

Chapter 6 pathway notes

Building better communities through music and media

Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: A pathway from Uganda

Purpose

These pathway notes support chapter 6 of the book: *Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: Learning and development for a better world*. The chapter profiles the work of the UK charity 'Community Albums' (CA) and draws on examples from Uganda to illustrate how participants are able to use music and media to bring about improvement in their communities. Organizations interesting in this approach should contact Community Albums via its website at www.communityalbums.com

The pathway design and possibilities for collaboration between CA and the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) emerged from discussions between CA's Co-Founders, Simon Hill and Rob May and Richard Teare (for GULL). In the UK, CA works with a number of schools and colleges and there are numerous options for recognizing and certifying learning outcomes but the options are more limited in developing countries. In view of this, the chapter draws on examples of CA's work in Uganda where in partnership with the children's charity 'Viva' and the 'Children At Risk Action Network' (CRANE) a network of 20 Creative Learning Centres (CLCs) has been established to widen access and participation. The CLC concept affords opportunities for personal expression and development and for community-led messages that are powerful and effective forms of advocacy for change.

GULL welcomes affiliation with any organization working with marginalized young people and the purpose of these pathway notes is to assist those who are using or developing a similar approach. For more details about how to affiliate with GULL please see: www.gullonline.org/affiliate

Pathway implementation

A key feature of CA's work is a development process that produces a tangible outcome in the form of a video of the community's collective voice. In Kampala, Uganda CA's workshop outputs were viewed on television and/or heard on local and national radio by millions of people and this contributed to significant community-led change. The Indicative pathway design in chapter 6 integrates professional recognition with the sequential development of CA approved lead facilitators so that by Level 5 (GULL's Bachelor of Professional Studies degree) participants are able to replicate a project similar to the Kampala pilot cascade, initiated by a small lead group with more than 100 participants at the second stage. It is anticipated that on completion of Level 5, participants will become CA approved lead facilitators who are able to support the work of a CLC as a member of its leadership team.

Extracts from an interview with Simon Hill and Rob May, Co-Founders, Community Albums, UK

Is CA's work solely with young adults?

We named the charity 'Community Albums' because we aim to involve the whole community and it seems to work best that way. For example, we recently completed a project with the Salvation Army in the UK – the youngest participant was probably 65 years of age – though it was a project geared specifically for mature participants. As music is a vehicle for both self and collective expression, CA's process can work with any group and age profile.

Given its universal appeal, how does CA facilitate change through music and media?

Our participants begin to change when they engage with music because it enables them to explore and articulate inner fears and concerns using creative expression as an intermediary. Something happens during the creative process – whether it is writing music, lyrics, poetry or some other form of creative activity. The creative process opens the individual's mind in a different way and they experience a deeper, spiritual connection with themselves and with others. In contrast to this, sitting someone down and asking them to share their problems is a much more difficult way to draw out the issues and challenges. Our approach suggests that participants write a song as a way of exploring and releasing feelings and emotions that become part of the song – often in the form of song lyrics.

Does CA's approach to engaging with issues of concern help to facilitate personal change?

Yes because participants are sometimes able to change the ways in which they view their own life situation. As an example, we facilitated a project that involved multimedia interaction between homeless young adults in the UK and an equivalent group in Guatemala. The interaction enabled workshop participants in the UK to realize for themselves that they are relatively better off with a much wider range of development and employment options. Further, the interaction left a deep impression on the UK participants and their perceptions about their own predicaments changed for the better.

How did CA facilitate the multimedia interaction between participants in the UK and in Guatemala?

The project was called 'Our Shout' and in the UK, it ran every Thursday evening for two hours in three phases, each of six weeks duration and additionally, we allocated one full day for filming purposes. Eight young people in the UK location took part in the project. The young people were invited to write a rap and film a video in response to seeing 'Under The Bridge', an inspirational film made by young people who live on the streets of Bolivia. This can be viewed at <http://www.communityalbums.com/video/under-bridge>. To accurately reflect the realities of youth homelessness in Latin America, the UK participants were able to share and compare experiences (via video translation) with a group of a similar age and predicament in Guatemala. The rap which the UK participants wrote and produced is called 'No Correlation' and it was later integrated with a video that the young people made to accompany the rap. The video can be viewed at: www.communityalbums.com/video/no-correlation-0

The film was later presented to a number of people with professional and other interests in the plight of homeless young people - including a UK Member of Parliament. The video presentation and ensuing discussions enabled the participants to ask questions about homelessness in the UK and elsewhere. As an outcome, the participants felt that they had a better understanding of the issues faced by young people in another part of the world because they had heard their own stories - directly from them. The project also helped them to evaluate and take stock of their own situation and personal journey.

