Investing in Young Women

Learning and good practice from six projects funded by The Ragdoll Foundation 2022-2025

THE Ragdoll FOUNDATION

Contents

3
Introduction

7
Project in Focus: Forge
acta Community Theatre

9
Project in Focus: SpringTide
Mainspring Arts

11
Project in Focus: Creative Futures
Making Space

13
Project in Focus: Sound
Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project (CYF)

15
Project in Focus: Young Producer Pilot Programme
South East Dance

17
Project in Focus: STORE Architectural After School Clubs
STORE

19
Appendix 1
Learning and good practice from the Sound project

21
Appendix 2
Learning and good practice from the STORE project

Investing in Young Women

Learning and good practice from six projects funded by The Ragdoll Foundation 2022-2025

The Ragdoll Foundation's **Investing in Young Women** pilot programme explored how arts organisations could support talented young women from backgrounds less represented in the creative sector to develop their skills, learn more about career opportunities, and understand which training or education choices might help them achieve their ambitions.

Lack of diversity in the creative industries is well documented, and this project was advocated by Ragdoll's founder, Anne Wood CBE, who herself is from a working class background in the North East of England.

> **" Young women of my background in the 1950s had very few choices – we could become wives and mothers, secretaries, teachers, or nurses, and that was it. There was no careers advice and most of my schoolfriends would not have known how to find information about other types of work, let alone been able to conceive that their creative vision could lead to a career." – Anne Wood CBE, Founder of the Ragdoll Foundation**

From an open call for applications, 51 proposals were received, 11 were shortlisted, and six were funded. Trustees looked for examples of different models of intervention, a variety of arts practices or work within the creative industries, a balance of projects with under- and over-18s, geographic spread, and whether the proposal was for a pilot or an established area of work. In making the final selection, the trustees chose pilot projects with a strong focus on organisational learning, a robust and reflective evaluation plan, and the capacity and partnerships in place to deliver high-quality work.

Why "invest" in young women from backgrounds less represented across the creative sector?

"The idea of a fair and diverse industry is central to current discussions about cultural and creative jobs. However… **the cultural and creative industries are marked by significant inequalities; in particular… the social class background of the workforce, and how this intersects with other issues**, including attitudes and values, experiences of working for free, social networks, and cultural tastes." – **Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries, Create London and Arts Emergency, 2018**

"**…cultural and creative occupations are not, and have never been, exceptionally open**, with access to core creative jobs by class background remaining **consistently unequal** since the 1970s." – **Social Mobility and 'Openness' in Creative Occupations since the 1970s, Brook, Miles, and Taylor, British Sociological Association 2022**

"From acting in an award-winning film to producing a number one album, getting to the top of the creative industries is a dream for many young people. But access to such careers, both behind the scenes and in front of an audience, is currently far from equal. **For young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds in particular, there are major barriers.**" – **A Class Act: Social mobility and the creative industries, The Sutton Trust 2024**

(Emphasis in quotes: Ragdoll Foundation)

Image courtesy of Dory Valentine

Investing in Young Women: Projects funded

acta Community Theatre in Bristol was awarded £24,540 over 24 months to support Forge, an in-depth, intensive theatre-making programme for young women in the Bedminster area.

> The Ragdoll Foundation trustees identified acta's application as "clear, compelling, well-argued, and with a strong sense of purpose." Progression routes into further education or careers in theatre were identified from the beginning. Participants included former acta youth theatre members, helping the project make a strong start.

Mainspring Arts in Cumbria was awarded £15,000 over 12 months to support SpringTide, an experimental programme of creative support for a group of talented neurodivergent female artists facing barriers to entering the art world.

> Mainspring's proposal took a focused, clear, and practical approach to working with a group of young neurodiverse female artists and had the potential to significantly improve their opportunities in the art world.
>
> The project's focus on developing socially engaged practice — an area that can be particularly challenging for neurodiverse people — was significant because many visual artists earn their living through community arts engagement projects. All participants completed the programme, and five of six took advantage of the bursary on offer to develop a socially engaged project of their own.

