



## London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Culture for keeps:  
encouraging participation

The attainment of looked-after children has been of great concern – both at a national and local level. During the last two years, the council has identified that more support and resources are needed to raise the attainment, achievement, school attendance and well-being of this vulnerable group of children and young people. The council is bidding for the second generation of Public Service Agreement funding and looked-after children is a key performance indicator.

The programme will focus on breaking down the barriers that prevent looked-after children from accessing and benefiting from cultural experiences. The aim is to promote inclusion and encourage participation in existing and planned programmes.

There are approximately 110 looked-after children cared for by the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. Not all of these children live in or near the borough and the group, by its nature, tends to be fluid as children's circumstances change. We believe that this group of children and young people should have every opportunity to experience culture in the same way that children living locally with their parents do and that exposure to and engagement with cultural activities, will have a positive impact on their attainment, achievement and well-being. The council has good cultural services and want to build on this base, to support the priority given to looked-after children, and demonstrate the value of cultural activity and the benefits of an integrated response to shared priorities.

We recognise that there are significant barriers to accessing local cultural activities for looked-after children and their carers. These young people's lives are subject to a lot of instability – changes in care placement, school, foster carer or a social worker. These changes, associated traumas and other difficulties, limit their access to cultural opportunities. The aim of the programme is to help break down some of these barriers, to promote inclusion, encourage participation and develop a universal offer of engagement with cultural services for this group of vulnerable young people and their carers.

The programme is planned to run during two years from April 2005 to March 2007. It will target looked-after children and their carers on the basis of identified needs and interests. It will not, however, target looked-after children as a homogeneous group. Needs and interests will be identified in liaison between the education facilitator in the Looked-After Children team, the participation worker, the Looked-After Children's steering group and cultural services officers.

The programme will encourage and support looked-after children, to participate in a wide range of activities. Sports sessions and courses will be provided with partners, such as Brentford Football in the Community; Thames Young Mariners Outdoor Education Centre; the Chatterbooks reading group; several library sessions and schemes; Artful open exhibition and art clubs; and a Dance Festival, which will include Dance Moves.

Carers will be encouraged to support participation, through discussion and training in foster carers' support groups and family learning opportunities.

Outcomes:

- raised educational attainment and school attendance of this group of children and young people
- the improved well-being of this group, by raising their self-esteem and feelings of achievement via a variety of cultural experiences
- raised awareness and knowledge on the part of carers and officers

Aspirations or anticipated outputs include:

- two or three places on targeted sports development team courses and holiday camps, where looked-after children are participating
- two or three places on targeted sports centre courses, where looked-after children are participating
- a total of 20 children, to participate in the libraries summer reading game
- from five to 10 children, to participate in Chatterbooks' reading groups
- all looked-after children, to participate in the extended Bookstart scheme
- family learning programmes and projects with the involvement of 10 families
- a total of 20 children, to participate in 'Larks in the Parks'

Other outputs will include those that relate to individual children; for example, library membership and use, attendance at after-school art clubs and holiday art activities.

An April 2007 review, by the Looked-After Children's steering group, who monitored and evaluated the following:

- outputs such as participation and attendance through existing service mechanisms
- educational attainment and school attendance outcomes
- qualitative outcomes, using the Inspiring Learning For All framework
- the effectiveness of activities, programmes and training opportunities, in breaking down the identified barriers
- elements of good practice in the provision of each cultural activity which helped encourage participation and engagement

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