



ACTION MEDIA





Action Media: Untold Stories (Report June 2021)

Executive Summary

The Action Media: Untold Stories project is a partnership between Starting Point (a project providing mentoring for young people who face disadvantage) and Real Time (an educational charity specialising in participatory video and digital media).

From March 2020 – March 2021 the project has been working with young people aged 15 - 24 who are or who are at risk of becoming NEET. These are individuals who are often overlooked and are unlikely to access creative opportunities elsewhere.

The young people have had the opportunity to work on real world creative media projects including video productions, website building, graphic design work etc. supported by experienced media professionals and mentors.

Young people particularly those who are NEET (not in employment, training or education) often struggle to find suitable work experience to help them prepare for future employment. The project has helped support young people in:

- Building confidence and teamwork.
- Developing their communication skills.
- Preparing for the workplace.
- Helping to inspire other young people.

Young people were also provided with the opportunity to gain arts award qualifications whilst undertaking project work. The project has targeted those most in need and have multiple barriers to employment such as: learning disabilities/difficulties, no/low qualifications, social isolation, mental health struggles and social-economic disadvantage.

Participation in creative workshops and work placements have had a significant impact on their confidence and key skills, increasing the likelihood of participants attaining and sustaining education, employment and training. This is evidenced through the data, outcomes, evaluations and crucially through the documentary created by the young people.

Action Media: Untold Stories worked directly with **29** young people, all of whom undertook some form of work placement. The project supported young people with significant additional needs and low capacity for engagement.

The project had 4 key elements:

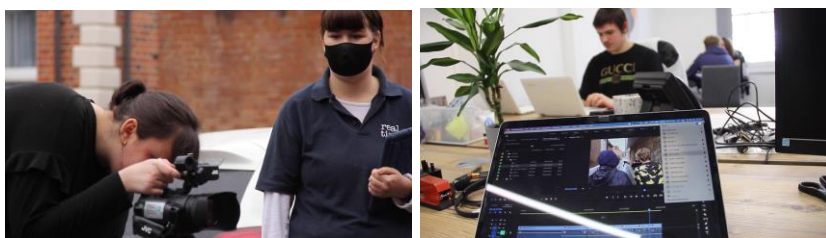
1. Creative workshops with young people, including one to one training.
2. Setting up a Media Production Company style initiative (Action Media) to provide structure for a ladder of opportunity in work placements.
3. Production of a Documentary (Untold Stories) - to provide hands on work experience and share learning and good practice from the project.
4. Developing Bespoke work experience placements providing the multiple work experience opportunities required by those who are NEET.

Introduction: 'Untold Stories' Documentary

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/561559458/fc69365b7a>

'Untold Stories' is a documentary produced by the young people at Action Media. They looked at some of the challenges and barriers young people face getting employment. It is an impressive piece of work particularly given a large part of the production was undertaken under strict film industry Covid protocols.

The documentary provided an on-going opportunity for creative engagement and learning through a real-world work environment, young people working alongside and learning from experienced media professionals.



All the filming was undertaken by the young people themselves, they were also responsible for the creative direction and content of the film, gaining skills in planning, storyboarding, scripting, research, interviewing, presenting, acting, directing and in technical areas such as camerawork, sound recording and digital editing. The documentary looked at young people's journeys from being NEET (or at risk of NEET) through to entering education and work environments.

Initially participatory video workshops introduced the young people to the experience of working together using the equipment moving around to different locations and being seen outside filming.

For many this was novel and challenging and considerable time and effort was made to ensure they were able to overcome their reluctance. Initially this was by choosing more private places to film to build their confidence.

Everyone took turns on all the equipment to ensure the skills were shared around the group, they had to learn to communicate with each other to become a "crew".

