

Methodology

We consulted with a small number of key informant interviewees in order to develop a narrative of the project and to identify key practice points. Interviewees included the following:

- Interviews/focus groups with young people (n=7) who are Immortals Peer Mentors and a number of the young people who have been involved in the development of The Immortals.
- Interviews with project staff and management (n=3) from Young Addaction.
- Interview with one local commissioner.

Our qualitative work has been supplemented with existing local grey material in relation to The Immortals.

Note: For the purpose of clarity, in the report we often refer to the 'project', which is The Immortals. We also refer to the 'service', which is a reference to Young Addaction in Barnsley.

1 Background and initial engagement

The project from which The Immortals emerged was funded by ASDA and had open, loosely outlined outcomes as targets for the project. The funding was principally linked to engaging young people on alcohol awareness. During this time, various approaches to young people were made via groups, clubs and schools but it transpired that the initiatives which involved a creative or musical project seemed to generate the most engagement. The project worker initially attended youth clubs to engage with young people; however many of the young people attending were too young and had little existing knowledge of alcohol. This concerned the worker and this approach was then abandoned. The project worker then adopted a new approach, which was to use an activities budget to buy an iPod as a prize for an art competition for young people to design a poster warning about the dangers of alcohol. This was distributed throughout schools and youth clubs. Thirty entries were received and the majority of responses were from young people with learning difficulties. This was not the intended target group of the project and prospective future competitions were also abandoned. However, it is important to note that, through the art competition, the project worker made contact with a local artist (Creative Recovery), who judged the competition. This artist later became an important player in the creation and development of The Immortals.

As an additional part of the process to reach out and engage young people, project workers made a presentation to the local Youth Council to inform them about the role and the work of Young Addaction in the locality. Young people present were not aware of the service and an invitation was then extended to these young people to visit the service. It was felt that this may be helpful should they need to signpost other young people to a local substance misuse service.

2 The emergence of The Immortals concept

Two young people, who were 15 years old at the time, visited the service. During the visit, young people and project workers discussed ways in which it would be possible to develop and promote safe drinking messages to local young people. This conversation also included an exploration of ways in which some young people are introduced to alcohol within their peer group, in parks or at house parties with older peers. A discussion of local drinking culture also took place.

Young people present stated that could envisage an 'adulty' night for young people – 'not cheesy...quite cool' and felt that this had never been an opportunity available to them. They wanted 'something cooler' than a youth club environment. The project workers suggested that it may be possible to work together to develop this idea. The young people were surprised to be taken so seriously. Indeed, the openness of the response appealed to the young people:

'They said that we are going to make a difference, we are going to do something for young people...we just need your help'



Practice Points

- Be creative when identifying forums/venues where initial engagement with young people may be facilitated.
- Initial ideas for the project were service-driven. Following an open discussion with young people, the project quickly shifted to a young-person led ethos. Start any new project with an open outlook and open conversations with young people. It is through this approach that inspirational, relevant and creative ideas are to be found.
- 'Start as you mean to go on'. Establish an early relationship between the project and with young people, based on the principles of openness, honesty and transparency.
- In many respects, the early phase of the project established the ethos and culture of the project. Establish and commit to an ethos and a way of working with young people from the outset and continue to self-monitor against these founding principles on an on-going basis.
- Start with a blank canvas. Be open. Before the involvement of young people, and their ideas, project workers had no pre-conceived ideas for the project. Or, indeed, if there would be a project.
- Be clear and honest about the aims of the project and its funding and openly explore the potential roles of young people in the project. Indeed, develop and shape these aims with them.
- Young people who we spoke to asserted the importance of The Immortals having 'direction' and not just being a 'social group'. Reflect on this when discussing the aims of the project with young people.
- Ensure that the project has a palpable and tangible sense of 'direction' and that young people are at the heart of determining project direction.

Engagement and participation

3.1 Establishing and building relationships

Project workers were open when reaching out to young people and gave them an overview of the aims of Young Addaction and the ASDA-funded work. An open invitation was extended to young people, asking them "What do you think we can do?"

Central to the project workers' approach was: 'Taking on board their ideas and shaping them into something solid but underpinned by their ideas and wishes'

This approach also became the ethical and values framework for the work.

Further meetings were planned to flesh out and explore the ideas discussed by young people. An invitation was extended to young people to bring along friends who might be interested in playing a part in the project. This was the way in which the initial small circle of young people was expanded. The Immortals concept, ethos, prevention message and structure emerged from regular weekly meetings between the project worker and this group of young people. It was also through these meetings that relationships and trust were established.

Practice Points

- Develop a simple process for participation. From an early point in the project ensure that structures and pathways are open to all young people in order for them to have the opportunity to express their ideas and participate.
- Widen the early base of young people becoming involved through informal routes – such as asking them to bring interested friends along to subsequent meetings.

3.2 Broadening participation

Whilst developing a rapport and trust with a relatively small group of young people at the start of the project was regarded as important, it was later recognised that this may have been to the detriment of the early involvement and participation of other young people – who may have regarded this group as ‘cliquey’. A key turning point for the project was recognising and addressing this issue. An open session for participation and discussion was then included at the start of the regular Monday night session, discuss this, as well as events:

‘We recognised that we needed to be a bit more open to others and we had to encourage our existing group to open it up to others. I think that was a turning point’

This approach broadened participation and the involvement of young people in the project. This was discussed by one young person:

‘It’s got a lot better as we’ve got along. At the start it was more just our ideas, but as we have gone on we have engaged with other people who have come along often, and got their ideas.’

‘I think they (other young people) have more of an input now.’

It’s not just the four of us, it’s a whole range of ideas from young people.’

As a consequence of broadening participation, the project offer and appeal has also broadened.