Making Space in Leigh Park, Hampshire, was awarded £16,812 over 24 months to support Creative Futures, working with senior students from a nearby secondary school to explore aspects of craft and making, with the aim of helping education and career choices.

> This was a high-quality, well-focused project aimed at widening young women's horizons and raising their ambitions. The two-year model demonstrated progression and mentoring through the opportunity to become an Associate Maker. Organisational learning allowed Making Space to understand what support was required for meaningful work with young people and fed into the development of subsequent projects.

Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project (CYF) was awarded £8,410 over 12 months to support Sound, working with young women from Nottingham's most under-resourced communities with talent and passion for the music and film industry to develop their artistic and technical skills.

> A strong, focused proposal that offered an exciting new approach to breaking down gender and class barriers to music and film production. This well-developed project had the potential to make a tangible difference to the young female participants.

South East Dance was awarded £15,000 over seven months to pilot the Young Producer Programme, paid internships and training for young women of global majority heritage, exploring the systemic, structural changes needed to make the UK dance sector diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all.

> The Ragdoll Foundation trustees saw this as a well-developed proposal, which they described as exciting, innovative, in-depth, and targeted. The sector's need was clearly identified and well defined. This new programme has the potential to address inequality within the dance sector.

STORE in Hackney was awarded £29,888 over 24 months to support STORE Architectural After School Clubs to encourage young women from inner city London to consider careers in architecture, town planning, or urban design.

> The Ragdoll Foundation trustees identified this project as "exciting, different, unusual, and well-targeted." It focused directly on skills development, aiming to broaden participants' horizons and encourage them to consider careers in the built environment. Running the project over two years gave time for organisational learning and programme development.

Image courtesy of Making Space and Store

Projects in focus

Project in focus

Forge

acta Community Theatre is based in the Bedminster area of Bristol. **Forge** was a two-year project for young women aged between 15 and 25 interested in a career in the arts but facing barriers.

In year one, participants completed a range of workshops across different disciplines, developing skills and learning from female practitioners in the industry, culminating in a performance in which Forge members supported all aspects of the production, including costume, set and lighting design, stage management, scriptwriting, and performance.

In year two, the focus shifted to more independent work, taking creative responsibility for the project, working within a budget, and managing every aspect of their **final performance project**, which became an immersive, interactive, multimedia performance. Following this, the group continued working together on their Silver Arts Awards and utilised acta's mentoring offer alongside peer support to facilitate next steps post-project.

Images courtesy of Dory Valentine

Activities and outputs

- 24 participants over the two years: 16 in year one and an additional eight in year two; 10 who attended throughout
- 5 multidisciplinary performances
- 7 Silver Arts Awards
- 3 sector visits
- 1 careers advice seminar, alongside informal mentoring

Impact and outcomes for participants

- Increased confidence in their own abilities and knowledge
- Raised aspirations
- Development of new skills
- Increased employability
- Greater understanding of the sector, including new connections and networks
- Of the 10 core participants, nine embarked on further education opportunities or applied for jobs in the creative industries

Challenges

- Two lead acta staff members went on parental leave midway through the project, necessitating a change in project management.
- Navigating the external challenges and commitments of participants: caring responsibilities, mental health needs, and work, school, and university commitments.
- Recruiting from the initial target group: the 24 participants represented diversity in cultures, ethnicities, and locations across Bristol, however only four could be identified as coming from an economically underprivileged background. For a future project, acta would consider diversity more carefully during planning and recruitment.

" It's been such a privilege to work with so many amazing creative women and to create something we are all proud of together. I will really miss it, and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity, it's been a happy place."
– Forge participant

Organisational impact

- Raised acta's profile amongst Bristol and UK theatre organisations
- Developed new and strengthened existing partnerships in the Bristol area
- Increased acta's network of freelance professionals
- Significant funding from the Ragdoll Foundation allowed the project to be both broad and deep: developing the young women's skills as well as introducing them to the variety of work within a theatre.

