

**SOFT
T'OUCH
ART'S**

ANNUAL REVIEW 2007/2008

This report covers the period November 2007 - October 2008



Participants and partners talk about how Soft Touch makes a difference

CHAIR'S REPORT – Tim Burke, Chair, Soft Touch Management Committee

This year Soft Touch completed 21 years as a focus for creativity in Leicestershire, a fine achievement and tribute to the quality of the work conducted and the soundness of the original vision of its founders. We marked this milestone with a highly successful open evening and we thank both the young performers and our speakers on the night who helped us demonstrate the impact of Soft Touch's work to an audience of friends old and new.

We've been grateful this year to the Arts Council for an uplift in our grant which was not only a vote of confidence but is providing most useful resources to help us with our marketing and thus, we hope, build increased sustainability. Thanks too go to Business Link for support with improving our website. This kind of work is important if we're going to be around for another 21 years. We've also been addressing our own corporate well-being by undertaking a thorough programme of review of internal policies and now have shiny new policies and action plans on equality and diversity, environmental action and recruitment and selection. We've also completed our second set of social accounts - a time-consuming but revelatory process that helps us work out how others see us and hence build on our strengths and address our weaknesses. We're pleased to learn that the Arts Council have been able to use this material more widely to show that it is possible for arts organisations not just to assert their own worth but to provide credible external evidence.

Thanks to all our partners over the year – we look forward to continued contact.



This year we have made some of the people we work with the focus for our annual review and we have featured interviews with a selection of project partners and participants. Young people talk about how working with Soft Touch has made a difference to their lives. Project partners talk about how Soft Touch helps them to achieve their own aims, objectives and targets.

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

Part of the success of Soft Touch has always been through the way that project participants have been an inclusive part of the decision-making process giving them ownership over the ideas, process and final outcomes.

It is now time to extend this involvement into the overall work of the organisation. We will be looking beyond the traditional methods of seats on management committees and formal steering and advice groups, to ways which can engage and retain the diverse range of people we work with. The aim is to give them a reason to want to contribute and be a part of the wider work of the organisation, giving Soft Touch access to their ideas, knowledge and experiences.

A working group comprising of a management committee member, a worker director and a young volunteer will be putting their heads together, talking to other workers, participants and stakeholders, testing out ideas and coming up with a feasible, meaningful and workable system. It's a tough but exciting challenge but that's what we thrive on at Soft Touch.

FACTS + FIGURES ABOUT OUR WORK

- We worked with 3516 people in Leicester and Leicestershire
- We carried out 26 projects and programmes which encompassed 531 creative sessions
- The work our project participants made (magazines, websites, DVDs, CDs, performances, exhibitions) reached an audience of over 3000 people locally, regionally and nationally
- We continued to provide regular employment for 11 people and project contracts for 10 freelance/sessional artists
- Our projects achieve the Every Child Matters agenda of enjoying and achieving, staying safe, being healthy and making a positive contribution
- We provided 12 volunteering/peer mentor opportunities which helped young people with progression and also offered 4 school/student work placements.

Soft Touch running the Urban Arts Area at Leicester's Summer Sundae Festival, August 2008



Haji – participant and peer mentor for Sound Pru-f

Before I started coming to Soft Touch I didn't know how to make music - producing or rapping or how to make beats or use the equipment. Now I know how to make tracks, set equipment up and I help others from the PRU (Pupil Referral Unit) to learn how to do music. In return I get time in the studio to make my own music and I've helped out on another Soft Touch project which is about gun and knife crime.

Coming here has given me a lot more confidence, because before I came here I never used to meet anyone new and be able to say hi 'what's your name' and talk to them. Now I can do that and ask them if they need help and make them feel comfortable here, I've learned a lot.

It's inspired me to carry on doing music and if I decide to do a music course at college what I've learned will help me, as I know how to make beats, I know about tempo, about counting bars, putting beats to a bar you have to be very precise, if I already know this stuff I won't need so much help at college.

I really enjoy my time at Soft Touch, there's always different things to do, different people to work with, you've got your own name, the staff here are easy to talk with, you can crack jokes with them. Other places I go to do things don't have all this.

The thing that is different for me since I've been coming to Soft Touch is I've realised that music has come a lot into me and has changed me because the tracks I've made are about different things. I'm making tracks about my emotions and feelings and that's made me feel like I don't need to hide no more inside any more, so I'm more respectful these days, I'm not a mean guy no more, I've changed a lot.



STUART HICKING – Creative Arts Co-ordinator, Leicester Student Behaviour Support Service



For the past two years Soft Touch have been the delivery partner for our Youth Music funded project Sound Pru-f. The funding for this project finishes in December, but the success of the partnership has led our service to mainstream the project. We will now be commissioning Soft Touch to provide a regular weekly creative session for our students.

I think the key element of what Soft Touch offers our young people is giving them access to professionalism. There is a big difference to their experience of learning in school and their learning experiences outside school. Access to quality facilities and people who work in the arts full time is always going to be a very special experience for young people.

Attending Soft Touch is seen as a privilege and reward for good behaviour by students. As our young people have had trouble in mainstream school, for one reason or another they have switched off from learning in that environment. Going to Soft Touch gives them the idea that making music can be serious and it's not just purely a leisure thing. At the PRU we take what they achieve at Soft Touch seriously and that fosters respect.

Because our service is a small operation working with disaffected pupils who probably haven't had the opportunity to be involved in school performances, Soft Touch gives them an opportunity to perform in front of their peers at credible local events and venues. This gives them a big confidence boost. Also the fact they are learning new technologies that can't really be taught by a teacher means they will have the confidence to use state of the art software and computers in the future. I have seen a change in the students that go to Soft Touch in terms of their personal development. They are mixing with different people in a different environment which will help them move more easily into further education. Some of them are talking about what they want to do in the future and as well as creative skills they are learning about planning, time management, team working and communication.