Nevertheless, it was suggested that many of the young people who have accessed The Immortals broadly shared the same ‘youth culture’ (‘emo/indie kid’). It was suggested that an earlier emphasis on engaging with a broader youth culture may have engaged a breadth of young people (for example, those listening to ‘happy hard core techno dance music...club music), which could have been incorporated into a broader spectrum of events. It was suggested that this may have included more young people who were ‘active’ when using substances and alcohol. It was accepted, however, that the core Young Addaction service may already be working with this group and they may be engaging with other opportunities in the locality.

Young people reflected on the importance of the project providing them with a number of ways in which they can become involved and uses a range of the skills and talents of young people, therefore broadening potential involvement and participation (many of which could not have been envisaged when the project was created).

Practice Points

- Consider, at the outset, how the project has the potential to include a broad spectrum of young people and to review, on an ongoing basis, the diversity of young people the project is reaching.

Provide a number of ways in which young people can become involved and can use their own talents and skills.

3.3 Flexible engagement opportunities

It was accepted that involvement of individual young people often ebbed and flowed and dipped at times when young people were particularly busy with their school and college lives (such as exam times). Once the framework and structure of the events was established, the planning of these events ‘took on a momentum’ of their own and could therefore function through periods of limited involvement of young people.

Practice Points

- Embed a regular open opportunity to consult and engage with young people to ensure that participatory opportunities are open to all. Engaging with more young people ensures that there is a bigger pool of ideas, talents and skills to draw from.

3.4 Deepening involvement and participation

Much of the recent work of the project has been focused on deepening involvement and participation and building capacity. Peer mentoring and volunteering opportunities have been developed. The blend of peer mentors, some of whom have experience of accessing Young Addaction as clients, and others who do not share this experience, ensures that peer mentors bring a breadth of experience and opportunities to model behaviour within the peer mentor team. It was recognised that developing a peer mentor and/or volunteering opportunity could impact on the personal growth of young people:

'The best way to build young people's esteem and resilience is to get them involved in helping other young people'

The project worker developed a training programme for volunteers and peer mentors. The training is informal, light touch and is relevant to the needs of young people and the extent of the peer mentoring role. Young people appreciated the opportunity to become involved as peer mentors and have been keen to support other young people who have an interest in engaging with The Immortals. Peer mentors are easily identifiable within The Immortals and wear hoodies with the Young Addaction logo and are assigned a young person as a mentee, prior to the young person accessing the project:

'You make them feel comfortable in the group, you get them to interact with other people and if they feel comfortable with you then they can tell you things.'

There is a referral route into The Immortals from the local Young Addaction service. However, at the time of our interviews, referrals into the project were weak, therefore limiting the potential impact of peer mentors. This pathway requires strengthening.

Young people attending the Monday session (Safe Space) who reach the age of 19 years old are no longer able to attend. Management want to ensure that the project remains fluid. However, a volunteering route has been developed for this cohort, which has enabled these individuals to maintain contact with the project and with their friends, whilst also providing an opportunity to 'give back'.

Practice Points

- A route for further and deeper involvement, such as peer mentoring and volunteering provides an opportunity for young people, who are now over 18 years, to remain involved in the project.
- Training for peer mentors/volunteers needs to be relevant and appropriate to the role.
- Work with peer mentors/volunteers/young people to define these roles.
- The requirements of peer mentor/volunteers needs to be flexible, as there may be periods when young people cannot wholly commit to the project (such as times of exams).
- Ensure that there is a robust system of support in place for volunteers and peer mentors.
- In terms of progression, there may be opportunities for volunteers to extend their experience and build their confidence through volunteering in the core service. The project may therefore be an opportunity to increase volunteer capacity within the core service.

4 Values

4.1 Open, honest and transparent

It is vital that project workers are open, honest and transparent when initiating and developing relationships with young people; it is also important that these values continue to form the basis of the ongoing relationship. One

interviewee discussed this approach:

'Listening to young people, taking on board the young people's opinions, their wishes, ideas, hopes, preferred futures and then working collaboratively to make those into a realisation'

Honesty was also discussed within the context of the ideas of young people being achievable or unachievable. Discussions were held with young people about ways in which elements of their ideas could be incorporated. This was a view supported by young people:

'We get asked about things as well. If an idea couldn't be put into practice, we were given options and told why. We were part of the planning'

Practice Point

- Be open and transparent about what can be done and what cannot be done.

4.2 Trust and risk

Trust was at the heart of the relationship between young people and project workers. This was specifically discussed as being of importance during the early phase of engagement. Young people were aware of the potential impact on their 'reputation' should the initial events not have emerged as planned, or were poorly attended. Young people's trust in the project worker was important in this respect:

'We trusted her (the project worker) completely. From the start we weren't sure how The Immortals was going to evolve at all. It was a big risk we were taking, but we trusted her and we had control of the events'

A key strength of the project has been the way in which project workers, and management with oversight of the project, have been prepared to take risks. Without this approach, it is unlikely that the project would have been as successful, or that young people would have played such a key role in the development of The Immortals:

'I think you have to be willing to take the risk. Otherwise you end up missing chances and you would deliver the same old, same old'

Fundamentally, assessing risk was linked to trusting one's judgement and instinct and having confidence in the project, in the young people and in the project workers. It was also rooted in a sense of confidence in the relationships and trust that had been established with young people.

Practice Point

- Recognise that young people may be taking a reputational risk. Talk openly to young people about this.
- Be prepared to take balance risks, whilst ensuring that the safety of young people is paramount. An overtly risk averse approach is unlikely to yield the creativity and innovation required to make a similar project work.
- Be opportunistic. Think creatively and flexibly in order to respond to situations as they emerge.

4.3 Open communication

Young people reflected on the importance of open communications and the good relationships they had with project workers, not only during the planned meetings, but between these meetings. This is testament to the relationship that has been established between young people and the project workers:

'You can email and text them outside the group if you have any problems'

'It don't stop here. If it gets to nine o'clock and you have a problems, then you can go and see them in the morning'

Practice Point

- It is vital that staff are available all week and not only during events or sessions. This is a key part in building trust and relationships.

