

# INTERIM REPORT June 2020

ACTIVATE  
FELTHAM  
PILOT  
INSPIRED BY THE  
AGENCY



BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE &  
FELTHAM YOUNG OFFENDERS  
INSTITUTE



**BATTERSEA  
ARTS CENTRE**

 HM Prison &  
Probation Service

 Youth  
Custody  
Service

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## WHAT IS ACTIVATE?



## WHAT IS ACTIVATE FELTHAM?

In October 2019, Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) began a pilot of Activate Feltham, a project inspired by The Agency, a creative entrepreneurship programme for young people from underserved communities. Sparked by partnerships developed through BAC's Agents of Creative Change programme, the pilot ran for 3 months at Feltham Young Offenders Institute in southwest London on Feltham A (15-17 year old boys). Activate Feltham joins other Agency projects across the UK in Battersea, Manchester, Cardiff and Belfast, alongside the original programme in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The scheme was led by BAC; supported by Feltham staff; and co-created with young people at Feltham.

At the time of this report, the project is still ongoing but was interrupted by Covid-19, with young people in Feltham having just completed Cycle 1 (12 weeks) and were planning how to implement their projects within the prison (Cycle 2).

***We ask two questions: who is the most talented young person you know who should be in this project? And who are the ones who are not engaged at all, who you imagine won't have any ideas? Because we want both of them.***

**-Marcus Faustini,  
Agency founder**



## BACKGROUND: THE AGENCY

The Agency works with young people aged 15 to 25 from some of the most deprived areas in the UK to create social change projects based on the needs they identify in their communities. The programme began in 2013 through a partnership between Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), Contact and People's Palace Projects (PPP), based on Agência de Redes para Juventude, founded by Marcus Faustini in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2011.

Since the pilot year in 2013, it has had a significant impact not only on the young people who have taken part but also on the organisations and communities that enable them to realise their ideas. The programme aims to be truly representative of the local area, working with young people who are driven and ambitious with lots of ideas, as well as those who may not think they have anything to contribute to their local area in order to drive social innovation from the ground up.

Composed of two Cycles, The Agency runs for 28-weeks, with Cycle 1 (Cycle of Stimulus) taking 12 of those weeks and Cycle 2 (The Incubator) lasting 16 weeks. They pitch to a Panel at week 12 to gain funding to support their idea. The Agency is not only a tool for individual empowerment and social mobility, but has the potential to provide an emancipatory education to drive social innovation and solve systemic social problems. The programme does this through constructing a safe space for young people to think critically about the world and their place in it while devising ways they can turn their ideas and dreams for change into a reality.

## BACKGROUND: AGENTS OF CREATIVE CHANGE

Activate Feltham was seeded from a long-standing collaboration between BAC and Feltham as part of another BAC programme, Agents of Creative Change (AOCC). AOCC is a programme that uses creative process to promote innovative ideas generate social impact through pairing artists with public and third sector organisations such as prisons, the police, day centres, council departments, and more.

AOCC started at BAC in 2015 as an opportunity for artists and arts organisations to apply creative approaches in different contexts and as a way for local organisations from the public and third sector to incorporate more creativity into the way they work. It has now been fine-tuned into a methodology for co-creation and collaboration. Underlying this collaboration are three basic values:

- 1. Everyone is creative.**
- 2. Creativity is an essential yet under-explored element to social change.**
- 3. Cross-sector, creative collaboration is the key to unlocking social innovation.**

Henry Smithers from Feltham (and now at Youth Justice Board) took part in the programme twice, being paired with two different artists, before deciding to work on a larger collaboration with BAC's Agency staff. Collaboration is at the heart of AOCC, encouraging the team to work closely with Feltham staff throughout the programme.



# THE TERRITORY

## FELTHAM YOUNG OFFENDERS INSTITUTE

Feltham Young Offenders Institution a prison for young males, A side age 15-17 and B side 18-21, located near the town of Feltham within the London Borough of Hounslow, in west London, England. The original Feltham institution was built starting in 1857 and opening on 1 January 1859 as an Industrial School and was taken over in 1910 by the Prison Commissioners as their second Borstal institution. The existing building opened as a Remand Centre in March 1988. Giving a child a custodial sentence is often seen as a last resort due to the severity of their offending, hence children housed in custodial settings have often led complicated lives and present a range of complex needs.



# HOW DOES IT WORK?

Activate Feltham is inspired by The Agency programme, a project co-designed with the prison staff; the boys in Fetham and Roisin Feeny, Meg Peterson, Kay Rufai and Bobbi Byrne from The Agency team. Planning sessions were held to turn the 12 weeks of Cycle 1 into a 12-week programme (running October 2019- January 2020), using some elements of the Agency methodology and culminating in The Panel with the Governor of the prison on week 12 and other special guests. Facilitators worked with between 11-25 young people from the Platinum Community per session, approximately 35 young people in total. Cycle 2, where they are able to implement their ideas, aimed to take place from March-May 2020 but is pending due to Covid-19.