Organisational legacy

- Design of a new career development programme for younger people
- In conversation with The King's Trust to offer employment skills programmes for young people not in education or employment
- Greater awareness of the importance of a generous project budget to create artistic excellence when working with community groups.

"acta

Project in focus

SpringTide

Mainspring Arts in Cumbria works across artforms to support neurodivergent (ND) artists and celebrate neurodivergent creativity. **SpringTide** was an experimental programme of creative support for a group of six talented ND women and non-binary artists aged 18 to 25 living in Cumbria and Lancashire. A residential week of workshops, creative collaboration and peer support exploring socially engaged practice was followed by one-to-one mentoring and £300 in seed funding to support each artist in developing a new socially engaged project of their own. The project was informed by feedback from young ND women who described late diagnosis and associated difficulty accessing support, and anxiety as a result of 'masking' their neurodivergence.

> " Socially engaged practice describes art that is collaborative, often participatory, and involves people as the medium or material of that work." – TATE

Crest image (top) ©Juliet Klottrup
Project image (left) courtesy of Mainspring Arts

Activities and outputs

- 6 participants recruited through a two-stage process of open call and lottery
- 5 days of workshops, creative collaboration, and peer support during a residency week at Piel View House in Barrow Park
- 1:1 mentoring for all participants
- Celebration event with presentations on socially engaged practice and a **short film**
- Project development and seed funding – each artist was able to access £300 to support their idea, with five projects taking place:
  - Short film as conceptual research and development for a new screen adaptation of Hamlet
  - Queer community garden in Lancaster
  - Music composition for a collaboratively designed online game
  - Community pop-up project in Blackpool to encourage wellbeing, mindfulness, and self-reflection
  - Creating carnival-style headdresses to celebrate participants' unique neurotypes, followed by a portrait session with a neurodivergent photographer

Impact and outcomes for participants

- Development of creative skills and arts practice
- Gaining a sense of belonging to a "creative tribe," for example, linking with networks, artists and arts organisations, and building relationships with peers
- Greater understanding of how to develop proposals for commissions, collaborations, or other paid work
- Increased confidence in finding or asking for support

> "Thank you for being so patient with me in the process after the residency and having to delay the start of my project. It's really helped me access-wise, and it's wonderful to ask for accommodations and for them to be accepted. I really appreciate it." – SpringTide participant

Challenges

- Participants' personal or health issues made it difficult for some to complete elements of the project or for Mainspring to contact them
- Balancing conflicting needs – for example, artists articulated their neurodivergence differently, and this caused friction at the beginning of the project.

> "At the very start my peers spoke about me in slightly pathologising ways, but we were able to discuss this in an inclusive, safe and positive way, which is a testament to how supportive, accessible and kind the Mainspring environment was." – SpringTide participant

Organisational impact

- Mainspring Arts has co-created a model to support young ND women and non-binary artists
- Development of local contacts and partnerships
- Greater understanding of how to create a fully accessible environment

Organisational legacy

- The project enabled Mainspring Arts to secure an Arts Council England grant to fund their core annual programme, including a series of online courses and a mentoring programme, helping it to become a more financially sustainable organisation.
- Mainspring Arts has developed and received funding for a follow-on project that will be informed by learning from SpringTide: two regular creative wellbeing groups for neurodivergent adults based in Lancaster and Kendal.

Mainspring Arts

Project in focus

Creative Futures

Making Space is a craft organisation and charity with studios in Leigh Park, Hampshire, an area of multiple deprivation with some of the highest proportions of unemployment, poor health and low-income families in the UK. Creative Futures was a new project exploring aspects of craft and making through skills development, careers advice, and knowledge-sharing.

Over two years, two groups of young women from a local secondary school worked alongside four professional makers to design and create a diverse portfolio – making creative decisions, learning new skills, building networks, and exploring creativity beyond what is offered in mainstream education. Four mini-projects over the course of each academic year explored fashion design, pattern-cutting, jewellery design, silversmithing, millinery design and construction, textile design, dyeing, print, and embroidery. Participants were supported to attain a Bronze Arts Award, received careers guidance, had the opportunity to take part in the annual Hampshire Open Studios exhibition, and to become Associate Makers at the end of the programme.