4.4 'Credit where credit's due'

Young people respected the way in which project workers, and Young Addaction, 'did not take credit' for The Immortals and always ensured that credit was attributed to the young people involved in the project.

Practice Point

- From the perspective of the organisation always ensure in any promotional/media work, that young people are attributed with the credit for the key achievements of the project. This is about integrity.

5 Developing a vehicle for involvement

5.1 Outreach?

The original project brief (funded by ASDA) had a relatively open focus on outcomes and could very easily have been delivered as a traditional outreach project through engaging young people 'on the street' and in the town centre. In many respects, this approach would also have achieved the defined target of the project, which was to engage with a minimum number of young people. However, as discussed by one interviewee, this approach was now '20 years old' and many young people are no longer on the street, but are 'in their bedrooms' using social media and gaming. There was therefore an emerging consensus that, in order to 'reach' and engage with young people, it would have to be possible to achieve this through creating events which had the potential to attract young people to a forum where the project would be able to engage them with a safer drinking and harm reduction message.

Practice Point

- Through creating events and spaces which are attractive to young people, engagement with young people can be undertaken.

5.2 Developing the Immortals 'brand'

During an early meeting between project workers and young people it was agreed that the project needed to be promoted 'like a club night' and that developing a brand would be important '...in the same way that Ministry of Sound' and other promoters approached their events. The Immortals emerged as the brand, following suggestions made by young people. The name 'The Immortals' was initiated by the young people and counters a term used in the north for getting drunk – 'getting mortalled'.



5.3 Launch event

A launch event and two trial events were developed in order to gauge the potential of the project. The Immortals was launched in the town centre on the evening when the Christmas lights were being switched on (this also coincided with alcohol awareness week). Two stilt walkers were hired and this attracted the attention of many young people. There was also a tent with distorted mirrors and beer goggles. Many branded flyers for the two Immortals events were distributed at the launch. At the launch, it was estimated that contact had been made with over 600 young people.

Practice Point

- Work with young people to develop an appropriate way in which to launch, and possibly trial, the project.

5.4 The Immortals events

Music

The themes for the initial trial Immortals events have, in essence, been sustained throughout the project. Young people did not want a 'pop and crisp' night, but wanted to have a 'grown up' night that was drug and alcohol free. The young people were 'massively into music' and this created the key theme for the project. Accessibility and relevance to young people was a key aspiration of young people who were initially involved in the project. This was not only an aspiration in terms of the music events that were developed, but also across other 'spin off' activities:

'We wanted it to be an alternative night out – so we didn't want it to be a pop a crisp night – we wanted it to be cool, not cheesy and clichéd'

'The Immortals is like a nightclub scene, but without the alcohol or drugs. It makes you feel older than you are, which is what a lot of people want – to feel like an older generation'



Key learning following the trial events was that The Immortals nights needed more than music and so a space for other activities, such as crafts, arts, bracelet making, and screen printing, was created. Other early learning points included the potential to provide a variety of music in order to widen the appeal of the events.

Even though there is now a structure in place to plan The Immortals events, it was acknowledged that the events continue to absorb significant resources to organise. Work includes the need to book a band/artist, book the venue, arrange refreshments and food, risk assess the venues and work to promote the event. The budget for each event varies (larger events have required a budget of £850 and smaller events have had a budget of £350).

Theatre: Punch and Judy 'Pop Up' events

It was acknowledged that some of the younger 'target group' (10 to 14 year olds) were not attending the music group and the events in great numbers. The idea to develop events for this age group was therefore explored. Punch and Judy Pop Up events emerged following conversations between the project worker and some of the artists and other professionals who had provided their time, free of charge, for the Immortals music events. Funding to develop a 'community piece' was secured. Young people were involved in the writing and staging of the piece, which was delivered in three schools. This was aimed at Year Nine pupils and was followed up with alcohol-related workshops.

Punch and Judy were on stilts and 'ambushed' the school assembly when Year Nine pupils were present. The theatre piece was in five acts (the five stages of drunkenness). Young people from The Immortals, in addition to writing and helping to stage the piece, essentially acted as consultants and were available in an advisory capacity for the events.



Film

One of the young people who was involved in the project stated that they had made a film at school on alcohol awareness and, on reflection, wished that they could make the film again. A local independent filmmaker was able to access local funding to support the young people to make a film. Young people from The Immortals worked with the filmmaker and other artists to develop a script and to make the film. The film was premiered in Barnsley at The Civic Gallery, with many local people, including local commissioners, elected members, and the Mayor, taking time to attend the event.

Practice Points

- One way in which young people were assured that they were being taken seriously was the way in which the initial events reflected their input, work and aspirations. This helped to build trust.
- Consider a number of entry points to the project (under the same branding, with a consistent message) which may meet the needs of a different age group/community.
- Use a small number of trial events to help build the model. Ongoing reflection and consultation with young people will ensure that the project continues to develop and remain relevant.
- Start small. Do not think about scaling up when initiating and developing the project. Let it grow organically

Creating 'Safe Space'

A local project 'Town Rocks' was hosted at the local YMCA, which was used as one of the venues for an early Immortals event. The Town Rocks project lost its funding and this coincided with a view amongst young people that they would like to meet on a more regular basis other than at the bi-monthly events. It was generally felt that there needed to be more regular meetings for the project to 'change lives' and offer an 'alternative lifestyle' as well as an 'alternative social space'.

The YMCA was identified as a potential venue for a weekly group (which was initially called The Immortals Music Group, but is now called 'Safe Space'). There were existing musical instruments and space within the venue for a musical theme to be continued. The project worker was also able to negotiate a rental for the venue through an existing contact. One of the original project workers for Town Rocks was a sound engineer and also had many contacts who were musicians. This individual contributes his time for free at the regular Safe Space sessions. One of the local musicians at one of the early events, also enjoyed the event so much, that he then returned to the project to volunteer. The Safe Space group provides an opportunity for young people to listen to, and play, music and also relax in a comfortable environment.

