



THE BIG GREEN UMBRELLA – EVALUATION REPORT



1. Introduction to the Project

1.a Background

The Big Green Umbrella took place on 26th and 27th April 2008 at the Oxford Brookes Student Union. This was the second collaborative showcase of its kind in Oxfordshire, following the success of last year's Big Umbrella held at the Oxford Town Hall. This year's event brought together 17 different Youth Groups, involving over 150 young performers and artists from across the whole of Oxfordshire in two live performances inspired by an environmental theme.

Last year's Big Umbrella had come out of two past OYAP Trust projects, the first being 'Securing the Voice and Views of Young People', a youth consultation commissioned by Arts Council England South East, which found:

"The young people desire easy access to and information about a wide range of diverse activities and chances to get involved – including opportunities to show their own work and experience that of other young people"

Le Brocq & Prue, 2006

The environmentally aware showcase also acted as a 'springboard' for OYAP Trust's Zero Footprint project, which will support the development of environmentally friendly youth arts projects throughout Oxfordshire. The Big Green Umbrella aimed to raise awareness of, and generate interest in, this project.

2.b Aims and Objectives

The Big Green Umbrella aimed to provide an opportunity for young people to showcase their own work as well as see other young artists work, in a safe supportive environment. It is part of a programme of 'festival' events to encourage, develop and celebrate all that youth arts has achieved in Oxfordshire.



The Big Green Umbrella aimed to be environmentally aware. It offered a platform for young people to focus on environmental issues in their work, and share their work with others. Groups were encouraged to use the platform as an opportunity to make their views about the environment known, to use recycled and found materials and to consider the environmental impact of their work.

Helen Le Brocq, director of OYAP Trust said:

"The Big Green Umbrella sees an electrifying mix of young performers from all arts backgrounds performing together on an environmental theme. There is nothing else like it, young people never fail to surprise and challenge us, and the Big Green Umbrella is their chance to demonstrate their voice creatively."

In order to better understand the impact and importance of this work, OYAP Trust has sought written feedback from participants, group organisers, VIPs, partners and staff in the form of a questionnaire. The findings of this data are included in this report and it is hoped that this information can be used to inform and improve future events.

3. Partners

The initiative produced by OYAP Trust and funded by the Department of Children, Schools and Families through the Youth Opportunities Fund.

4. Summary

- The Big Green Umbrella fulfilled its main purpose to provide an environmentally aware platform event for young artists to show their work and see others from Oxfordshire and was a well attended and organised event.
- The event offered a variety of opportunities for young people to see and experience a range of performance arts and was well received by both young people and adult audience members.
- The event created a link between essentially disparate arts groups (including school and out of



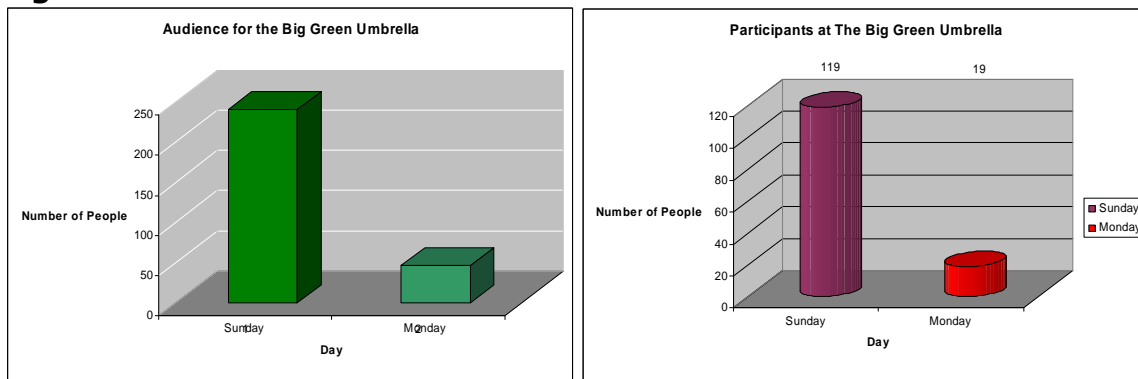
hours and youth groups) to create a sense of the artistic identity of young people in Oxford.

