



Introduction to Working with Young People

The project worker's role

Steve is the lead worker on music projects at Madcap.

Steve

And I think a lot of youngsters have the ideas in their minds, have ideas that they want to – and things they want to express, but they may not have the means or the ability to do that. So, what I'm actually trying to do is make something that's amorphous in their mind actually concrete, I guess. That's what it sort of comes down to. So, I'm forever looking for what it is they really are after, rather than try to impose my own ideas on what they're doing.

His work brings him into contact with some potentially problematic young people.

A lot of the people that come to me are referred to me via, you know, various social services groups, like Connexions or, well, the Young Offenders Team, you name it. But, they come in and, potentially, I've got the very worst young people, who are well known for causing massive problems elsewhere.

Anyone referred here becomes the lead musician on their own music project.

We might be able to get a mix sorted, so that you're actually going out with something that is relatively complete.

And yet, by having one at a time, what happens, they come in, and I say to them, 'well, if you're working with your friends, bring them in.' So, they bring their mates in, who bring other mates in, and soon you have a group of people who are actually already – they've already worked on their own dynamic, they work. And if they are falling out, then usually it's a lot easier to deal with that, because they're already friends, they know each other.

Building confidence is one of Steve's first objectives.

As you hit that note, just put your head up slightly, so that you get it.

At first, you may have to put an awful lot of input in to make them realise that they've even got good ideas. And then you can gradually back off as the time goes on. But when they start to realise that their own ideas have value and they do work, you can sort of back off and allow that to happen.

But everyone who comes here has different abilities and aptitudes.

You may find that the person's come in with, you know, have loads of lyrics, and they write lyrics every day, and they're absolutely brilliant. So, that process of gauging where they are first is incredibly important, gauging without any kind of judgement is also incredibly important. And so everything that they're doing, you've got to say – you've got to bring out what is good about it. So, it's not a case of lying and saying it's good when it's not, but it's to actually bring out what is good about it.

It's crucial for the first stage of a creative project to be non-judgemental

'What you may tell me, sending me –

No, that wasn't quite right.

Jackie

'Sending me down.'

Steve

Yeah, so it's lower, so it's –

Jackie

Yeah, so it goes a bit lower.

Steve

Sometimes that phase is called 'client origination.' And I think that's the most important thing, is to keep everybody smiling and keep everybody feeling that their ideas have value, and to actually bring no judgement whatsoever at that point. And so, and usually the people that are making the most judgement on themselves are the young people themselves. So, they'll say something, 'oh no, that's rubbish,' and it's really, really important to make sure that they understand that it most certainly isn't rubbish, and even if it is rubbish, maybe you've got to get the rubbish out of the way before the good stuff comes, so, for God's sake, just do it, you know.

For every project Steve and the band leader start by working up a plan.

In fact, what you've got is a rolling plan. So, therefore, the plan doesn't dictate what actually happens. But what the plan does do is give purpose to the whole process. And I think that having purpose is really essential, is what it's all about. With purpose comes discipline, and that's not imposed discipline, necessarily, it's the kind of discipline that the young people actually want themselves. They want to create this thing, they want it to happen. And my job, I guess, is to keep reminding them.

Steve believes working towards a goal is a very effective form of discipline.

And I'll get the levels right and sort of mix a bit, so that you can hear everything right, and then we'll go for it.

They actually have ownership of it, and all I'm bring abrupt with is their tendency not to do the work. But it's their work, it's not mine, so, hence, you know, we really don't have discipline problems, because, basically, that's what it's about. They know it's their work, and they know that the result of it will be their thing.

The goal may be a CD, a live performance, or a set of lyrics.

Young people, I think, as a breed, tend to have a million ideas, but find it difficult to actually bring something to a close. Actually, I say young people, I'm sure we all find that difficult. But it is in the bringing something to a close and completing it, in some shape or form, that says, 'look, I can do it, I've got this, this is mine, this is it, this is a stake in the group, and listen to me on this CD.' And that is what actually creates confidence in doing the next project. Because what it's saying is that my ideas are valuable, they work.

Steve believes his ability to do the job is tied to his love of music.

How about if we bang it up. No, one of you hold it, and we stick a microphone at both ends.

There's no doubt about it, that what drives me is my love of music. So, I'm very, very enthusiastic about music and I'm also aware that I have – that that's where my skills lie.

Jackie

(singing)

He sees no divide between Steve the project worker and Steve the musician.

Steve

You're doing something really interesting. (plays notes) That's what you were doing the first time.

So, for example, somebody may sing a snatchet of melody, which is all out of tune and everything, and my skill, I have to listen to what they're really trying to do, use my musical skills to work out what it is they really want to do, play it back to them and say, 'is that what you meant?' But, if I wasn't musical, I wouldn't be able to do that. So, I'm really feeling that whatever youth work – you know, a good youth worker, if they're going to work within a certain medium, they've got to know that medium, too, and not just know it but love it. They've got to love that medium. And that's what you express to the young people that you're working with.