

Community engagement

Assessment 1

Help Our Future through Our Past - From Centuries to Centuries

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The evolution of modern-day technology has reached the point where everything in life has been made effortless – only one click away. From online shopping, work, games, to the infinite amount of information sitting at your fingertips, everything can be accessed easily and pleasantly from the office, while on the move or from the comfort of your own home.

Everything, however, comes with a price, and it is quite the price. Constant use of technology is not just affecting our lives, but the lives of our children as well. Regardless of how we feel about technology, it has been proven that too much technology use in children can have serious negative outcomes for them. (Alghamdi, 2016) Therefore, it would be best if we provide our children with an education and past times through various methods, aiming for most of them to be technology-free.

Of course, there are already some opportunities for past times that are both educational and not based in technology such as educational visits to enterprises and museums, summer schools, training centres and we can always bring our children to the playground for some physical activities. Some children, however, are less fortunate when it comes to physical or mental ability, and for them, even something as simple and natural as the playground can seem like an impossibility. As a focus group interview from 2018 confirmed that even children with disabilities need to be able to access outdoor activity for their mental and physical health. (Pouya, 2018)

Perhaps there is a way to address both problems with a single solution – a past time that would bring generations together, bring children away from their hypnotic devices and bring kids with disabilities the pleasures and joy of a shared playground.

For this assignment, I intend to use a community engagement “to-do list” divided into a few steps analysing the project. At the top of the list is most importantly: The purpose of the engagement

“Help Our Future through Our Past” is a not-for-profit organization, which was founded to realize a project titled “From centuries to centuries”. The project will work alongside three schools in the Leytonstone area as well as a charitable organisation and will consist of

producing various works based on traditional and modernized-traditional handcrafts including:

- Yarn knitting on one or two hooks
- Panel Weaving
- Wood Carving
- Crochet and embroidering
- Basket making
- Calligraphy
- Traditional dyeing
- Clay and porcelain pottery making
- Glass art

The “fruits” of this project will be presented, displayed and made for sale or auction at a bazaar organised by the local community. The proceeds of the aforementioned bazaar will be used for the purchase and integration of a special playground for children with physical and mental disabilities, which would be installed as an additional segment to the playground in the local park.

The second purpose of the project is to present an alternative for the free time of children aged 8 to 14 that does not include any technological gadgets that have taken over every sphere of their life. The latter becomes especially true in their later child and teen years as our have kids become one of the largest consumer groups of technology (Madden, 2013).

This step away from technology however should not be viewed as a step backwards. On the contrary, it is instead a step closer in attempting to bridge the growing generational gap, leaning into the idea that it is simply not possible to build a stable and prosperous future without relying heavily on the experience and knowledge of the previous generation. Now that we have discussed the purpose of this project, let us look at the people who are directly responsible and participating in the project to make it all possible. In community engagement terms those people are known as the Stakeholders. These people are of immense and crucial help to any community engagement and as the journal of BMC Public Health puts it: “Involving specific communities as stakeholders can help build public commitment to a

health promotion agenda and can empower the public to advocate for change.” (Brunton, 2017)

We can divide the types of stakeholders we include in our project, into three distinct groups:

- a) The immediate network of people we’ll be collaborating with to create the project – these stakeholders will be the ones that would help us plan, organise and realize the project - these may include but not limited to:
 1. The Local Council – who would help give us guidelines, access to public spaces such as the park, the playground and schools, and also possibly provide us with funding on the back of a charitable project
 2. The schools themselves – who would facilitate for the children and workshop leaders to have safe and designated rooms and spaces in which the activities can be led. They would also help us with communication with the students and their needs. The schools can also serve as advertisement “hubs” as the activities and bazaar can be market to children and parents in the schools.
 3. London charity organisation or organisations that support predominantly children with mental and physical disabilities (such an organisation is KIDS UK), who would assist us in properly dealing with the sensitive subject and help us with advertising the activities within the community and with marketing the bazaar that culminates our project
 4. The workshop leaders - the masters of traditional craftsmanship also known as artisans. There are plenty of them around the UK still practising their traditional crafts, a lot of them found on the heritage website (craftcourses.com). They will be the ones who lead the workshops, teach and guide the children in their process of creation. Without their work and teachings, we will not have anything to work towards.