Images courtesy of Making Space

Activities and outputs

- 10 participants recruited from Park Community School in year one and eight in year two
- Four multi-session workshops each academic year exploring fashion design and pattern cutting, silversmithing and jewellery design, shibori dyeing and textile design, and millinery
- Support to achieve Bronze Arts Awards
- Group visit to Portsmouth University Graduate Showcase
- The opportunity to make and exhibit work alongside professional makers at the Making Space annual summer exhibition, part of the county-wide Hampshire Open Studios
- Signposting to further and higher education opportunities

> " The group exceeded our expectations at every stage of this project." – **Project Leader**

Impact and outcomes for participants

- Growth in confidence and knowledge
- New skills learned at a high level
- Bronze Arts Awards were achieved by 11 of the 18 participants; the others have an open invitation to finish the Award with Making Space in the future
- All participants signed up to Making Space's follow-on project, Making a Start, which will offer continuing support
- Five participants received free Associate Maker privileges at Making Space

> " I wanted to have a career in the arts anyway, but this has made me REALLY SURE that it's what I want." – **Participant**

Challenges

Learning from year one influenced planning for year two, and resulted in:

- Smaller group of eight participants rather than 10
- Additional assistants to ensure adequate individual support (to support this Making Space requested and received additional funding from the Ragdoll Foundation)
- Restructured scheduling for each block of workshops, so that they took place over consecutive days rather than spread over a few weeks
- Additional project time and resources were needed to complete Arts Awards in year two – supported by another funder

> " I loved learning all these different new skills and meeting the other people in the group, I'm most proud of the top and skirt that I made... before Creative Futures, I barely knew how to sew!" – **Participant**

Organisational impact

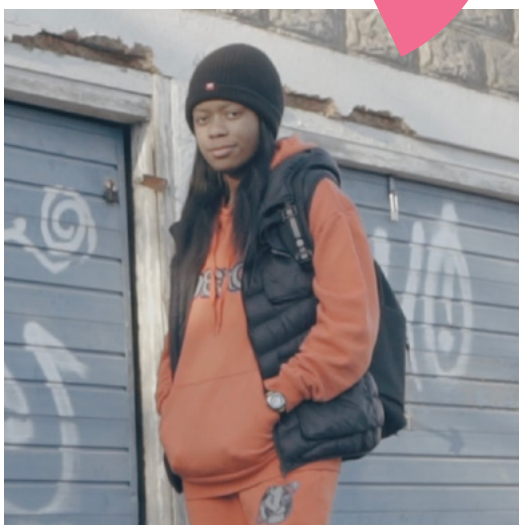
- Greater understanding of access needs and the kind of support needed to do meaningful work and achieve significant outcomes with young people

Organisational legacy

- Learning from the Creative Futures project inspired Making Space to launch **Making a Start** and Craft Pathways, additional interventions and support for young people facing challenges that might limit opportunities to launch a craft business, which are seeing an excellent take-up by new young people.

Project in focus

Sound



Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project (CYF) is a pioneering grassroots charity that enables better outcomes for Nottingham's most under-resourced communities through youth and community work and the arts. They are based in St Ann's, which is in the top 3% overall deprived neighbourhoods in England.

Sound worked with local young women who showed talent and passion for the music and film industry. Over 12 months, 12 young women ages 18-23 received weekly creative mentoring sessions, an artistic residential, and an individually tailored plan of activities designed to build on their specific talents and interests. The skills they developed, the knowledge they acquired, and the experiences they gained through Sound were tailored to meet and respond to the individual's needs. Thanks to The Landmark Trust's **50 for Free scheme**, the creative residential took place at Auchinleck House in Scotland – an 18th-century country house with its own grounds, river, icehouse, and grotto. The music video, **Escape to the Paradise**, was one of the many creative

Images courtesy of Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project (CYF)

outcomes of Sound and was shot on location at Auchinleck House.