- Participants benefited from an increased sense of confidence and pride in their own and appreciation of others work and the legacy of the benefits are demonstrated in the additional evaluation footage on the accompanying DVD and comments below.
- Young people have given consideration to the environment and have become more aware of environmental issues as a result of participating in the event and watching the work of others.
- Participants and groups have shown interest in taking part in future events of this nature.

5. Attendance

Figure 1 shows the total attendance and involvement in The Big Green Umbrella. The numbers present were managed by counting audience members upon entry and stamping their hands. A total of 240 people attended on Sunday 26th April, Monday 27th April was a more intimate affair with an audience of 46. The group also enjoyed audiences for their performances or rehearsals prior to or subsequent to, the Big Green Umbrella, and it is thought that the audiences for these events total approximately 1000. Additionally the DVD will also produce a further audience for the work, but it is hard to quantify what this number might be.

Figure .1



It is interesting to note that the event was run over two nights in response to feedback from the previous year; however this caused a difference in the scale of the performance and audience on the second night.

6. Reaction to the event

Reaction from all parties was extremely positive, showing the need for this event had been effectively fulfilled, as shown by the feedback received:

6a. Words Used to Describe the Event

The young people appear to have had strong emotional reactions to their involvement in the showcase, including excitement, happiness and nerves. Participating groups were asked to give three words that described the event for the performers:



"Excited, Nervous, Surprised"
"Emotional, Happy Amazing"
"Excited, Thrilled, Exited"
"Excited, Happy, Fun"
"Friendly, Social, Alright"
"Lots of Excitement"
"Happy, Great, Tired"
"Fun, Fun, Fun!"
"Exiting, Happy, Good"00

The participating groups and their leaders clearly value the opportunity to see each other's work and it was positive to note good reactions towards each other's performances. Groups (including group leaders) were asked their perception as audience members:

"Energy, Talent, Excitement"
"Entertaining, Professional, Talent"
"Inspiring, Brilliant, Varied"
"Infectious, Energy, Amazing"

6b. The Best thing about The Big Umbrella?

Participants appear to have enjoyed the event as a whole, including performing, watching others and the experience in general. Groups were asked what was the best thing for them about the event:

"The whole thing"
"Meeting new people and performing."
"The Experience"
"Watching the other acts"
"The sheer vibrancy and atmosphere"
"The energy and music"
"Seeing other performers and how pleased the participants were"
"Meeting the professional technicians that were working at the venue and watching the show"
"The atmosphere was thrilling"



6c. What was learnt from Participation?

As well as learning about each other's organisations, and their own performance skills, participants also appear to have been made more aware of environmental issues. When participants were asked what they had learnt from the experience, they responded:

"About the world (Earth Intruders video).

"How lucky we are"

"Environmentalism"

"That there are other organisations like us"

"More about the importance of a good harmony between performer and audience"

"To adapt our performances to other environment"

"To make the act have a positive impact on the audience"

"Experiencing different youth groups"

"How many different youth groups there are in Oxfordshire"

"How to adapt play to other environments"



6d. How the young people felt the event could be improved?

Feedback shows that amongst other things, participants would have valued more opportunities to interact with the other groups involved. When participant were asked what they felt could have been improved, they responded:

"Interaction between all the groups"

"Meet more of the other groups"

"Not as much waiting around"

"Not so hot"

"Having a large diversity of performances like introducing young bands would be a nice idea"

"More bands involved"

"Standing as well as seating, more bands"

"Better sound quality – don't just turn the volume up. Maybe better venue"

"Perform it on a slightly bigger stage with less videoed pieces"