There are a number of key features of Safe Space that are important and should be regarded as practice points:

- The weekly event provides an additional entry point into The Immortals and is aligned with the Immortals brand that had emerged at the events.
- The regularity of the event provides an opportunity for friendships and cohesion and a sense of community to emerge.
- The weekly event provides an opportunity to become a peer mentor or volunteer.
- The weekly event is an important outlet for maintaining and broadening involvement and for planning the bi-monthly events.
- The venue is comfortable and safe. It has a kitchen and smaller breakout rooms. It also has access to musical instruments:

'You need the right venue. It needs to be somewhere young people feel comfortable. It needs to be somewhere they can develop whatever activity they will be doing and the venue needs to accommodate that activity. You need some kind of hub to get people to come'

- All young people we spoke to felt comfortable within Safe Space and regarded it as a non-judgemental environment:

'You need to be able to express your opinion. It's informal. If you want to sit down and chill out, or be in a group, you can. You can act natural, without putting on a persona that's not quite you'

'A lot of people can relate to some of the stuff that you have been through. It's not a judging place'

- Safe Space and Immortal events are wholly inclusive. Young people appreciate the way in which Safe Space and The Immortals events are open to everyone and are regarded as inclusive:

'Anyone can come, no matter what walk of life or what you are into. There are all sorts of people. Everyone just seems to get along with each other'

- All workers within the Young Addaction core service are now given an introduction to an Immortals Peer Mentor so that they have an opportunity to access the project.
- Peer mentors are used to support some young people to access Safe Space.
- The Safe Space session is a regular, weekly event. It is important for the event to be at the same place, same day and same time every week. Deciding the timings and date of the sessions should be led by young people.
- Safe Space and The Immortals bi-monthly events are free.
- Fun and enjoyable. Young people would not attend Safe Space or The Immortals events if they didn't enjoy them and if they weren't fun. Many of the young people we spoke to had been introduced to Safe Space through 'word of mouth' and were introduced through friends, therefore reinforcing a view that projects designed by young people are relevant to young people:

'Nothing like it in Barnsley – its free, it's enjoyable and it's run by young people'

- Safe Space and The Immortals have art, in the broadest sense, as the key theme running through its approach. The use of art provides a route through which young people can explore their feelings and express themselves whilst having fun with others in a safe environment.
- Early in the process of developing the Monday night Safe Space group a working agreement was drafted by young people – essentially ground rules. These are the community rules and agreed by all. These are revisited on a regular basis.
- Safe Space, like all Immortal events, are facilitated with a light touch by project workers. Relationships, mutual respect and trust is at the root of this approach. 'Silly or risky behaviour' is challenged in an appropriate way and there have never been any scenarios of young people being threatened with exclusion or having time out from the following weeks activities.

Practice Points

- Put processes in place to support new young people into the project. This could be achieved through linking new young people with young people already involved to ease their entry into the project.
- Management need to be aware of the ratio of staff to young people and also need to be mindful of this when identifying potential venues.
- Whilst not letting risk assessments over encumber the project, it is essential that any venue is risk assessed prior to use.

- Data indicates that only 5% of young people attending events had been made aware of them through social media (Young Addaction, 2014); nevertheless, use of Twitter and Facebook are important routes through which events and harm reduction messages have the potential to reach a wider audience.
- Luck and serendipity. Be watchful for opportunities and grasp these as they arise. Decisions often need to be taken quickly. Ensure that project workers have appropriate autonomy to make these decisions.

6 Funders, outcomes and shared values

6.1 Young people-led

A key theme of the original project brief was to raise alcohol awareness with young people. The remit was therefore broad and the only key target was an output linked to contacting a minimum number of young people (n=150). There was therefore significant opportunity for those developing the project to trial a number of potential ways in which to engage young people (and to be able to fail at some of these approaches). We gained a sense from many interviewees that it was a challenge to identify, map and scope out the way in which the project had developed, as much of this had been organic and based on 'luck'. However, the key feature of the project which ensured that the provider had the time and freedom to explore appropriate and relevant ways through which the project could achieve targets, whilst also making a real difference to young people and to the community, was the focus on outputs as a target:

'There were no plans. It was just definitely an organic opportunity'

'It was raw, creative – very creative, never planned, it just kind of happened'

'It has to be the sort of thing that is almost cobbled together. It is patchwork and in many ways that is its strength. It is the bit that makes it valuable...scrambling for funding... I think the struggle to deliver it is part of its strength'

'To some extent it is the learning process that is the valuable thing and the fact that the organisation didn't presuppose it. They genuinely allowed it to grow'

Having young people driving the project as 'experts' and having them fully involved in the planning, design and delivery of the project has ensured that the project is locally appropriate:

'What works in Barnsley might not work somewhere else'

Practice points

- The key building block of the project is the focus on outputs as a target. This provided the freedom for the project to organically grow and develop. There was freedom to experiment and there was little 'fear of failure' from the provider, who was also willing to take 'risks'. Young people were at the heart of the project. They co-designed, planned and delivered the project.

6.2 Funding tensions

In order to sustain the project over a number of years, it has been necessary to secure new funding, from other funding sources. The outcomes for this funding have been more clearly defined and has impacted on the organic growth of the project, which has been re-configured in some areas, in order to meet the defined outcomes for the new funders. There is occasionally a tension when securing new funding with more clearly defined targets. In many respects, this can often be a difficult choice for providers: change the nature of the project or fail to secure the funding and therefore jeopardise the future of the project:

'It was at a point where we knew that we loved it and we wanted it to continue but we needed to shift a little bit to be to access more money, because somebody was never just going to fund a positive activity, they needed to see something about'

There was an ongoing tension between protecting the model and meeting the requirements of funders. In recent years funding has become increasingly 'piecemeal' with each prospective funder demanding their 'own thing, their own branding' – all of which has the potential to influence the shape of the project. The role of those with oversight of the project, in this context, is to attempt to balance the needs of the funder with the values of the project. This was often a challenge:

'Every time you go for some different funding and put some more stuff into it, then you lose more and more of the original model'

The new funding impacted on the project in a number of ways:

A name change:

The Monday evening group name was changed from The Immortals Music Group to Safe Space.

