

CASE STUDY: Flying Angel

Artists' studios – engaging with communities

ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art) studio providers have worked with Look Ahead Housing and Care (LAHC) to provide artists' studios at one of their sites providing accommodation for previously homeless people.

The project has used space in a residential building in Newham, London for artists' studios to complement and extend the housing provider's programme of arts activities. Flying Angel, an old seaman's mission building, has been converted into mixed use residential units and artists' studios.

BACKGROUND

As well as providing accommodation and care for vulnerable people, Look Ahead has a unique, cross-disciplinary arts programme to contribute to the quality of residents' lives. When the Flying Angel building was due to be redesigned, extensive research was undertaken by Look Ahead into the most appropriate and sympathetic use of the ground floor spaces.

A visit to Acme's Galleria development demonstrated the viability of mixed use, private, affordable accommodation, social housing, and artists' studios in urban environments. Research undertaken by Look Ahead into the Times Square model project in New York, another mixed use development providing accommodation for formerly homeless people and ongoing arts projects, gave strong evidence of the benefits of integrating different kinds of housing and activities.

Look Ahead invited artists' studio providers to tender to develop and manage this provision. ACAVA's track record of studio development and management as well as their involvement in exploring the ways in which marginalised



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Exterior of the Flying Angel site

people, and people threatened with social exclusion, can be helped through art, meant they had exactly the right experience and knowledge for the project.

FIRST STEPS

Once ACAVA had won the tender they started to work with Look Ahead, the architects and contractors to make the project practically and financially viable. Drawing on their experience of studio provision ACAVA consulted on the layout and specification of the studios, including; room heights, lighting requirements, the nature of the walls, and access to the studios.

DEVELOPMENT

As soon as the project had the go-ahead ACAVA and the arts manager of Look Ahead started to collaborate on how the arts programme would work and on how they could access funding.

A project at Princess Beatrice House, another of Look Ahead's sites and the largest hostel in London for formerly homeless people, saw an ACAVA artist working with residents to produce an exhibition of art work. The project provided an opportunity for both organisations to collaborate and for ACAVA to learn about the practicalities of working with Look Ahead's clients.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The project has provided an opportunity for ACAVA to work very closely with a social housing provider in the development of an entire process and programme which will benefit artists and the community
- The development places artists and their practice at the centre of a challenging community
- The benefits of artists working in a residential space and the potential connections which artists and residents will develop will be explored through this partnership
- The project makes constructive use of the ground floor space, ensuring occupancy and activity

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FINANCE

The residential development is funded by The Housing Corporation and Look Ahead, whilst Look Ahead is supporting the studio development alone. It has been agreed with ACAVA that rent for artists will be affordable, with the actual figures to be reviewed once the building has been completed. Working together and using both partners' experience of managing previous projects, funding for the arts programme will be sought on a project by project basis from external funders.

FUTURE

When the building project is completed in 2010, ACAVA will recruit artists to take up the studio spaces and join Look Ahead's rolling programme of arts projects taking place at the Flying Angel and in and around other supported housing projects across London and the South East.

Look Ahead plans to access one studio as a project space. This will provide potential for artists' residencies or short term exhibitions and educational activities. As ACAVA works together with Look Ahead to manage the studios and artists, their relationship will continue to develop and other partnerships may evolve, extending benefits to artists and participants.

BENEFITS

Artists

Artists will benefit from purpose built studios, which will be pleasant, thermally-efficient working environments.

The studios will provide an opportunity for artists to make work and develop their portfolio of skills whilst sustaining their practice through community and education projects

The studios are in an area where many artists live and so provide the opportunity for artists to work closer to home, reducing travel costs and increasing productivity.

Residents and service users

There will be new opportunities for individuals to integrate with their local arts organisations and community.

Following involvement in other arts projects, many participants have gone on to access employment or training, or decided to tackle long standing alcohol and drug issues as a direct result of acquiring new confidence and finding an interest outside their everyday existence.

The presence of artists onsite reduces vandalism, increases respect for the property and creates a sense of peaceful activity and community.

Look Ahead Housing and Care

The project is an opportunity for Look Ahead to extend its strategy in engaging residents with arts projects



The Flying Angel that gives the site it's name

A group of working artists who are, by nature, enthusiastic workers, within the residential unit will be good for morale and encourage residents to view employment choices differently. The visibility of the scheme will provide a platform to change public perceptions of some of society's most vulnerable people and what they are capable of achieving.

MORE INFORMATION

ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art) is an educational charity. It provides a comprehensive range of visual arts services, including the development of public art and community educational projects, training in the use of digital technology for image creation and communication, mounting exhibitions, and the provision of studios and other facilities for professional artists. ACAVA's various educational initiatives aim to promote individual expression and the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity. They aim to develop visual skills in relation to the schools curriculum and beyond, to provide work experience and promote career development.

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Look Ahead Housing and Care (LAHC) provides vulnerable customers with high quality accommodation and the care and support services they need to live independently. Look Ahead works to a unique social care model and operates in partnership with local authorities, helping them to achieve a range of local strategic objectives. They offer a range of specialist services designed to meet the differing needs of the many people in their care. These include rough sleepers, homeless single people and families, care leavers, people with mental ill-health issues and learning disabilities, recovering substance abusers and ex-offenders.

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