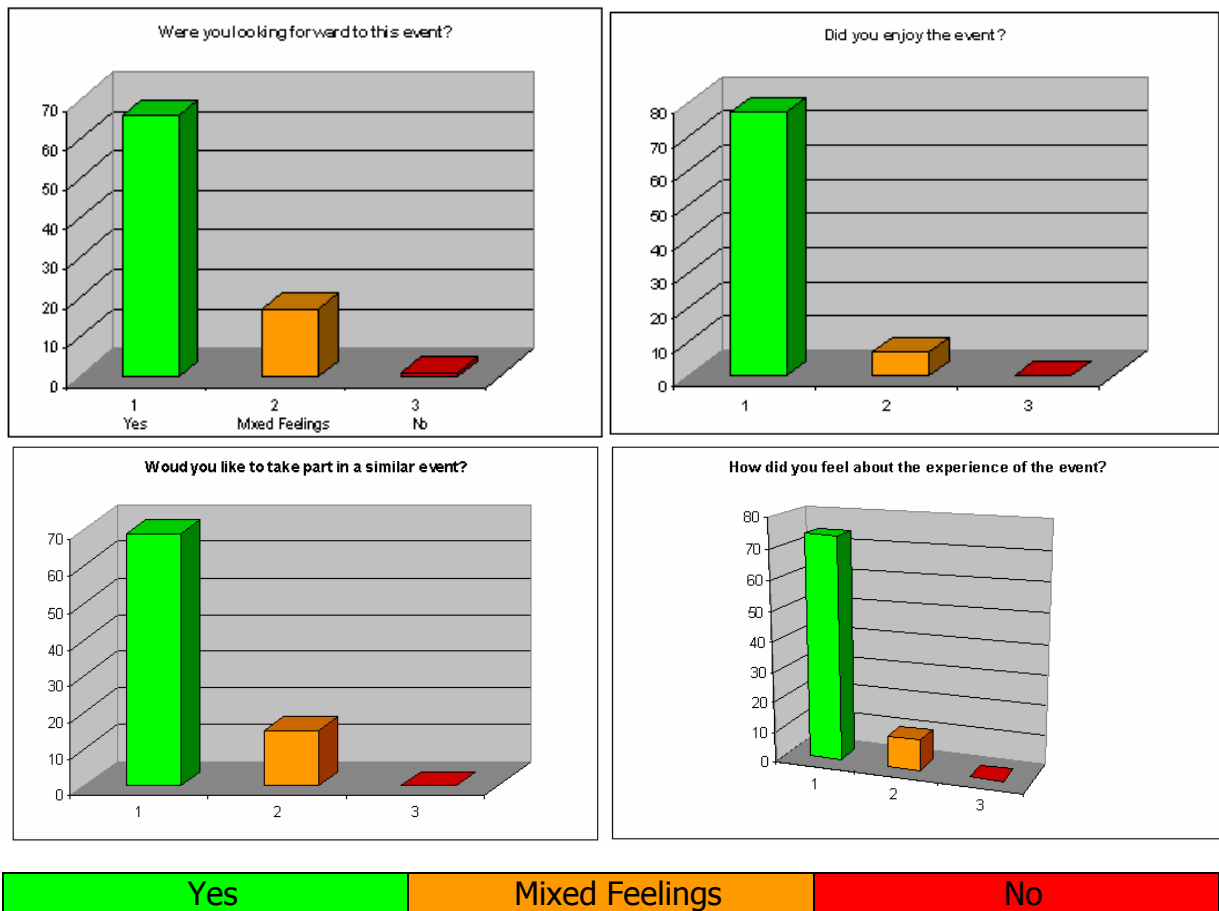
"Different lighting – more colouring"



6e. Participant Feelings about the Event:

Participants were asked to rate their feelings towards different aspects of the event by circling diagrams of faces. The results are shown below:

Figure 2



The DVD of the Big Umbrella contains more detailed comments from the young people and audience as they were filmed throughout the event.

The full results of the feedback are in appendix 1.

Participation and Benefits



Many groups heard about the event by word of mouth and previous contact with OYAP Trust, including involvement in the Big Umbrella last year. Other groups responded to a more generic marketing approach through email and via networks. Groups benefited in various ways, with the key benefits to them ranging from increased awareness of environmental issues, gaining more performance skills and learning from, and being inspired by, other groups.

All respondents would be interested in being involved in future similar events.

For two groups of young people, it was not practical or appropriate for them to perform at the event, but music that they had created was played throughout the evening.

The legacy and positive impact of the event is captured both in photographic form and DVD to give a lasting impact beyond its initial reach.

8. The Venue

Reaction to the Town Hall last year was mixed (the venue has a beautiful impact and made the event feel special, however presented particular problems for groups whose work involved live speech, it also created access problems, required a lot of technical input and was relatively expensive). Oxford Brookes Student Union was chosen as the venue this year. As well as being a central, accessible venue, which was large enough to hold the expected numbers it is also very well set up technically and the venue has a supportive attitude towards community and youth events of this nature.