Increased data collection:

As a result of the new funding stream there was an increased expectation for young people to complete forms which monitors their wellbeing, therefore illustrating to funders the impact on outcomes and the 'distance travelled' for each young person accessing Safe Space. Young people whom we spoke to asserted the importance of the project not becoming over-encumbered with data collection and were happy to just give a 'name and number'. If there was a contract, they stated, and then this would be 'too much'.

There was concern amongst a number of interviewees that this approach had the potential to 'make young people who are not service users, into service users'. It was not clear whether this increased monitoring had impacted on the number of those attending, but it was stated that there was 'a lot' of reluctance from a number of young people and a sense that the process indicated a shift of project ownership.

An extension of a service?

There was also a proposal, with the new funding, that the majority of referrals into The Immortals would now come from Young Addaction workers, as the funding was linked to working with 'vulnerable young people'. It was suggested that if this were to happen, then there would be an impact on one of the key aims of the project – 'pro-social modelling' – as the project would no longer be open to a broad range of young people with a range of lifestyles and life experience.

An increased focus on volunteering and peer mentoring

Perhaps, a more positive impact of the new funding has been the increased emphasis on developing peer mentoring and volunteering roles. These have been discussed in more detail above.

Practice points

- More clearly defined outcomes can sometimes prescribe, and narrow, service delivery, in order to meet these defined outcomes, therefore limiting the potential for creativity and organic growth.
- Emphasise with potential funders the benefits of flexible outcomes. Outputs may be one way in which a conversation on a different approach to outcomes could be initiated.
- Ensure that funders share the values and aims of the project.
- Explore with potential funders the different ways in which to report on outcomes, through case studies or stories of significance for example.
- The original funding brief was linked to developing opportunities to engage with young people on alcohol awareness. Later funding was also secured on issues related to wellbeing. However, the breadth of the project, with a focus on community building, engagement and development, broadens potential funding streams.

- It is vital that should new funding become available (funding which may fundamentally shift the focus of the project) young people need to be openly consulted on this. In the case of The Immortals, a decision was taken to accept the funding and shift the approach of the project. The views of young people may well have been to not accept the funding and to close the project – or explore other alternative funding routes. Their views must be respected in this regard.
- At every point, continually link and reflect on, the direction of travel of the project and the original aims of the project.
- To be wholly participatory it is important that young people are provided with the opportunity to have input into funding bids and are able to help shape those bids.

6.3 Funding sources

In the current funding climate it would be very challenging for a project similar to The Immortals to be commissioned through local key commissioners. At a time of austerity, there is, perhaps, increased scrutiny on public spending and this may also coincide with a time when local youth services are being defunded.

From a local commissioner's perspective, there can also be no duplication with existing services within a locality. A project such as The Immortals, may, in this context be challenging to commission.

A similar project requires high levels of innovation and freedom to be creative and to take risks. This may also be difficult for local commissioners, who, in such circumstances may not be able remain at 'arm's length' and may be concerned about 'reputational damage'.

The attraction to local commissioners for projects such as The Immortals is the added value and investment that such projects bring to a locality. For example, the original Immortals project was funded through ASDA. Other funding for local Young Addaction projects, which have brought additionality to the core Young Addaction commissioned service, has been received via Zurich, Big Lottery and Heineken. Much of this funding is often for 'experimental' or pilot projects, which would not have been funded by local commissioners.

Whilst the project was not directly funded by a local commissioner, the relationship with the commissioner is such, that the local commissioner has been supportive of the project. Developing strong and collaborative relationships with local commissioners is important, because, as an ally and supporter of the service, they may be able to signpost the service to other local funding opportunities.

6.4 Contingency Planning

There have been a number of times when the project has been vulnerable due to the funding situation. In these circumstances, management have worked with key partners to contingency plan and to explore ways in which the project could continue, without further funding. For example, the local youth service offered the use of their buildings and volunteers.

Practice Point

- Ensure that young people are involved in contingency planning.

7 Aims and impact of the project

In many respects the overarching aim of the project has been to develop an alcohol awareness model, led by young people. There have been a number of ways in which the project has made an impact and addressed key areas:

7.1 Impact on young people

Building aspiration for young people

It was suggested that, for some young people, there is a lack of opportunities for them to engage in their community, which may 'fuel social isolation and lead to risky behaviour'. It was suggested that The Immortals has created alternative opportunities to positively engage young people in a 'non-invasive way'.

Increased sense of mutuality across young people

Mutual aid is an important part of the functioning of the project. Within the project, and across our consultation with young people, there was a very strong sense of mutuality and mutual respect and young people looking after each other:

'In the way it's grown, it's provided a sense of mutual aid for young people – which is unusual in young people services'

'Young people leading the project and young people supporting other young people'

Making a difference and having a sense of legacy and compassion and nurturing a sense of caring for others was important for at least one young person who was involved in building The Immortals:

'Personal highlight for me is seeing the same people coming – you know you are doing something right. They wouldn't keep coming if they didn't enjoy it. It's seeing people develop as well. There are people who come to the events that you know have had problems, so for them to be able to come and go socialising without that influence of alcohol or drugs, that's been one of the best things. Nowt worse than being someone vulnerable on streets'

There was also a sense of pride and compassion from young people who helped to develop The Immortals in relation to the needs of young people who are now engaging with the project:

'It's just helping other young people. There's so many people in Barnsley who have no money, they've got nothing to do and there's a space for them to come to, where it's safe. It was nice to go to events and see them enjoying themselves, instead of being outside the bus station, freezing'

It was suggested that the project has much potential when linked to recovery for young people (in the broadest sense) and mutual aid between young people. The model was regarded as unique in the context of young people's substance misuse services.