Activities and outputs

- Weekly individual mentoring sessions to develop artistic and technical skills
- Guidance on setting and achieving personal goals
- Three-night creative residential with creative and technical workshops as well as activities to build self-confidence and essential life/social skills
- Production of collaborative and individual music videos
- Music and film industry visits and networking
- Arts Award guidance and support
- Creation of professional CVs with relevant, current achievements, accreditation, and experience for each participant

> " 'Sound' and CYF are like my family now. I loved the music sessions the most – it felt like leaving all of the darkness behind and gave me a break from problems." – **Participant**

Impact and outcomes for participants

- Increased creative and technical skills, measured against goals set at the beginning of the project
- 10 of 12 participants successfully engaged with Arts Award, achieving their Bronze Award or making strong progress towards completion
- Increased self-esteem, confidence, self-belief, and aspirations
- 10 of the 12 participants accessed further training in arts and creative media following the project

Challenges

In response to the structural challenges many participants face, including housing insecurity, food poverty, and the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences, CYF staff worked alongside young women to provide immediate and longer-term support, helping them to navigate crises, and access appropriate solutions.

Organisational impact

The Sound project facilitated the development of new external partnerships and strengthened existing ones, including:

- Links with individuals and companies from the local film industry, which Nottingham CYF will build on to provide further training and work experience for young people
- Working relationships with specialist tutors in functional skills to gain qualifications or help to remove barriers to training and further education
- Increased access to and awareness of resources, such as the Landmark Trust scheme
- Greater understanding of how to offer individual mental health support

Organisational legacy

As a result of Sound, CYF hired an experienced arts therapist to give weekly one-to-one sessions for individuals experiencing mental health issues.

> " I have a much clearer idea of the direction I want to go with my creative career now, and I feel more confident about my ability. Knowing the steps I need to take has made such a difference to believing I can do it."
> – **Sound participant**

Good practice

The Ragdoll Foundation commends CYF for its holistic, evidence-based approaches to working with young people in highly challenging circumstances. See Appendix 1 for characteristics of the Sound project that were critical to its success, and which Nottingham CYF recommends as being applicable to work with young people from similar backgrounds.

NOTTINGHAM CYF

Project in focus

Young Producer Pilot Programme

Brighton-based charity **South East Dance** supports dance artists across all disciplines with funding, advice, and networking opportunities. As passionate believers in the health and wellbeing benefits of dance, it also brings movement to as many people as possible, especially those who might not have had the opportunity or confidence to dance before.

The Young Producer Pilot Programme provided two paid internships and training for young women of global majority heritage, which aimed to support the systemic, structural changes needed to make the UK dance sector diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all, particularly addressing the lack of female dance producers.

Activities and outputs

- A six-month contract for each participant to work 18.5 hours per week, over 2.5 days (0.5 FTE)
- Regular 1:1 mentoring sessions with an experienced external mentor of global majority heritage
- Training and development opportunities at South East Dance, including orientation meetings with all members of the team

Images courtesy of South East Dance

- Hands-on experience supporting South East Dance's wider artistic programme, including assisting with events and performances, and attending fortnightly team meetings
- Paid internships for each participant: one at producing/touring company **Uprise Rebel**, and one at **Rich Mix** arts centre in London
- Further paid employment for one of the interns as a direct result of the programme

Impact and outcomes for participants

- A wider understanding of what dance production involves
- Key skills development: timetabling, scheduling, IT, and person management
- Problem-solving skills in real-world scenarios
- Increase in confidence and understanding of how each young woman would like her career to develop, and how to bring this about
- Experience within new organisational settings
- Network development
- **Additional participant feedback**

Challenges

- Project planning, especially participant recruitment, took longer than anticipated. The project manager kept in touch with the Ragdoll Foundation, and the project timetable was redrawn to allow for this.
- The project manager and initiator left South East Dance during the pilot and a new manager was not immediately available, which created some line-management issues
- Both participants felt they would have benefitted from a more formal orientation and timetabled learning offer at the beginning of the project, similar to a college schedule, before beginning their work experience.