The experience of using the Oxford Brookes Student Union was positive from all parties. The venue had a good atmosphere, was extremely well set up technically and was of a sufficient size. There was a large audience the first night which the space accommodated well, to create a more intimate feel for the second evening, as there was a smaller audience, a dividing wall was pulled across the space which worked really well.

9. The Format

The Big Umbrella took place on Sunday 26th and Monday 27th April, during term time. The Sunday had technical rehearsals all day and a performance in the evening. The Monday just had technical rehearsals in the afternoon and an evening performance. This format was chosen due to feedback from last year's Big Umbrella, which was all held on one night, and felt too long to many people involved (50% of respondents from last year suggested that for future events, a format of two evenings would suit them best). Following the feedback from last year, the following steps were taken:



- The event was held over two days, instead of one, thus keeping performances to a more manageable length.
- As well as having tech slots for each group on the day they were performing, an additional rehearsal date was offered (21st April, 2009), with access to tech crew. This took the pressure off the technical rehearsals on the day and gave groups opportunities to try out their pieces in the space in advance of the event.

- Instead of limiting the number of groups involved, the length of performances was limited instead, each group was given an 8 minutes slot. Although some groups would have preferred longer performance slots, this format actually worked really well to maintain balance.

Originally the Big Green Umbrella was due to be held during the Easter Holidays. But following feedback from groups (especially schools) the decision was made to move it to the week after the holidays. This decision was received positively by the majority of groups.

The Project Manager changed during the lead up to the event. This was unavoidable, but affected organisation of the event to some extent. A lot of effort was put in to make sure this didn't affect proceedings too much, but it increased the workload of the new Project Manager and also the Artistic Director of the event.

The services of an Artistic Director were engaged, both to make contact and assist groups with their preparation for the event and to plan the running order and run the rehearsals.

11. Recommendations

In consideration of the whole event, from inception through planning to execution and feedback received, the following recommendations are made:

- There is a clear desire for collaborative showcasing events of this nature to be held in Oxfordshire, that allow maximum cross-group working and performance opportunities for arts groups as well as a sense of shared identity gained from being a part of Oxfordshire and a shared experience.
- Time of year is crucial to some groups for collaborative events. Therefore, research needs to be carried out to find out when is the best time of year for the majority of groups. The findings of this could be used to plan future events.
- Events of this nature and scale need to be planned as far in advance as possible to allow them to be worked in to groups' schedules and fully 'owned' by the participating organisations.
- If held annually (or every other year), perhaps the event should be held on the same dates each time. Thus enabling the event to become ingrained in people's programmes and calendars. This would also make venue hire more straightforward.



- The extra technical rehearsal day was extremely useful and took the pressure off the performance days. Therefore, it should be programmed in to future events.
- A central, accessible venue is essential to the success of the event. The Oxford Brookes Students Union was a perfectly suitable venue and worth looking in to using again. However, it will be undergoing a period of closure at some point over the next few years and therefore it is recommended that other suitable venues are investigated for future events.
- The input of young people could be involved from an early stage if possible, in order for their ideas to be integrated into the event.
- The input of the Artistic Director was very useful, but it is recommended that this person be employed at an earlier stage in development of the project in future, but to work more closely with the project manager in shaping the event.
- Due to unforeseen circumstances, the project manager changed during the lead up to the event. This was not ideal, and meant that some things did not run as smoothly as they could have. If at all possible the event needs a project manager who can commit to all stages of the entire project.
- Feedback has shown that participants would have valued more time together to network and socialise. Ways of achieving this should be looked into for future events.
- The staging of a joint finale would help to create a feeling of shared experience and should be worked in to the programme at future events. It would also help to create a more shared experience (see above) and would mean that audience members and performers would be encouraged not to leave after their own piece has been performed. The practical aspects of co-ordinating and staffing this would need to be considered for future events.
- Groups should be encouraged to watch each other's performances. One of the groups chose to stay backstage for most of the performance, which was noisy and distracting, but also made them more isolated from the other groups.
- The Big Umbrella DVD is an additional valuable source of feedback from participants and should be used as widely as possible to advocate for youth arts and the positive impacts that can be achieved through regular access to the arts and collaborative events. It is recommended that any future events include a DVD element to capture not only the performance elements but also this important stream of open dialogue with the young people involved.