Building friendships and meeting other young people

Many young people agreed that they have built friendships with many other young people from within the town, many of whom they would never have previously met:

'You definitely see friendships being built'

'I've made friends – really close friends'

'As friends, it's brought us a lot closer'

'Met other young people that I wouldn't have met without The Immortals. Different groups of young people – see them at college – 'oh, 'ey up'; they are still coming to The Immortals events'

In terms of feeling connected, 100% of Safe Space participants reported feeling more interested in other people in a survey conducted in 2014 (Young Addaction).

Increased confidence and building protective factors

There was a consensus that involvement with the project had helped to build confidence and protective factors for young people:

'For young people who have been involved with planning and the hands on development it has given them confidence'

'So much more confident. I am not just more confident working with people my own age, but working with adults too'

'I felt valued – everyone who came to the events knew who I was'

This supports a survey conducted in 2014 (Young Addaction), wherein 89% of participants had improved their self-esteem and reported feeling better about themselves and more confident.

Developed skills, experiences, and opened options, for young people

Through involvement with the project, young people have developed skills and the project has provided many unique opportunities for those involved. For some young people, the experience of The Immortals has impacted on their future aspirations, and perhaps, increased their skills in relation to employability:

'It has given them excellent stuff to put on their CV. It has given them opportunities when they have been writing their personal statements for university. It ticks a lot of boxes'

'It's on all our CVs and personal statement'

'The experience. I became a peer mentor, something that will look good for me later on in life'

'It's something that's good for your CV'

This supports findings from a survey conducted with young people attending Safe Space in 2014 (Young Addaction) which found that over three-quarters of young people (78%) surveyed felt they had learned new skills.

Many young people were surprised that they had become volunteers and peer mentors – as this was something that they would previously have not considered. It had also unearthed an instinct that had previously been dormant and prompted them to contemplate helping other people at a broader level:

'I want to be a social worker. Not something I would have thought about before'

'Rekindled the sort of work I want to do. I started off doing plumbing, but this has opened the door to me. I've considered going into healthcare'

'It's made a difference to some of the choices I am making now. When I was 15 I wouldn't have dreamt of volunteering or doing anything to work with people my age, Now, I love it'

'I had no opportunities till I came here'

A number of young people, who were involved in creating The Immortals a number of years ago are now volunteering for Young Addaction.

'I see things in a different way now. I think about the planning side, costs, funding'

The project has provided new and unique experiences for some young people. This included attending a premiere for their own film, visiting the House of Lords, receiving national awards and working with a range of adult professionals.

7.2 Key themes of The Immortals

There are two key strands of work that have emerged from The Immortals:

1. Creating a safe environment for young people to come together, socialise, 'have a good time' and enjoy music without using drugs and alcohol.
2. To develop a breadth of engagement opportunities for young people, over and above the opportunities that have been historically developed by substance misuse services:

'It is mixing it up a bit really. It is a different space for engagement in a way where young people feel like they want to engage, but then giving the opportunities to engage in a different way, which they may not have thought about'

A number of key Immortals themes have also emerged as the project has developed:

Social norms and challenging stigma

It was suggested that through creating spaces and 'positive venues' where 'young people who are engaged with society meet young people who are not as engaged with society' the project provides an opportunity to develop mutual understanding and creates 'positive peers and positive opportunities'. The Immortals provides an opportunity for positive peer social interaction. Lack of positive peer interaction and diversionary activity is often an undermining factor for young people who are experiencing substance misuse problems as it is difficult to change if nothing is changing around you (Beevers, 2015):

'The Monday night group is an opportunity to meet new young people in a safe environment where drugs are not the focus. New faces are not introduced to the group as a Young Addaction client. They are just a new face so there is no stigma attached which was important'

It was also suggested that the project has addressed wider societal stigma of young people and has challenged a pre-conceived view of groups of young people amongst some members of the broader community.

One of the key aims of The Immortals is to show other young people that there is another way – you do not need to drink to have a good time. The Immortals are approaching changing normalised and learnt behaviour within their community by trying to change what is perceived as normal within their culture. The Immortals approach supports this initiative by providing a platform for young people to get involved in activities which promote a different social norm. It supports young people in creating their own social norm by offering opportunities to reduce risk and health related problems in an exciting and creative way, empowering their community in culture change (Beevers, 2015)

Safer drinking and harm reduction awareness

As discussed, a key aim of the original group of young people who developed The Immortals was to challenge the perception and social norm of drinking alcohol to have a good time. In many respects, one of the key strengths of the project has been the ways in which it has provided a route for young people to become involved in developing preventative messages for other young people. Young people worked with project staff to develop safer drinking messages, which are on the reverse side of all The Immortals flyers and promotional material. The flyers are widely distributed across the locality, so not only are the flyers promoting the event, they are also consistently promoting the safer drinking messages. When designing the flyers, it was also envisaged that the flyers would be 'cool' and young people would collect them, thereby having a constant reminder of the safer drinking message. It was important for young people to illustrate how it was possible to have a 'really good time without drinking'. From the conception of the project, young people knew that they wanted to promote safety and to promote choice. The safer drinking and harm reduction message has been maintained as a strong theme throughout the project and has not been diluted since the conception of the project:

'Messages – I'm not sure whether they will look at them or not, but it's just that they're there. We are trying to promote safe drinking as best we can. That's another thing, we have always said that we can't stop young people drinking – it's been going on for years – there's no way we could stop it. But just make it safe for them and give them something to think about, to look at when they drinking'

'They have gained a lot of up to date information around drug trends, fact rather than fiction around drug use, it is also underpinned with harm reduction as well'

'The nights have been drug and alcohol free, and people have had a good time, that's what we wanted to do'

Recovery

Whilst it was acknowledged that many young people may not necessarily relate to recovery, in the context of individual recovery, which may not be regarded as 'cool', young people may engage with the concept of 'community recovery'. The Immortals, it was suggested, has enabled the Young Addaction service in Barnsley to focus on developing and building community capital amongst young people. Indeed, as discussed above, the project has built a sense of mutuality amongst many of the young people attending The Immortals and has provided a vehicle for young people to offer support to each other and to engage with other young people from across the locality. In a survey conducted in 2014, 100% of young people questioned reported feeling more active in their community, with over three-quarters of participants (78%) feeling a part of something bigger (Young Addaction, 2014).

