Building partnerships during COVID-19

Partnerships with arts organisations can be hard to establish and sustain, especially with all of the current pressures related to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, many arts and cultural organisations have great digital offers, which could offer a great opportunity to re-imagine what a partnership could be.

Firstly, consider these questions:

» What do you want from an arts partner? CPD for staff, skills and experiences for students, a platform to share work or projects to improve the school environment?

» Is your current focus on recovery and wellbeing?

» Or could this be the time to experiment with new artforms?

And take these three simple steps:

» Use our online LookUp platform to search for arts organisations. Apply the Artsmark filter for more tailored support

» Find inspiration in our regular Schools E-news

» Book your free place at an upcoming Creative INSET or Artsmark Connects session, co-delivered by a variety of arts and cultural organisations, many of whom are Artsmark Partners

Top 10 tips for developing partnerships

1. Think local
Approach your local library, museum, music hub, LCEP or independent arts practitioner to see what they can offer

2. Take the lead
Tell prospective partners what you want and co-design a bespoke project together

3. Go outside

With current restrictions in place on meeting indoors, why not try creative sessions outside? Speak to sculptors, musicians, architects and storytellers to see what they can offer

4. Focus on digital

Try something new, such as podcasting, animation or VR

5. Create an inclusive project

Connect with a local special school and work together on building an arts partnership, with the aim of developing a project that is accessible and inclusive

6. Develop a joint funding bid

Utilise fundraising expertise within arts organisations to work on a joint funding bid

7. Let potential partners come to you

Ask the person who manages your admin@ or office@ inbox to forward on emails they receive from arts organisations

8. Get recommendations

Speak to other schools about how they are managing partnerships at the moment and get recommendations for arts organisations working in a COVID-secure way

9. Plan ahead

Identify events or celebrations in the coming school year which could involve an external artist or arts organisation, for example Black History Month or World Book Day

10. Reflect on your school development plan

Are there any areas within your plan that could be addressed by utilising arts practitioners or arts organisations? Examples could be inviting in a storyteller to improve speaking and listening, or working with a drama practitioner to plan a series of workshops focused on raising attainment in literacy

Case Studies

We checked in with Artsmark Partners to see how they've adapted their offers to be delivered digitally during the pandemic. Check out case studies below for ideas on how to structure your own digital partnership projects.

Pegasus Opera Company
Writer: Sonia Hyams

Pegasus Opera Company is a small arts organisation based in Brixton, South-West London, making a big impact. Our mission as a Black-led organisation is to take opera and music making activities to diverse and underserved communities. We want to ensure that the company thrives during these challenging times by working swiftly and responsively to the needs of our community.

When Covid-19 restrictions were put in place last March, our first action was to check in with our partners to see how we could continue to deliver the wonderful projects we had started. One of these projects is the 'Music Mentoring Programme' for Secondary School students, which works with young people who may feel disengaged with school and may be at risk of exclusion. We then collaborated with a music practitioner and mentor to use music as a way of helping the students express themselves by creating their own compositions and undertaking an Arts Award.

To continue delivering this programme live, we worked closely with school partners via their online learning platforms. We adapted our activities so students can work independently and have access to all the resources they need to participate. Often

this involves pre-recording backing tracks for them to make music with, introducing them to free music applications to make their own backing tracks, and posting videos of our practitioners doing the activity themselves to model the best way to carry out the activity. We rely on the support of our partners to ensure the participants remember to attend sessions and follow up with any students who have not been able to attend.

It was vital that the young people themselves were involved in the planning and design of the site, so we employed a brilliant young web designer and facilitator who led two sessions with the participants to collaborate in creating the design of what became our online music store. The students designed their own album covers and wrote their own songs — all of which were uploaded to the site in our virtual music store. The participants talked about a site that had maximum interactivity, so in addition to sharing their music, the web designer created instruments, which can be clicked on to hear the instrument being played as well as a juke box that includes a music quiz.