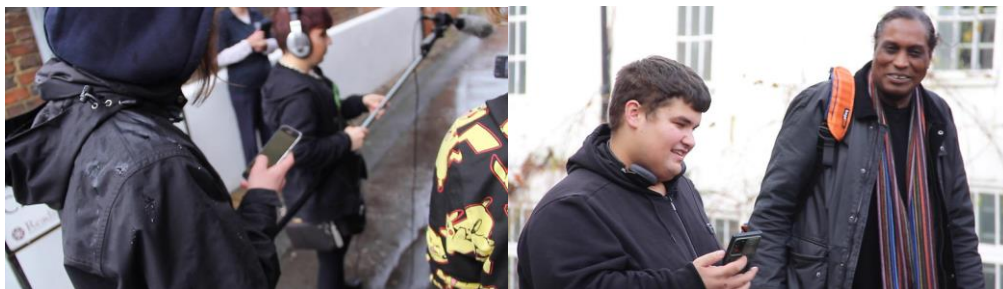


2 workshops took place every Friday with 2 groups. Each lasting 2.5 hours. This was generally split between video production workshops followed by activities involved in setting up Action Media which included branding, logo, and website design.

After a few weeks the young people began to start planning the video. This involved thinking about who might be involved where and when the filming might take place and what were the main aims of the film.

Scripting planning and storyboarding sessions were undertaken, and the young people undertook interviews with several people with experience and expertise in employment. They were able to plan the questions and then successfully undertake interviews, they used their phones on location to access their planned questions.

The young people also undertook a range of the more mundane tasks associated with production work such as transcribing the interview and watching and logging content. They also learnt the basics of video editing.



The Covid outbreak and the start of lockdown led to some intense reorganisation. Real Time quickly undertook risk assessments and established new working protocols based on PACT's (TV and Cinema producers association) broadcast industry Covid working guidelines. Where possible (weather allowing) all the workshops took place outside or in larger ventilated rooms that allowed for social distancing. The young people did not continue to share equipment in the same way as it had to be sanitised between each person touching it. These restrictions and the general feelings of unease within the young people made it much harder to integrate new people into the group. However, it was remarkable how committed they were in continuing to engage and take part in the activity.



The young people reviewed the edits and suggested changes, they took responsibility and were extremely careful in following the Covid guidelines. The final video will be a useful asset in promoting the work and approach to offer more opportunities to other young people, it's a considerable achievement.

The challenges

The most obvious and unforeseen challenge was of course the pandemic. For many, even during lockdown there were opportunities to take part in other creative activities from singing and music to dance online. However, from the experience of Action Media, the Covid-19 crisis increased the divide between those who can access culture and other activities and those who cannot. For many of the young people who engaged with Action Medi: Untold Stories, digital exclusion due to lack of equipment meant they were unable to access online opportunities and services. This feedback from young people led to the decision to provide in-person activities (where safe to do so) and to maintain ongoing support them by phone, seeing how each young person was coping and whether they felt they could attend.

Even under normal circumstances young people who are NEET often find it difficult to commit to a project such as this, they are often absent or late. As the project was supporting such vulnerable young people Untold Stories continued to offer sessions throughout the lockdown according to the prevailing government regulations. This necessitated the need to redesign the whole approach to workshops and other creative activities. This impacted on the project as it required considerable additional resources, time, and cost.



Interview with a Police Officer under Covid production protocols

Action Media: Untold Stories was the first project delivered together by Starting Point and Real Time. While they are both experienced in a multi-agency approach, Covid made communication between the organisations and other stakeholders much more difficult. Everyone had to adapt to new ways of working not only in the direct delivery but also in the management and development of the project. Despite this, new partnership working was initiated with the Toolshed (A project providing alternative education). We provided ongoing work experience for 8 of their students. We also provided workshops and or work experience for pupils at Highdown, Hamilton College and The Wren.

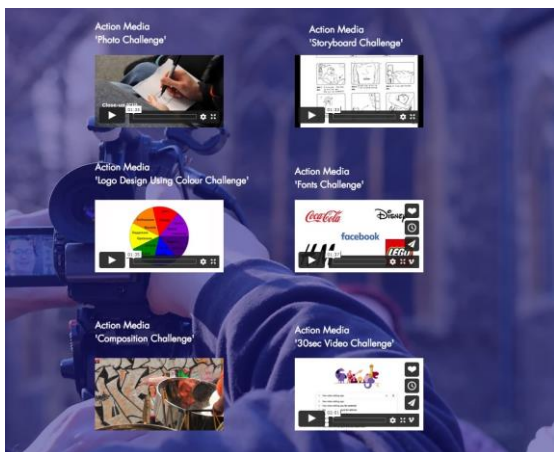
Digital engagement

Covid also amplified the difficulties in recruiting new young people to the project. To maintain its profile during the pandemic the project worked in collaboration with the young people to create 9 online video challenges so that young people who were unable to physically attend (reasons including residing with vulnerable relatives and social anxiety) were still able to be involved.