Anneke Hay
 OYAP Trust
 May 2009

Appendix 1.

Feedback for The Big Green Umbrella

What did you enjoy most?

- *The sheer vibrancy and atmosphere*
- *Watching other pieces*
- *Flaw r*tists and messy jam*
- *Watching the other groups perform*
- *The energy and music*
- *Participating in the event*
- *Seeing other performers and how pleased the participants were*
- *Playing our gig, being on stage*
- *Being on stage*
- *Taking part in the event*
- *Meeting the professional technicians that were working at the venue and watching the show*
- *Watching the show*
- *Messy jam was amazing and the atmosphere was thrilling*
- *All of the event!*
- *Performing*
- *Messy Jam*
-

What have you learnt participating in this event?

- *More about the importance of a good harmony between performer and audience*
- *To mind the steps on to the stage*
- *I learnt nothing*
- *To adapt our performances to other environment*
- *To make the act have a positive impact on the audience*
- *Better communications over technical issues would have avoided problems encountered*
- *Find out where the venue is before, make sure my drum kit won't fall over*
- *I love big stages*
- *Being on time*
- *I liked the venue and the audience*
- *Experiencing different youth groups*
- *How many different youth groups there are in Oxfordshire*
- *The installations in touring venues make operating much harder*
- *How to adapt play to other environments*
- *To be optimistic! Never to expect no fun!*

- *That other places are good as well*
- *To speak clearly and loudly*
- *To have clear movement*
- *Where Brookes Student Union is. How to better perform to a large audience.*
- *How to kip up*

Please write three words which describe how you felt about the event.

- *Fun, inspiring, hilarious*
- *Good, motivational, opportunity*
- *Excited, good, tired*
- *Proud, happy, excited*
- *Excited, safe, moist*
- *Happy, pleased, safe*
- *Excited, cool, moist*
- *Excited, happy, nervous*
- *Pleased, relived, proud*
- *Excellent, awesome, sweaty*
- *Lush, amazing, loud*
- *Pleased, inadequate (us), joyful*
- *Excellent, very excellent*
- *Cool, alright, long*
- *Energetic, vibrant, loud*
- *Excited, Nervous, Surprised*
- *Emotional, Happy Amazing*
- *Excited, Thrilled, Exited"*
- *Exited, Happy, Fun!*
- *Friendly, Social, Alright*
- *Lots of Excitement!*
- *Happy, Great, Tired*
- *Fun, Fun, Fun!*
- *Exiting, Happy, Good*

How do you think that the event could be improved?

- *A more detached area for those performers not watching*
- *More publicity and better venue (a theatre?)*
- *Having a large diversity of performances like introducing young bands would be a nice idea*
- *More theatre groups in the event*
- *More bands involved*
- *More bands. Standing instead of sitting*
- *Standing and more bands*
- *Standing as well as seating, more bands*
- *Bands should all play in one block of time, with a better PA system and a good drum kit and bass amp supplied. More music, less dance.*
- *Better sound quality – don't just turn the volume up. Maybe better venue.*
- *More plays, we were the only theatre group*
- *Perform it on a slightly bigger stage with less videoed pieces*

- *Different lighting – more colouring*
- *Maybe better organisation/formality of acts – good entrance/exit, details like good set design, dim the house light as it is more professional*
- *Make it more fun*
- *Have Street Stage on the stage for longer*
- *More time on stage. Less time rehearsing*
- *More communication between the groups*
- *Bigger crowd...somehow*
- *More performances*
- *Made bigger*

Do you have any further comments?

- *Do it again next year*
- *I am very I participated in the event*
- *The ticket system could have been a lot better and possibly longer sets.*
- *Should be able to get tickets on the door*
- *The ticket system needs work and better public to the venue*
- *Maybe do the event on one day*
- *To find out a way of getting people to be more quiet at the back*
- *It was a great youth event and I would like it to keep going in the future*

May we contact you about other events?

40 yes and 5 no