Pegasus also continued to deliver Primary School projects over this period. Our project entitled 'Confident Creators' delivered regular face-to-face INSET sessions with non-arts teachers to develop skills to use music and drama as a creative approach in teaching core subjects. With teachers facing many challenges with online learning, we ran a number of online 'live' INSET sessions and have now created a series of videos for teachers to use as a creative toolkit in their classroom as an online resource. Feedback from Lambeth teachers illustrated that warm-ups focusing on breathing, well-being, and music activities linked to specific curriculum topics would be most useful. These audio-visual assets, which are a helpful resource to further embed the arts and creativity across the school curriculum, can be used online and in the classroom for years to come.

As we navigate 2021, we will continue working closely with our school partners to maintain our partnerships, ensuring that we keep the lines of communication open so that we can stay flexible and responsive to their needs.
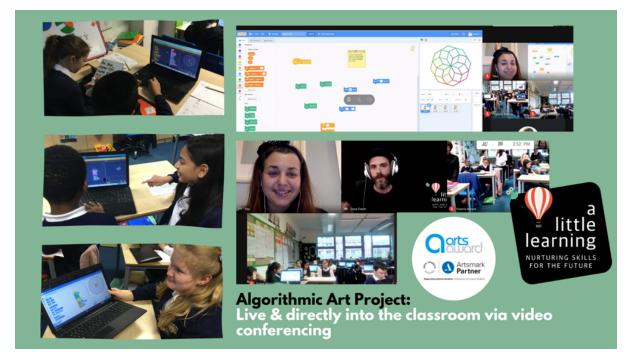
Find out more: https://www.pegasusoperacompany.org/artsmark-schools-offer

Contact: admin@pegopera.org

A Little Learning
Writer: Francesca Gkotsi

Algorithmic Art Project:
Live & directly into the classroom via video conferencing

A Little Learning is a programme of arts and culture, technology, and young leadership provided in partnership with schools and organisations to nurture skills for the future in children and young people. We partnered with Keir Hardie Primary to deliver Algorithmic Art, a tried and tested project and CPD popular for its truly interdisciplinary nature and its ability to engage learners. It is a cross-curricular arts, mathematics, and digital project (computing) designed to expose children to digital art whilst increasing enjoyment of teaching and learning about mathematics through technology. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project could not take place in person as planned. Algorithmic Art was pushed to the Autumn term for the project to be adapted to be delivered digitally via video conferencing platforms.

Openness to new ways of working, adaptability, and a can-do attitude from both Keir Hardie's and A Little Learning's teams meant that the pandemic did not put a pause to their Artsmark journey or the creative opportunities for teachers and students. Instead, it enabled them to try new and exciting ways of working in partnership.

Our team, along with the school's Artsmark Lead and a member of SLT, began with a planning session to ensure the project would respond to the school's needs, fit with the Artsmark aims and objectives, and challenged the school to try new and innovative ways to embed creative learning throughout their Artsmark journey. Further sessions were planned with other members of staff to ensure the project could run remotely as well as address any safeguarding concerns.

A Little Learning facilitators then ran a two hour online briefing for key staff, talking through how the entire programme will run, the Arts Award element, and the digital requirements for the project. The teachers then tested some of the practical tasks and examined the mathematical and computing element of the programme to ensure it

was pitched at the right level of the students' prior learning. Padlet, a digital platform used to share resources, updates, extension activities, inspirational videos, and Arts Award information and resources, enabled children to work independently and at their own pace, taking responsibility for their own learning journeys.

At last, the whole of Keir Hardie's Year 5 cohort was taught weekly for six weeks by the facilitators between November and December 2020. Lessons took place simultaneously online using Google Classrooms and in physical classrooms with teachers and support staff. The benefits of the programme being delivered digitally meant that children isolating were included as they were able to join the session from their homes as well.

The feedback from teachers tells us that the project and the way it was run enhanced their practice (and A Little Learning's for that matter). They commented how exposing the children to real content had sparked an interest in digital creative industries and they wanted to find out more — an unexpected result for teachers but an integral part of the project's design. The teachers and students developed a range of skills from coding to design and composition, as well as artistic process and team working.

Through this process, A Little Learning developed their digital delivery programme and was commissioned to run a series of CPD sessions on Digital Learning for East London primary schools via the Creative Schools Programme, delivering a whole programme of exciting, creative digital projects for schools involving literacy, numeracy, games design, animation, and music technology.

Find out more: https://www.alittlelearning.org/

Contact: info@alittlelearning.org