Early intervention

It was acknowledged that many young people engaging with The Immortals would not be regarded as the 'hardest to reach' and the most vulnerable and challenging. However, it was suggested that a number of young people accessing the project may be on the cusp of engaging in negative behaviour patterns and the diversionary nature of the activities may have positively impacted on their trajectory. The Immortals also provides a vehicle through which harm reduction messages can reach many young people at a potential early point in their drug/alcohol journey. In this respect, an element of the work undertaken by the project could be regarded as an early intervention. Through the link with Young Addaction, young people are also provided with the knowledge, and indirect contact with, a local substance misuse service, should this be required.

Practice Point

- A key theme of this report has been to underscore the importance of the flexibility of funders when outlining outcomes for similar projects. Nevertheless, The Immortals has demonstrated a number of ways in which the project has made a difference to young people and this information could therefore be used to support future funding applications, to indicate potential impact.

8 Partnership working and networks

Prior to the creation of The Immortals, Young Addaction had been established within the locality for some time and had built networks, relationships and a reputation within Barnsley. However, it is also important to note that many of the partnerships that have been developed in connection with The Immortals have been partnerships that have been outside of the scope of the traditional health and wellbeing sector. These partnerships were in the arts sector and with the private sector (venues and local businesses). Indeed, a key strength of the project has been the way that the project has developed partnerships with a broad spectrum of partners and the ways in which networks across a range of sectors have been drawn upon to support the development of the project. The initial creative input from one key individual was vital, as was the ability to draw on her networks and contacts to support the project. This included a graphic designer and artists who would be able to support the Pop Up events. Similarly, contact with a local musician, who supports the Safe Space group has also provided access to additional contacts and networks. The development of partnerships with local businesses and other third sector and private sector organisations has also been instrumental to the success of the project. One interviewee described this as community spirit:

'Community spirit, community engagement. Businesses and professionals within the community have engaged with the project and have given their services for free. They have seen the benefit of the project, changed their ethos when thinking about young people'

Practice Points

- This ability to explore, identify, seek out and establish new partnerships is an important part of the work of the project worker. Networking is central to the role of the project worker.
- It is important for any similar project not to be regarded locally as a 'parachute project', with a short term focus, linked to short term funding. It is important that there is a partnership approach and a focus on long-term involvement and sustainability. Developing local partnerships are an important element of long term commitment to a locality.

Whilst having an established core service within a locality provides a stronger foundation from which to build a project, it is important to note that it is the values and the approach taken by the provider that will build the project; therefore, the project does not necessarily need to have an established base within a locality to build such a project.

Be open when providing opportunities for all community members, including local businesses, to contribute towards the project.

9 Roles and ownership

9.1 Defining roles

For young people, one of the key appeals of the project was the stated intention of Young Addaction, as discussed at the initial meetings, to fully involve and immerse young people in the planning of the project. Young people felt this was unique:

'...it's always been adults who have been in control of the stuff. Like being parented really.

Whereas they said that we have the opportunity to plan these events. Young people will be in control of them'

Young people throughout the delivery of the project have been self-motivated and have bought into, and helped to create The Immortals ethos. Promoting the ongoing involvement of young people did not require a 'carrot or stick' from project workers. Young people were trusted and they were given responsibility. In discussion with young people, it was stated that this was what they, as young people, wanted:

'Just all the responsibility they have given us – that is something that kids want – they want responsibility, they want to be able to use their ideas. There probably is somewhere where you go and get that hour a night – but nowhere has got it where it's your ideas'

Young people feel that The Immortals is 'their project'; they own it and have taken responsibility for it. It is evident that without the involvement of young people, there would be no Immortals. The views of young people are listened to and, very often, acted upon. Young people feel that they are fully involved in the project and feel that they have driven the project:

'We pretty much plan the events'

'We say what we want and they make it happen, within reason'

'The fact that we are very heavily involved in the conversations about planning, even things that we wouldn't have thought about – the ratio of workers to young people...we were involved in everything'

There was a huge sense of pride amongst young people when reflecting on their achievements:

'We feel like it's ours. We are really proud of it'

The Immortals was described as a co-operative. Indeed much of the project has been co-produced between workers and young people. This was a view supported across many interviews. Generally speaking, many of the ideas for the project and for events come from young people. The role of the host/facilitator is to work with young people, and other partners, to convert these ideas into practice.

9.2 Project staff

The role of Young Addaction is that of the 'host' and the specific role of individual project workers is that of 'facilitators'. Key qualities and attributes of staff when working on similar projects were discussed. Some of these have been detailed below:

- Workers who believe in the potential of what young people can achieve in their own right
- Non-judgemental
- Good understanding of harm reduction
- Good understanding of young people's rights
- Knowledge of youth and community work
- Understanding of youth arts (and an understanding of the ladder of participation and how this theory works in conjunction with arts and creativity)
- Ability to plan events
- Willing to 'take a chance'
- Be opportunistic, open minded and positive.