With the aforementioned groups, we can have what is known as a round table discussion. We can use these types of discussions, cleverly named after the equality table of King Arthur, to have preliminary consultations and collaborations with the specialists and organisations helping us achieve our goal. “Roundtable discussions are a great way to bring people together to network, collaborate, and create meaningful connections between professionals” (Speednetworking.com, 2018)

Secondly, on our list of stakeholders we have people who while no necessary planning and organising the events, are still an essential part of the project and without them, the project simply wouldn't be able to exist. For our project these are:

- b) The people who will contribute to the already pre-planned and existing project i.e. Our suppliers and sponsors - in our case those would be shops, workshops and factories that would be able to supply us and the workshop leaders with necessary materials and instruments - places such as yarn shops, woodwork factories, hobby shops, furniture shops and factories. Also very important are our sponsors – be those small charitable organisations, local businesses or private donations. Without them helping out the project will prove to be a difficult task to achieve.

And last but by no means least, we have:

- c) The people we invite to participate in the project from the community - the participants themselves. For our project, the participants will be:
 - 1. The children aged 8 to 14 - the stars and aim of our project - they will be the ones invited to take part in all the activities and workshops. They will be the ones who, under the guidance of the workshop leader, make all of the items used for the bazaar. We also plan to include children with disabilities in the creative process should they choose to be a part of it.
 - 2. The Parents – who will essentially act as middle management stakeholders as they will be the ones we mainly communicate with and trust that they convey all the necessary information to their children. They will also be the ones having to facilitate accompanying the participants to and from the extracurricular activities, so their role is crucial for our project to prosper.
 - 3. Volunteers -These good-hearted people are interested in the community objective and what it represents, and they dedicate time and effort to the cause without expecting monetary compensation. Specifically, in our project, the volunteer efforts will go towards marketing, flyer-ing, and assisting us with staffing for the bigger events (the opening demonstration described below and the bazaar itself).

Now that we have identified the key components it is time to discuss the plan of action:

Once initial meetings and discussions have occurred and we have a green light from the local council regarding the project we start fundraising and accumulating sponsorship. Part of those funds will come from local businesses (restaurants and shops), part from charity organisations and the council and part what we fundraise ourselves (in the form of charity events, pay what you decide events etc.).

After we have what is deemed as enough funds to begin, on a previously agreed and heavily advertised weekend, at the end of the school year, in the Leytonstone Park there will be a two-day demonstration led by the people who specialize in the fields, which would be part of the project. They will all lead a two-hour workshop displaying their particular skill. In the first half-hour they will give a short introduction for their field, then proceed to demonstrate their skill, after which there will be a short break and following that, the parents, children and all attending the workshop would take part in trying out that particular skill under the supervision of the workshop leader.

Booking a slot for the event, will be free however, there will be a few points where some of our partners will be standing on a street stall with a bucket or a box. They will be there to collect immediate feedback for the workshops from both children and adults and the buckets or boxes will be for a “pay-what-you-decide” scheme where people can donate at their discretion as big or as small as they like. Half of the money will go towards the cause and the other half will be split between the people who lead the workshops as compensation for their time.

Following that, all the parents will have a week to discuss it amongst themselves and their children regarding which workshops/crafts they think would be best suited for the extracurricular activity and based on their discussions they can vote online through a survey or on our social media platforms. We will then review the votes, contact the chosen artisans and the volunteer suppliers, and begin preparing for the start of the next school year.

At the start of the year, children will be split into groups by age and interest in projects and then a schedule will be followed. Twice a week for two hours per session the groups either will stay in school after the lessons to participate in the workshops. The aim of every session will be previously agreed and discussed with the artisans as they must follow a progression of teaching culminating in at least one product per person per group.

Every month we will have a public meeting with representatives on both sides – parents representing the interests of their children, the artisans, members of the school and local council and members of our organization. In these meetings, we will identify areas for improvement as well as confirm what we know works and discuss the progress of the project. At the end of the school year, the aforementioned bazaar will take place. As an opening, our mission statement shall be read detailing what we have done for the past year as well as what the aim of the project is. That would then be followed by a brief introduction by the artisans talking about their respective processes and then the sale will commence. Stalls with the creations will be separated by types of projects created and all of the works of the children will be displayed. Light refreshments and entertainment will be provided, again, sourced by the community of Leytonstone. The most successful of the creations, deemed by the artisans themselves, will then be offered as an auction to get help to accumulate more earnings towards the project goal.

As a finale, the proceeds from the bazaar will then be counted and together with KIDS, we will contact a playground equipment organization that deals with playgrounds for disabled children (such as “Living Made Easy” or “Caloo”) to start the ball rolling on building the government approved, inclusive of all abilities, playground.

To conclude I would like to say that as stated above, this step away from technology would not be a bad thing, neither for our children nor for us. It is a step closer between children with the uniting activities, a step closer between generations due to their shared experiences, a step closer to the heritage that this country has to offer and a leap closer to bringing the playground joy and inclusivity to those who were unable to enjoy it fully before now.

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