Organisational impact

- A wealth of organisational learning on how to structure and manage future internship programmes, providing more and better opportunities for young global majority dance producers.
- First steps towards developing a network of diverse dance producers

> " Our major takeaway from the Young Producer Pilot is when planning a programme of development, especially with young people, it's best to come to the project with an open, listening attitude and not a fully pre-planned schedule." – **Project Manager**

Organisational legacy

- South East Dance and four partner organisations – Rich Mix, Uprise Rebel, Dance Umbrella, and Sadler's Wells – are interested in a future, enhanced version of the Young Producer Programme, subject to funding.

> " Coming into this programme, I was looking for some direction. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was burnt out from the dance performance industry and knew nothing else since I was 16 years old. This programme allowed me the space to explore a different avenue in a safe space. Unexpectedly, my experiences reignited my fire for dance again which has been invaluable, and I am extremely grateful. I came out with... new skills and direction, which is much more than I bargained for." – **Young Producer participant**

SOUTH EAST DANCE

Project in focus

STORE Architectural After School Clubs

STORE is an association of over 30 designers, architects, artists, writers, and engineers who share a common goal: getting more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into applied creative courses, addressing the social imbalance in art and design education. STORE is based in Hackney, North London.

A new two-year series of **Architectural After School Clubs**, co-funded by the Ragdoll Foundation and University College London Widening Participation, added to STORE's portfolio and encouraged young women aged 16-18 years old from lower-performing London schools to consider careers in architecture, engineering, planning, or urban design. Priority on the programme was given to female students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding. Over 80% of participants were young women.

Activities and outputs

Ten different one-month after-school clubs plus additional workshops. Year one produced a **feasibility study** to convert a series of garages into community spaces, which was presented to Hackney Council in July 2023.

Images courtesy of STORE

Workshops leading to the feasibility study included:

- **Measuring Space and Recording Place**: Techniques for surveying a site
- **Casting the Ground**: Archaeology and understanding the history of a site
- **Mapping Your City**: Different ways of understanding what already exists in a borough and what is missing
- **Applied Objects for Observation**: Adapting conventional surveying and engagement into personal fieldwork objects
- **Design and Deconstruction**: Scale model-making and zero-waste design and deconstruction
- **Design and Reconstruction**: An additional workshop on non-destructive design and transformation

Year two focused on aspects of engineering to design and build a roof structure for one of STORE's garages and a large-scale **STORE STORE BUILD** Pavilion, which was exhibited in the 2024 London Design Festival.

- **Building with Sustainable Materials**: Using found and bio-based materials in new building design
- **Handling Metal**: Processing found objects and transforming them into metal handles
- **Getting into the Swing:** Designing and constructing a timber truss that was used as a multi-person swing and became the prototype for the roof
- **Packed (lunch) Furniture**: Designing and building a portable piece of furniture
- **Curating Water**: Exploring water, with experiments including water as a musical instrument, and how plant irrigation systems function
- **Waste City**: How waste is processed, from human to urban scale, constructing a waste disposal system
- Four portfolio development workshops

Impact and outcomes for participants

- Practical, transferrable hard and soft skills, including technical drawing, design, safe use of tools, cooperation, collaboration, and seeing a project through from concept to finish
- Greater understanding of how planning, architecture, and engineering contribute to urban design, and the educational next steps needed to embark on a career in this field
- Individual portfolios to be used in applications for higher education or employment

Challenges

Creating group cohesion amongst participants from different London schools and engaging them in highly technical subjects was initially a challenge, which STORE addressed by introducing fun, quick, icebreaker activities at the start of a new series of workshops.

Organisational impact

- Additional London secondary schools are aware of and participating in STORE's programmes
- New connections between STORE's practical, real-world programmes and students' STEAM subjects

Organisational legacy

Having tested how educational programmes can be integrated into small-scale building projects, STORE will develop new in-school and external programmes to deliver STEAM subjects at key stages 4 and 5.