The project role allowed individual workers to use a blend of skills, with a high degree of autonomy and flexibility within their role. This can be both a refreshing and challenging experience. The opportunity to work in equal partnership with young people was regarded as a unique and rewarding experience by those working on the project:

'I have never been allowed to work in equal partnership with young people like this before. It's been amazing'

'You need to be opportunistic. Take your chances where you can get them. Take the opportunities and you need to be very open minded'

'The young people own it, not you, so your role is purely to facilitate what they want'

'The young people are the experts – not you'

'You need to take a lot of risks'

'You've got to be able to work WITH young people as partners rather than a worker and a client'

'Somebody who believes in the innate strengths of people and communities'

'Somebody who is going to allow the project to grow organically whilst keeping an eye on the necessity for the structure'

Young people also held project workers in high regard and there was a strong sense of real partnership and parity between project workers and young people:

'They talk to you like you're one of them, don't talk down to you. They listen to your opinions. You can have a proper discussion. It's not like someone watching over'

'It's not like they're better than you'

'You don't have to act different around them. It's comfortable'

During the delivery of the project, one of the key challenges for workers has been balancing 'client work' and their caseload with work on The Immortals. Amongst those who have worked as facilitators on the project there was a view that the role was a full-time job. Work involves the development of the project and support for peer mentoring and volunteering, the day to day running of the project, networking, and the development and promotion of the events and the weekly Safe Space group.

Practice Points

- A dedicated practitioner may be needed to 'get the project off the ground' and to establish the project. Access to an activities budget is also preferable. However, it may be possible to use some of the time of an existing worker within a project and to be creative using partnerships and other local assets to help build the project.
- Ensure that an appropriate and experienced project worker is recruited in the role and that appropriate training is available to support them in their role.

9.3 Role of management

There has been a consistently light touch from management in relation to The Immortals. Project workers have been provided with the freedom to develop the project in partnership with young people.

Management trusted the instincts, and the practice, of the project workers and was provided with regular feedback on the progress of the project. Autonomy was regarded as important by project workers:

'Being left alone... that trust to enable the workers to get on and develop without being micro- managed. Management know what outcomes they want but we were not force fed to get those outcomes'

The key challenge for management has been, wherever possible, to maintain a 'hands off' approach with the project.

A key role of management has been to ensure that risk assessments are in place and completed and to ensure that the work has been 'safe'. This was specifically the case for the events, as this was a new experience for all workers involved and for the service. Developing a culture that was less risk averse has been an important strand of the work. Appropriate risks have been assessed, but not to the extent that this process has over encumbered the flexible and creative nature of the project.

Practice Point

Management role is to ensure that the project is being delivered safely and to offer support and guidance. The management role needs to be light touch, as similar projects should also be young person led and not service led.

10 Young Addaction

10.1 Enhancing the Young Addaction brand

The Immortals is well known and identifiable within Barnsley. Whilst there is a recognisable link with Young Addaction, The Immortals also has a strong sense of being a separate and autonomous entity. This was supported by one young person:

'There's quite a big difference between Young Addaction and the Immortals. I feel like The Immortals is ours and Young Addaction is a company. We don't have much to do with Young Addaction'

Nevertheless, projects such as The Immortals have the potential to highlight and promote the broader work of the service locally. For example, The Immortals has won several awards (local awards for its contribution to live music and the national Marsh Media Award for reducing stigma in recovery using technology) and has therefore raised the visibility and profile of Young Addaction within Barnsley. This has the potential to mark Young Addaction out as an organisation that is creative and innovative and is willing to take risks.

Such projects also create an opportunity to work with young people as a 'client group' and cohort. They are therefore usually beyond the traditional remit of young people with substance misuse issues, and extend the reach of Young Addaction, illustrating the potential of Young Addaction to work beyond the boundaries of its traditional sector.

10.2 Policy and governance issues

It is important that lessons learned when developing The Immortals are communicated upwards within Addaction to influence the development of organisational policy-making and governance. It is evident that if governance was followed 'to the letter', then The Immortals would not have emerged and evolved. In order for the project to progress

there has been a light touch application of governance at local level. An example is the ratio of staff to young people. Young Addaction policy states a client/staff ratio of 2:1. This ratio was developed for its application to the traditional work of Young Addaction as a substance misuse provider and is not relevant to the broader Immortals settings. Workers and management in other Young Addaction projects may be unwilling to explore the potential of such a project without the support of organisational governance and policy. It is therefore vital that learning from this project is fed into, and influences, Young Addaction policies.

10.3 Other local settings

There are clearly advantages for Young Addaction should the organisation develop similar projects at other sites and include similar projects in future tender proposals. Fundamentally, such a project provides additionality and added value. Many of the advantages of the project have been outlined in this paper, including the way in which the project creates unique opportunities for young people to participate. Moreover, a key part of the work of services such as Young Addaction, when working with clients, is to explore diversionary opportunities with young people and to build their capacity to make better choices. Through the client/worker relationship, diversion techniques and tools can be developed, however, The Immortals provides an opportunity for workers to directly signpost and refer young people into a positive local engagement opportunity. The project also provides an opportunity for young people to 'give back'. Whilst a dedicated worker to support such a project would be desirable, it may be possible to explore the development of a similar project using the allocated time of a project worker. There may also be opportunities, once established, for local groups to take over the running of such projects and the project could then become community owned. Independent funding could then be sought through streams such as crowdfunding or through developing the project as a social enterprise.

10.4 The Future

Young Addaction Barnsley have received further funding from Barnsley Area Council Youth Programme to deliver the Immortals Community Engagement Project to young people in specific locations in the Central area of Barnsley. The Immortals will continue to engage young people and support them to plan, develop and deliver activities of their choice and engage others in their local area. The Immortals team will support young people to build confidence and resilience, learn new skills, gain qualifications and experience and engage with their communities, making a positive difference for themselves and other young people. Young Addaction will endeavour to support the implementation of young person led, community development activities within all of its services in the future and will seek the resources to achieve this.

References:

- Beevers, C (2015) Leading innovation and change
- Young Addaction Barnsley (2014) The Immortals Report

The Immortals: Key Learning review and report has been carried out on behalf of Addaction by Sounding Board Consultancy.