The Soft Touch partnership means we have access to professional space and expertise. They can advise us on what can be delivered to engage our students and respond to their needs which helps our service deliver its targets.

ADELE – participant in the Watershed textiles project

My name is Adele, I'm 16 and I've been doing a textile art project for 10 weeks with Soft Touch through our Young Mums Project at the Watershed Centre.

I've done bits of art before but I've never really been taught how to do it and then teach it. I feel confident that I could teach someone to make felt now. I wouldn't have been able to do this before. After the sessions I felt really boosted and it made me feel good about myself, it's probably the only thing I'm doing at the moment that makes me feel like that. I've got some beautiful silk paintings in my flat now and people come round and say "oh where d'you get those" and I can say "I made them" and people say they're wicked and they're really impressed, it gives me a good feeling.

This project has inspired me to carry on and do more arty things. I've been able to put on my CV that I've done a Soft Touch course and that I'm confident running a session with young people to make felt or do silk painting. I'm going for a job in November and I've got an interview so it's really helped me.



"I think the girls that have done this project have learned new skills definitely. They have used these skills to teach me how to make felt and silk painting and some of them have said, oh, I'd like to do this with my kids and they now know where to get materials from and can now do things with their kids that don't cost them much. They have all said they would like to do more arts and crafts and it has given some of the women the confidence to take a lead in our regular parent group sessions. They are all keen to achieve their NCFE Creative Craft qualification and working with Soft Touch has helped us to achieve our aim of getting the young women an accredited qualification".

Rita Morjaria, Youth Work Co-ordinator, Watershed Centre.

SHANE – participant in the UrbanXpress project



My name is Shane, I live at the YMCA in Aylestone. I'm 19 and I came to Soft Touch on the UrbanXpress project in the summer.

I learned to use Photoshop and I've realised I'm quite good at graphic design. I've also learned to work as part of a team and got better communication skills. I've started breaking out and helping on other Soft Touch projects using Photoshop so I obviously did something right in UrbanXpress. It means I'm actually doing something good, bettering myself and I've found something I'm good at other than just sitting on my jacksie playing computer games all the time.

Soft Touch staff tell us how to do things and give a lot of support, work with us closely to make sure that we try to do the best we can do. It's made me more pro-active about doing something about going to college, knowing that I could get up and go somewhere and stick to it. Coming to Soft Touch has opened the door a little wider, I mean, for possible different careers.

Now I know I'm good at something else, it kinda broadens my horizons.

Over the past five years Soft Touch has built up a great working relationship with the YMCA and we have offered opportunities for participation in creative projects to young people who are involved with their housing and education projects. Maria from the Hinckley YMCA Education to Employment Project made the following comments:

"Working with Soft Touch provides opportunities for young people to express feelings and opinions using a medium that we do not have the equipment or expertise to do. Some of the things they achieve include working as a member of a team, delegation, compromise, co-operation, problem solving, listening and the confidence to try new things, therefore encouraging them to push themselves out of their 'comfort zone'. They are often 'buzzing' after working with Soft Touch and the activities always promote further discussion on the issues covered. Some of the projects also help them to discover hidden talents, change career aims, respect others and challenge stereotypes in an appropriate manner, such as through the Moving On DVD they worked on with young Gypsies and Travellers. Their staff are patient, non judgemental, respectful, challenge inappropriate behaviour and encourage participation.... all this AND have a sense of humour!"

During the period November 2007-October 2008 Soft Touch received funding from the following:

Arts Council England, Leicester City Council, Equality + Human Rights Commission, Gulbenkian Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Leicester Youth Offending Service, Leicester Secondary Federated Pupil Referral Service, Leicestershire County Council Youth Innovation + Development Fund, Leicestershire County Youth Opportunities Fund, Leicester City Youth Opportunities Fund, Connexions Leicester Shire Voluntary Sector Grant Fund, Media Box, Big Lottery Young People's Fund, Creative Partnerships, Blaby District Council, Fleckney Parish Council, Awards for All, East Midlands Participatory Arts Forum, National Foundation for Youth Music, Leicestershire County Council, Babington Community Technology College, Find Your Talent, Trinity College, Leicester City NHS, Stokeswood Primary School, Mellor Community Primary School, Business Link.

Soft Touch is committed to equal opportunities and good employment practice in all aspects of its work.

Soft Touch Arts Ltd Profit and Loss Account for the year ended 31/3/08

	2008 £	2007 £
Turnover	354,460	325,022
Core Project Expenditure	(358,688)	(324,752)
	<u>1,765</u>	<u>1,550</u>
Operating (loss)/profit	(2,463)	1,820
Other interest receivable and similar income	2,631	1,785
Interest payable and similar charges	(1,245)	(1,757)
	<u></u>	<u></u>
(Loss)/profit on ordinary activities before taxation	(1,077)	1,848
Tax on (loss)/profit on ordinary activities	3,522	(957)
	<u></u>	<u></u>
Profit for the year	<u>2,445</u>	<u>891</u>

Full accounts can be downloaded from our website

During the accounting period above, Soft Touch received £52,900 revenue funding from Arts Council England (East Midlands) and £21,400 under a service level agreement from Leicester City Council. This core funding helped us develop business and secure funding which generated income of £280,169.



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Soft Touch uses the arts to offer people with limited opportunities the chance to work together to effect positive change for themselves and their communities

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