

Designing with Children

The Station

The Station is a youth centre in the middle of Bristol opened in summer 2009. Young Bristol, the bid organisation, secured more than £5m from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG), on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), to this end. The Station was a myplace project, a programme launched in 2007 by the Department for Children, Schools and Families which aimed to deliver youth facilities across the UK at a local level. This was part of the government's Aiming High for Young People strategy, whose aim has been to improve young people's access to positive activities.

Eleven local young people, aged 15-23, were framed as clients, design consultants and decision makers, actively informing the design process for the Station over a period of six months. In tandem with the launch of the project, the young people's work was furthered by the Sorrell Foundation in a two-month programme of activities. Overall, the Sorrell Foundation coordinated 15 myplace projects over a 6-month period in 2009. Under its guidance, the bid teams created client teams of local young people, which were then joined up with selected creative teams of architects, branding experts and creative advisers to work with young people's aspirations and briefs. The Sorrell Foundation's joinedupdesign approach comprised the following stages:

- planning and preparation: engaging the community, bid selection;
- the conversation: cooperation between the creative and client team, workshops, inspirational visits, initial discussions on the brief development;
- design concepts: making final adjustments to the brief, concept presentations; and
- celebration: celebrating the project closure with a major event.

Motivation

What

Youth centre facility in the centre of Bristol

Where

Bristol, United Kingdom

Age

15-23 years old

Group Size

11 local young people

Project Stage

Brief

Children's Roles

Clients, Expert Consultants

Timescale

Summer 2009

Partners

Stride Treglown (Designer)
Kim Tilbrook RIO (Facilitation)
Creative Youth Network (Facilitation)
Young Bristol (Bid Organisation)
SPY (Branding)
Local young people from Bristol (Participants)

The different agents involved in the project share some core beliefs that provide the rationale for young people's active involvement in the design of the youth centre.

The myplace programme was driven by the active participation of young people, particularly disadvantaged young people, in the development, design and running of the youth centres. Young people made up half of the committee deciding on myplace investments and each individual myplace project also had to demonstrate participation of local young people.

The Sorrell Foundation applied its joinedupdesign model to a range of programmes, including myplace, under the following principles: that children and young people, i.e. the end users of education, youth and leisure facilities, should have a client role in the design of projects. Not only are they seen as consumers of youth provision, but thanks to their active engagement they are also intended to become informed clients helping to develop and deliver fit-for-purpose services.

The Real Ideas Organisation (RIO) also took a role in the project. RIO's aims (to assist young people in becoming social entrepreneurs and making positive change happen in their own lives, schools, youth groups and communities) echoed those of the Sorrell Foundation. The Sorrell Foundation's work is driven by the understanding that giving young people the role of clients and actively involving them in the design of their youth centres can create an in-depth, sustained conversation with architects, designers and communities.

Children's involvement

The project was inspired by young people's wish to have a space in the centre of Bristol where they could meet and develop their talents through appropriate guidance and training. In this context, they asked for a cafe to be a central element of their centre. Young Bristol proposed the conversion of a listed former fire station in the town centre to become the new youth centre (Old Fire Station in Bridewell Island, next to Broadmead). After collaboration with SPY it was decided that the centre should be named 'The Station', thus safeguarding the site's heritage.

These key decisions having been made, the young team then identified the main facilities for the centre which informed the design brief: cafe, theatre/venue, gym, chill-out zone, music/film making studio, art studio, dance studio. Having established the selection criteria for the candidates, they interviewed three leading design practices and awarded the design of 'The Station' to Stride Treglowan.

Day-long, inspirational visits to London and Bristol, supported by the Sorrell Foundation, enabled the young clients to engage in dialogue with other stakeholders and service providers. Other activities involved taking photographs of buildings and identifying likes and dislikes; looking at design language and feeding back to the design brief; and working with the graphic designers to brand the project.

Outputs and outcomes

On 10th September 2009 the design project was presented by the young team to a Bristol audience of more than 200 people in a celebration event at the Old Fire Station itself. The brand was launched with lights and banners.

Documentation of the process by the Sorrell Foundation (2010) gives an overview of the

benefits of myplace for young people in all UK locations where this developed. As a result of myplace in Bristol and in other locations, young clients were overall reported to have learned how to collaborate, engage in decision making and present their case with arguments. Through their active engagement in designing their youth centre, they built understanding of the responsibilities involved in such an endeavour as members of their communities, as well as understanding the implications of a design and build process. They gained knowledge about organisational, aesthetic and design issues and also built self-esteem through their inputs. Since The Station opened, the Bristol client team have made presentations to groups of stakeholders and remained an integral part of the youth centre.

Quotes

'When I look at the brand, it looks like our work. SPY really listened to what we said' (Client, Bristol, in The Sorrell Foundation, 2010, p. 36).

'The creative team has really taken on board what we have said. It feels very inspirational to see the results' (Client, Bristol, in The Sorrell Foundation, 2010, p. 21).

'This is brilliant news for the young people of the city. We've had a vision for such a facility for the last eight years and now it's just a couple of years away from becoming a reality. The young consultants that have been involved in planning this world-class facility have ensured that it will have everything that local young people want and need' (Trevor Jones, CE of Young Bristol).

Resources

Creative Youth Network (2012) 'Press: Action Stations At £5.75 Million Youth Hub For Bristol Apprentice' <http://www.creativeyouthnetwork.org.uk/news-events/press-releases/creative-youth-network/action-stations-at-%C2%A35.75-million-youth-hub-for-bristol-apprentice.html> (accessed 4 July 2013).

Myplace 'Press release myplace Bristol' <http://www.myplacesupport.co.uk/myplace-Bristol-The-Station/press-release-myplace-bristol.html> (accessed 17 March 2013).

Real Ideas Organisation <http://realideas.org/news/2009/09/30/myplacebristol> (accessed 4 July 2013).

The Sorrell Foundation (2010) 'Joinedupdesign for myplace. Engaging young people in youth centre design'. Online. Available: <http://www.thesorrellfoundation.com/media/pdf/joinedupdesign-for-myplace.pdf> (accessed 4 July 2013).



*Th Station, Bristol. Courtesy: Kenton Simons – Story
Photography/Stride Treglown*