The 9 on-line Videos included short challenges in

- Photography
- Storyboarding
- Colour in Design
- Using Fonts
- Composing shots
- Making a 30 sec video
- Storytelling
- Using shapes and images
- Creating a logo

Watch Here: <https://vimeopro.com/user14092278/action-media-challenges>



Since equipment was not able to be shared in the same way the project developed new ways of running workshop exercises in video, storytelling, scripting, interview techniques and editing using i-pads. Due to Covid restriction i-pads and laptops were specifically purchased for use in the project.

Branding and Design

Developing a name, logo, brand and website for Action Media was a key component of this project and enabled us to create a clear framework in which young people received work experience. As they all played a role within the Action Media Crew and Design team, giving ownership of the project to the young people, empowering them to lead on creative decision making.

Designing the brand provided the opportunity to train young people in areas such as: completing research, understanding target audiences, conducting planning meetings, using IT software (such as photoshop), and developing a messaging matrix. These workshops not only helped young people grow in practical skills but also created a space for them to grow in teamwork, confidence and communication.

Once the name, brand and logo had been developed the young people presented the Action Media brand, demonstrating their learnings. Here is one example:
<https://vimeo.com/561706275/7f7cbc0ac4>

Alongside this they created a brand guideline to inform future marketing. This included: social media usage, imagery, and typography. The guidelines brought consistency to the development of the Action Media website where we delivered multiple workshops that trained the young people in the process of creating a website - one small step at a time. Through this the young people grew in IT skills and learnt how to use the WordPress software.

Here is the Action Media Website: www.actionmedia.uk

Key successes

The project used Innovative Approaches to working with NEETs integrating Arts Award delivery within the project structure, making it easier for participants to get the experiences and evidence to undertake the accreditation in a non-formal way. The use of innovative concepts such as task cards which provided participants with simple wins in each session, enabling each young people to reflect on their growth and develop a sense of achievement on a regular basis.

TASK CARD 1

LOGO RESEARCH

TO RESEARCH LOGOS LOOKING AT THE USE OF COLOUR, FONTS + IMAGERY

Objectives:

- 1) To learn how to use colour to provoke emotion in a brand.
- 2) To learn how to use fonts to represent tones & values of a brand.
- 3) To learn how to use imagery to help people remember your brand.



		Totally disagree	Disagree	Sometimes	Agree	Totally agree
I AM CONFIDENT IN FINDING OUT NEW INFORMATION BY MYSELF	BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5
	AFTER	1	2	3	4	5
I AM GOOD AT ORGANISING MY OWN WORK	BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5
	AFTER	1	2	3	4	5
I AM COMFORTABLE EXPRESSING MY IDEAS WITHIN A GROUP	BEFORE	1	2	3	4	5
	AFTER	1	2	3	4	5

The project used a modular approach to workshop activities in video, graphic design, and other creative activities. This meant that each session was self contained so if young people were absent for whatever reason, they could re-join, and this would not impact the activities or progress of the others. Action Media tailored the level of involvement and approach to each individual needs recognising the different needs and barriers, but also their unique skills and strengths. This required high levels of engagement and one to one support.

All the young people learnt new skills and used existing strengths in new ways such as design editing, planning, and group presentations. Interviewing and meeting new people all aided in and growth in communication and working with others. This ongoing activity and opportunity to learn from peers led to growth in confidence, levels of motivation and work ready skills.



Recording voice over for Brighter Futures Documentary

The project Integrated research and new methodologies on using video to improve employability from Real Time's other Erasmus Funded Video in Education project. It built on previous research on work experience using video undertaken in the Future Creatives Youth Consultation Project in Reading. Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/309666404>

The project created a real-world work experience for these young people to help increase workplace readiness. The young people were able to undertake task-based activities working with professionals which included delivering additional projects for local partners:

- Providing voice overs for a Real Time video production for Brighter Futures.
- Designing the logo and branding for the Thames Valley wide 'Hospital Navigators Scheme' (a Violence reduction unit funded scheme).



Navigator logo and branding designed by the young people at Action Media.