> " (The project has) developed my skills significantly, providing not just growth but also a supportive environment where I can truly unlock my potential. Being surrounded by like-minded individuals has amplified this, as we've been able to learn from and inspire each other." – Camden student

See Appendix 2 for STORE's good practice recommendations.

Appendix 1
Learning and good practice from the Sound project

Susie Gray, Project Manager, Nottingham Children, Young People and Families Project (CYF)

CYF is a pioneering grassroots charity enabling better outcomes for Nottingham's most under-resourced communities through youth and community work and the arts. CYF is based in St Ann's, which is in the top 3% of overall deprived neighbourhoods in England.

The Sound project, funded by the Ragdoll Foundation, worked with local young women who demonstrated talent and passion for the music and film industry. Over 12 months, 12 young women ages 18-23 received weekly creative mentoring sessions, an artistic residential, and an individually tailored plan of activities designed to build on their specific talents and interests. This resulted in new skills, knowledge, and experiences relevant to each participant.

The following characteristics of Sound were key to its success, and CYF recommends these approaches be applied to other projects working with similar target groups:

1. Not a one-off project, but long-term, holistic support for individuals

Through its embedded community approach, CYF develops long-term relationships, earning trust by understanding the unique challenges faced by the young women it supports. Project workers have a deep understanding of the histories of these young women, often knowing them from a young age. Sound participants had potentially accessed CYF support before joining the project and may continue to do so over an extended period. This long-term approach allows for the establishment of new, positive behaviours. As choices, knowledge, opportunities, and aspirations increase, CYF sees a significant improvement in mental health and overall wellbeing. Young women develop into healthier, happier individuals who can transmit these newfound positive behaviours to the next generation, creating a positive ripple effect over time.

The Sound project acknowledged the complexity of young women's lives, addressing mental health issues, social exclusion, and barriers to mainstream services through culturally sensitive, holistic working practice tailored to the individual. For example, workers accompanied participants to Jobcentre appointments, social care meetings, or housing interviews; assisted with administrative tasks like opening a bank account or filling in forms; or provided practical support in making domestic abuse statements or articulating mental health needs.

Sound addressed participants' needs in ways appropriate to them, for example, directly connecting young women with a curiosity about the music and film industry to relevant resources, thus avoiding automatic referrals to potentially alienating environments.

Finally, CYF's trauma-informed approach recognised the pervasive impact of trauma on the individual. By understanding and addressing trauma, Sound created a safe and supportive environment that promotes healing and resilience and empowers young women to overcome challenges and build brighter futures.

2. Flexibility and blamelessness

Being flexible was integral to Sound's approach, ensuring that if a young woman missed a session, this could be rescheduled. This adaptability allowed CYF to respond promptly to the evolving needs of individuals, creating a supportive framework that balanced responsiveness with the pursuit of long-term goals.

Sound fostered a culture of blamelessness, acknowledging that participants faced challenges that might lead to missed sessions. In this supportive environment, there were no repercussions for such occurrences. Instead, the dedicated team took proactive measures to maintain engagement, including arranging coffee meetings, home visits, and video calls. This approach ensured that young women never felt disconnected from the programme and felt valued and supported by CYF's team.

3. Regular and relevant contact and communication

Sound prioritised regular and meaningful engagement through a frequency of contact that included at least weekly face-to-face support. This consistent in-person interaction formed the backbone of the approach, allowing for deeper connections and understanding of individual needs. CYF supplemented face-to-face support with additional contact through social media and phone.

Understanding the often chaotic nature of participants' lives, Sound provided a "contact-us-almost-anytime" service. This accessibility nurtured a culture of understanding and self-worth among the young women involved.

Sound demonstrated persistence by consistently maintaining contact with participants and never giving up on them. Workers adapted their communication methods to ensure participants were comfortable and at a pace informed by their preferences.

4. Informal learning, not agenda-driven

Sound adopted an informal approach in educating and providing information. There was no pressure, and the atmosphere was relaxed, creating a supportive environment where the issues, concerns, and needs were acknowledged and validated. This informal setting fostered open communication, ensuring that participants felt comfortable expressing themselves without the constraints of a formal or rigid structure.