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your work?

CA's partners are responsible for determining the indicators and outcomes that they'd like to achieve and for driving the process via their involvement with us (e.g. via partner staff). So we start by asking our partners about the outcomes they'd like to achieve and at the end of the project, evaluation reports (some of which are accessible from the CA website) are commissioned by CA's partners as appropriate to their needs. Our sole concern is that the project must fit with CA's charitable objectives: 'Building better communities through music and media' - so for example, we don't make 'marketing films' for corporations. When working with young adults, CA's objective is to engage young people in writing music and songs about themselves and the issues that matter to them. Typically projects with young people begin with a technology workshop (a song writing ice-breaker) and arising from this, the group decides what it would like to say.

Given the very powerful outcomes of CA's pilot project in Uganda (as reported in chapter 6) will the initiative continue?

Yes. There are now 20 Creative Learning Centres (CLCs) and in this context, 'creativity' embraces craft, dance and other elements. CA is still supporting the team in Kampala and they say that music and multimedia is helping them with advocacy and so we are exploring next steps with our partners in Uganda in order to stabilize and build on all that has been accomplished so far.

Verifying outcomes

The CA process and the quality of the end product is directly related to the professional experience of CA's co-founders. Simon and Rob are award winning musicians, composers and producers with more than 20 years' experience in the industry. Their commercial company, Sitting Duck Music and Media produces music for the Television, Games, Music and Film Industries. Highlights include their work with a diverse range of recording artists (Natasha Bedingfield, Westlife, Lulu and remixes for Imelda May among others) and music for television such as their composition of the official worldwide Winter Olympic broadcast theme and re-arrangement and production of the official FIFA Anthem.

Simon and Rob strive to replicate this ethos in their work with CA and the goal is to ensure 'quality in reality'. In this context the end product is 'real' because the young people are making the music and a group video themselves – they write the script, feature in the film and record and produce the end result. They also write the songs and make the music and so their ownership ensures that the output has integrity and is authentic. This approach to community-led communication has great potential because it harnesses the innate skills and talents of the participants. It also inverts the traditional music and media 'pyramid' - the nearer the pinnacle, the fewer the people and at the top, someone is making decisions on behalf of others - historically that's how society and culture has operated. Whereas starting at the base of the pyramid enables the majority to speak out on the issues and concerns that really matter to them.

The CA with GULL indicative pathway

CA's powerful and effective approach enables people to discover and utilize their creative talents and potential to communicate on the issues that matter to them. The process is life-changing for the participants and challenging for civic leaders and others who are the recipients of community-led music and video messaging. In recognition of these outcomes, it is envisaged that CA with GULL students will receive certification at two points:

GULL Professional Bachelor Level 3 Diploma: After successfully completing their own training, participants will have trained others on how to use CA's hardware and software tools, evidenced by the completion of individual creative projects in at least two subsequent workshops over a period of not less than 12 months. Level 3 award recipients will be at least 17 years of age.

GULL Bachelor of Professional Studies (Level 5): After successfully completing their own CA workshop facilitator training, participants will have served as the lead CA facilitator of at least two subsequent workshop series (each with multiple workshops) over a period of not less than 12 months. Additionally, participants will know how to conduct evaluation studies on the outcomes of each workshop and how to prepare written reports citing the evidence of impact and change and any implications for adjusting/improving the workshop format. Level 5 award recipients will be at least 21 years of age.

How will the CA with GULL pathway help to strengthen and develop CA's work?

Simon and Rob's view is that GULL's philosophy and approach complements CA's work because of the commonly held belief that the learning process must be uniquely tailored by the individual. In so doing, the learner is equipped and empowered to make personal changes. Further, GULL's concept of pathway progression fits well with CA's ethos. The concept of 'journeying' with others is important because a short course cannot facilitate lasting change. Outcome-based recognition is important too because it both affirms and confirms the significance of what the individual has accomplished.