Key Outputs and Outcomes

From March 2020 – March 2021 a total of **29** young people accessed the project delivered by a Starting Point and Realtime. This included the forming Action Media of a production company style initiative that provides work experience within a creative industry, and the production of a documentary (Untold Stories) that shows the journey of young people who are not in education, employment, and training. Other

Outputs

Since March 2020:

29 young people accessed the project.

42 sessions (2.5-hour) of workshops and work experience were delivered.

Of the 29 young people who accessed the project:

25% receive Benefits.

17% are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds.

42% have ASD

34% have ADHD

50% have Learning Difficulties/Disabilities

9% have a Physical Disability

34% have Low or No Qualifications

34% have Mental Health Struggles

Through the ongoing training and work experience we equipped young people to create the following content:

- **Brand Guidelines** – Including a logo design, imagery, typography, and social media usage.
- **A Website for Action Media** – www.actionmedia.uk
- **The ‘Untold Stories’ Documentary** - <https://vimeo.com/561559458/fc69365b7a>

Additional outputs were:

- Creation of new innovative creative delivery methods for the project developed jointly by the partners.
- Consolidation of the partnership between Starting Point and Real Time in project delivery including the ability to respond effectively to the Covid crisis.
- Creation of online resources: Video challenges plus design elements short videos etc.
- Task cards and modular Arts award system
- Starting Point now arts award centre (7 new arts award advisors trained)

Outcomes and Evaluation

Of the 29 young people who accessed Action Media:

15 were NEET of those (6) **40% have accessed education, employment or training**.
14 were within education and at risk of becoming NEET of those **100% remained in education**.

In addition, 86% of all young people at Action Media accessed ongoing mentoring within the community.

We regularly gathered feedback from the young people through delivery however we used a UCL designed ‘Wellbeing Umbrella’ as a tool to help young people reflect on the process and to measure soft outcomes communicated by the young people. Below is an overview of the areas young people indicated growth through the ‘Wellbeing Umbrella’.

90% grew in confidence.

65% developed high aspirations for the future.

90% gained skills I need for the workplace.

75% grew in self-motivation.

65% gained positive friendships.

45% saw a positive change in their mental health.

However, the most effective and insightful feedback we received was the creating of the ‘Untold Stories’ documentary which captures the voice of young people, the wider community and the relevant partners. It is through this documentary and the unused footage we captured that we were able to better understand and evidence how meaningful work experience in a creative industry:

- Increases employability skills.
- Increases engagement of individuals with needs such as learning difficulties/disabilities and ASD.
- Has a positive impact on social-emotional development.

What the Young People said:

'It's been amazing! A great learning opportunity. I'm excited to continue' - Lucy

'Before I came to Action Media I was struggling with my mental health issues and couldn't find a job and Starting Point has helped me' - Kyle

'Action Media gives me brilliant opportunities.' - Connor

100% of the young people said they would recommend Action Media to a friend.

What the Partners said:

"One of the major difficulties faced by creative social action organisations is that funding often pays for direct contact but doesn't support the other essential work vulnerable people participating require. Action Media brings together Real Times expertise in engagement and digital media with excluded groups with Starting Points commitment to supporting those young people most in need. These organisations shared values have presented is a unique opportunity of partnership working to create innovative ways to benefit some the most disadvantaged young people in our society." - Clive Robertson, Founder/Creative Director Real Time Video

"It's remarkable to see the impact of 2 partners coming together, each bring their expertise to provide a unique opportunity for those who need it most. Through partnering with Real Time to form Action Media, we've been able to engage with a group of young people who would have otherwise struggled to access the support they need and to attain education or employment. Offering work experience in a creative industry has not only helped the young people gain employment and develop key life skills but has given the young people a voice and a chance to tell their story." Sam Lloyd, Project Director of Starting Point

Conclusion

The project has led to an on-going relationship between Starting Point and Real Time building sustainable platform to support young people in the future. It has created a new dynamic initiative in Action Media offering work placements to some of the most disadvantaged young people in Reading across a wide range of skill bases from design, video production, photography, acting, presenting etc.

The project has demonstrated how an integrated approach to creative activities can offer new and exciting ways to engage with young people and for them to undertake real world projects that benefit others. It also provides an opportunity for young people to tell their story, their way.



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