



IDEAS FOUNDATION: HOW CAN WE INSPIRE YOU?

How do you sail through a storm? Sheer will and endurance, of course, but also with learned skill and experience. It's a well-worn analogy, but one that feels familiar when you consider the many challenging unknowns faced by the Ideas Foundation in 2020. Covid 19 hit the arts hard, took children out of school, widened divides and pared everything back to just the essentials. However, Chief Executive, Heather MacRae and her team didn't lose sight of the shore.

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INITIALLY IT WAS A REAL BURST OF ENERGY. EVERYONE SAID, 'OKAY, THIS ISN'T GOING TO LAST FOR THAT LONG. WE CAN DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. AND DIGITALLY.

Of course, we now all know better, but at the time Heather and Creative Programme Director, Helen Poole focused their attention on the immediate, applying the calm and problem-solving approach that is their hallmark. It is the truly effective Programme Manager that knows when to step back – and when to step in. Spring 2020 was one of those times. “Peculiarly, everyone felt it was a chance to reboot and rethink. Then, obviously, it became clear we were in for the long haul and that's when communications became trickier. And people were anxious.” A new comms strategy was put in place to reassure the partners, help them to plan and, importantly, to share their experiences and feel connected with each other at a time when whole nations felt isolated. Monthly meetings became weekly, with the Ideas Foundation and partners using the time to flesh out a cohesive plan for delivering creative experiences to the schools.

“What is it we're trying to achieve here? What are we adding?” By staying focused on the core strategy of Burberry Inspire and true to the “red thread” of the programme, they were able to stay on track. These conversations addressed everything from safeguarding (“there was a real nervousness about having any live interventions at some schools”) to logistics and a lack of consistency in the school's approaches to lockdown

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schooling. In the early stages, many alternatives to the in-classroom learning were investigated. Some were exciting and high-tech, but ultimately it was the foundational goal of reaching as many young people as possible that dictated the direction. “We listened to what the schools were saying they wanted and then basically went for the Creativity Kits,” explains Heather. “It seemed inappropriate to look at high-tech solutions when kids were struggling with access to pencils and paper. You need to constantly think ‘what's going to be easy?’”

This far into the programme, the partners were already prepared for the many and varied curveballs that working with schools would naturally serve. The Ideas Foundation had ensured that they had already received plentiful training, tools and upskilling that would serve them well in their task of delivering creative experiences throughout the programme, and these were just as applicable to the challenging period of the pandemic. Each received safeguarding training as a matter of course and a number of the partners used their new Adobe Creative Cloud and Canon cameras to create and deliver tailored educational resources. When each partner was tasked with conceiving and delivering a unique ‘Creativity Kit’ of tasks and resources for the students, it was done under the ‘brand guardianship’ of the Ideas Foundation. As with every asset produced under the Burberry Inspire brand, they ensured that every aspect of every kit, from every partner, reflected the high standard that is synonymous with Burberry. “It had to be Burberry-esque in terms of the quality... with great quality writing and great quality design.”

This attention to detail and cohesive approach to deliverables has been consistent throughout the programme, with Heather and Helen setting clear parameters for all involved. Bringing everyone together for shared learning and development, forging a successful branding and comms strategy for Burberry Inspire and building a framework so secure meant that the Ideas Foundation were then able to step back and give the partners space to engage and educate. It's this attention to the details and fundamentals that keeps all involved focused when storm clouds brew.

And while the world changed before our eyes, new relationships were also beginning for this fresh year of the programme – a new aspect that paired the Yorkshire partners with contemporaries in New York. Introducing the partners in two cities saw the essential work of

aligning their practices and sparking the successful collaborations on the Creativity Kits. The team ensured that both Leeds and New York came away with new perspectives on their delivery and a resource that suited them both. “This time last year we were introducing ourselves to the New York partners and actually creating a community,” explains Heather. “Which is actually working well. The partnership has lifted everybody.” The annual ‘Cultural Runway’ event, a hotly anticipated showcase of students’ work, will also be a digital affair, with managing arts partner, Creative Arts Team in New York taking the lead on the project and the Ideas Foundation in full support from the UK.



Despite the obvious challenges throughout the year and the incredible amount of extra work to be undertaken in order to quickly course switch, there is a real sense of achievement and a tangible legacy of which the Ideas Foundation are justifiably proud. It would be easy to simply look to the future with a hope that everything settles down and returns to normal, but Heather acknowledges that even in the best-case scenario, they've learnt so much that it would be a pity not to develop a means to run in-person and digital education in parallel. “That way of partners working together, the Creativity Kits – that's going to outlive the programme,” she says. What this means in real terms is that the digital resources used by the eight participating schools can, in theory, travel. While they are already in use by the American partners, their presence online means that educators anywhere can use them to inspire their students. And the partners themselves have seen first-hand how the model has worked and been inspired to adapt it for other projects. Ultimately, it has shown that success comes in all shapes and sizes and creativity is adaptable enough to meet those shapes and flow into them.

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