CYF's approach was deliberately not agenda-driven, allowing sessions with young women to unfold organically without the pressure to cover specific issues or activities. This allowed for unhurried, meaningful engagements where individuals could spend hours if they chose, engaging in open conversation, exploration, and genuine connection.

The informal approach also encouraged collaboration amongst participants and peer support, to create a network where individuals felt understood and connected.

5. Skilled, experienced and supported delivery team

Finally, Sound's success hinged on a delivery team with diverse skills and experiences, who understood the complex challenges young women faced. Lived experience fostered relatability, while a multi-disciplinary approach ensured holistic support. Their commitment, resilience, and ability not to take behaviours personally were crucial in establishing trust. Creative and technical expertise in music and film allowed for skill development. Together, CYF's dynamic team empowered young women by offering comprehensive support to navigate diverse challenges and unlock their potential in the music and film industries.

The delivery team, in turn, received high-quality training and supervision. This included group sessions with a psychotherapist to address the intricate and diverse needs of individuals. The aim was to equip staff with the tools and insights necessary to provide effective and empathetic support, enhancing the overall quality of assistance provided to Sound's young women.

Appendix 2
Learning and good practice from the STORE project

Kevin Green, Director, STORE Schools & Projects C.I.C.

STORE is an association of over 30 designers, architects, artists, writers, and engineers with a common goal: addressing the social imbalance in art and design education by getting more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into applied creative courses. STORE is based in Hackney, North London. A new two-year series of Architectural After School Clubs, co-funded by the Ragdoll Foundation and University College London Widening Participation, added to STORE's portfolio and encouraged young women aged 16-18 years old from lower-performing inner city London schools to consider careers in architecture, engineering, planning, or urban design.

The recommendations below are relevant to organisations seeking to develop programmes of complementary or external hands-on learning for secondary school students.

1. Create strong pathways

Offering graded support to students, including age- and interest-appropriate advice and opportunities, can make a substantial positive difference as young people make the often difficult transition from secondary school to higher education or the world of work. STORE created a programme where students from years 9-13 can progress through After School Clubs, Summer Schools, One-Day Workshops, Portfolio preparation workshops, the (STORE) Graduate Network, and Young Trustees.

2. Provide extension learning opportunities

Much of what happens at STORE is applied, and we try to help students understand how what they learn in the After School Club can be applied to their future jobs or careers. We have started a lending library where students can take out books and develop their interests in certain processes and disciplines. Each book has been put forward by the After School Club tutor group, and contains a forward or annotations written by the tutors about why the book has been valuable to them. We hope this will help students see the link between the work we do in the After School Clubs and the possible careers and disciplines this could lead to.

3. Devise icebreaker tasks

In the second year of the Architectural After School Clubs, simple icebreaker tasks were added to the beginning of each new block of sessions to help students get to know each other and feel relaxed in a new environment. Activities included observational drawing, movement exercises, and quick making tasks. These made a substantial difference, helping students feel more at ease in their first sessions.

4. Providing healthy snacks

STORE found that students were often low on energy after a long day at school and needed a healthy snack to focus on the project. Where possible, project budgets should allow for feeding participants. If the host organisation is not able to do this, an alternative is to ask local eateries if they can provide lower-cost, healthier snacks for purchase.

5. Celebrate achievement

The STORE Graduate Dinner is a fantastic opportunity for our older students who have completed one of our senior level programmes to come together, meet each other, discuss what they are going on to do next, and to network. It is also an opportunity to hear from previous STORE participants who have followed professional pathways inspired by their time with us.

The Ragdoll Foundation Trustees would like to thank the organisations, project managers, artists, participants, and others who contributed to the success of the Investing in Young Women pilot projects – we are hugely appreciative of your hard work and dedication.

If you would like this document in large print format please email **admin@ragdollfoundation.org.uk**

THE

FOUNDATION

Design: Uproar Creative