Similar to The Agency that instigates change through young people having a stronger, more active voice in their communities, Activate explored ***how incarcerated young people can have a stronger voice in their community (in this case the prison context), particularly in relation to how they view themselves; what they think about the prison; and what they can change, making them active agents for change in that environment.*** This was initially explored through the simplified aim of ***offering a different logic or way of thinking to build personal strength.***

By the end, six young people came up with five ideas they pitched to a panel of experts about their projects and issues they had with the prison on 13th January, 2020. Longer term programme aims have wider, more systemic shifts which are listed at the end this report, however, for the pilot, the programme aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

## **Young people will:**

- Be supported to accomplish something
- Explore ways to improve the relationship between other young people and staff
- Investigate alternative learning approaches through taking part in creative activities
- Come up with project ideas; pitch to a panel of experts; and have a celebration activity at the end
- Be celebrated for their accomplishments and capabilities

## **Platinum Community staff will:**

- Have a better understanding of the needs of young people
- Be exposed to different ways of working with young people in a prison environment

## **BAC will:**

- Explore ways to adapt the methodology and co-design this adaptation to maximise impact in different settings
- Have a deeper understanding of how to provide pathways for young people leaving prison and for ROTL (day release)



## ETHOS

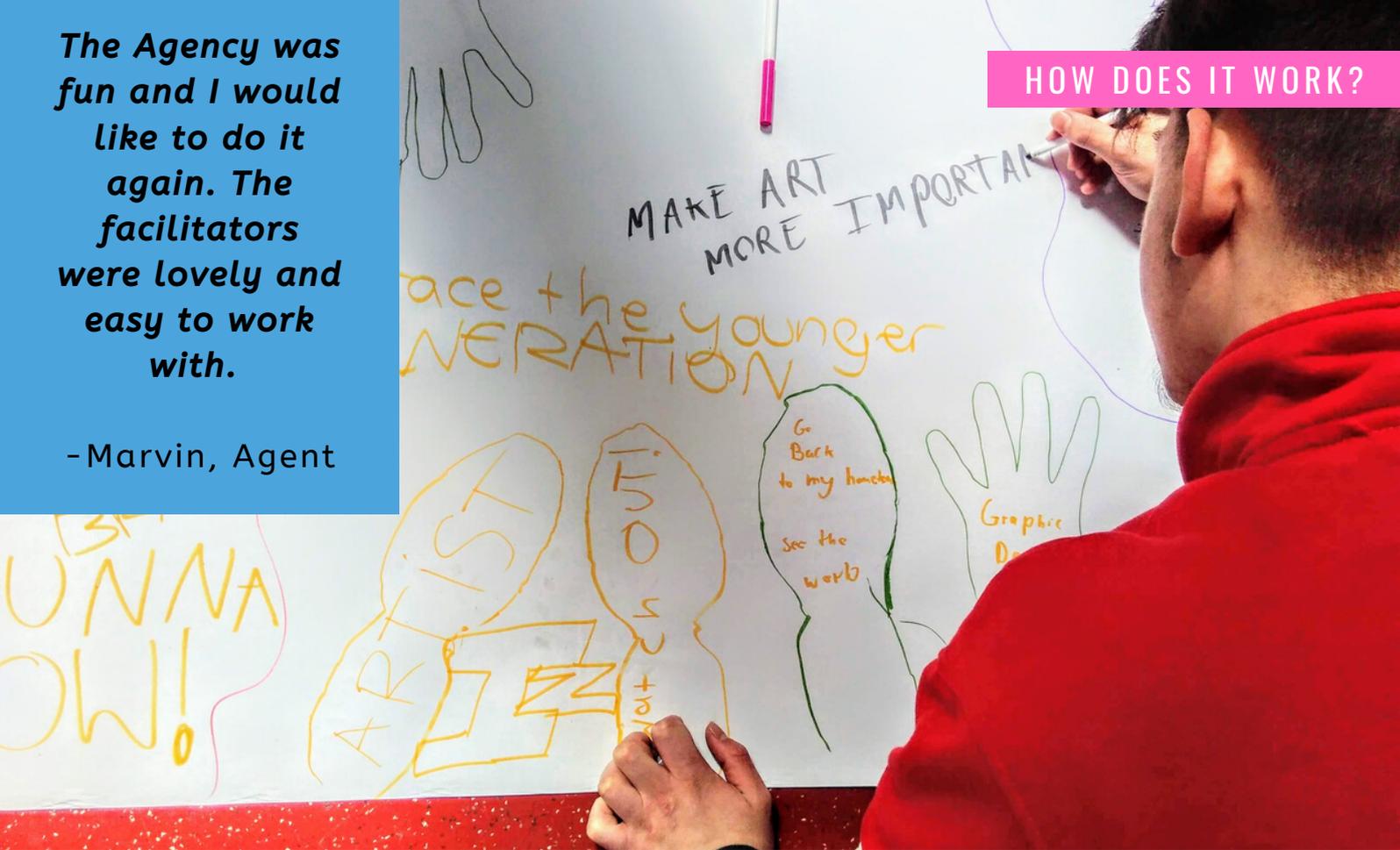
Essential to the success of the programme was not only the activities that took place, but the way the young people were treated and the environment created as part of Activate. These five key pillars included:

- 1. Creativity-** the process of creation; imagination is key; expression; planning, delivering, reflecting and supporting; reimagine change and possibility; sharing other artists
- 2. Environment-** signposting them to staff who can help them; mapping the territory; advocacy for change; using themselves and what's around them; developing an awareness of who they are in that environment and what they can change
- 3. Care-** positive, supportive approach; the body meditation; the space; showing the Agents we think about them; remembering who they are and what they have achieved
- 4. Skill-building-** using the tools in the methodology; using creativity to unlock potential and ideas
- 5. Celebration-** focusing on the achievements of everyone including agents, team, staff and methodology; giving them a chance to share what they can celebrate from week to week; celebrating their ideas

**The Agency was fun and I would like to do it again. The facilitators were lovely and easy to work with.**

**-Marvin, Agent**

**HOW DOES IT WORK?**

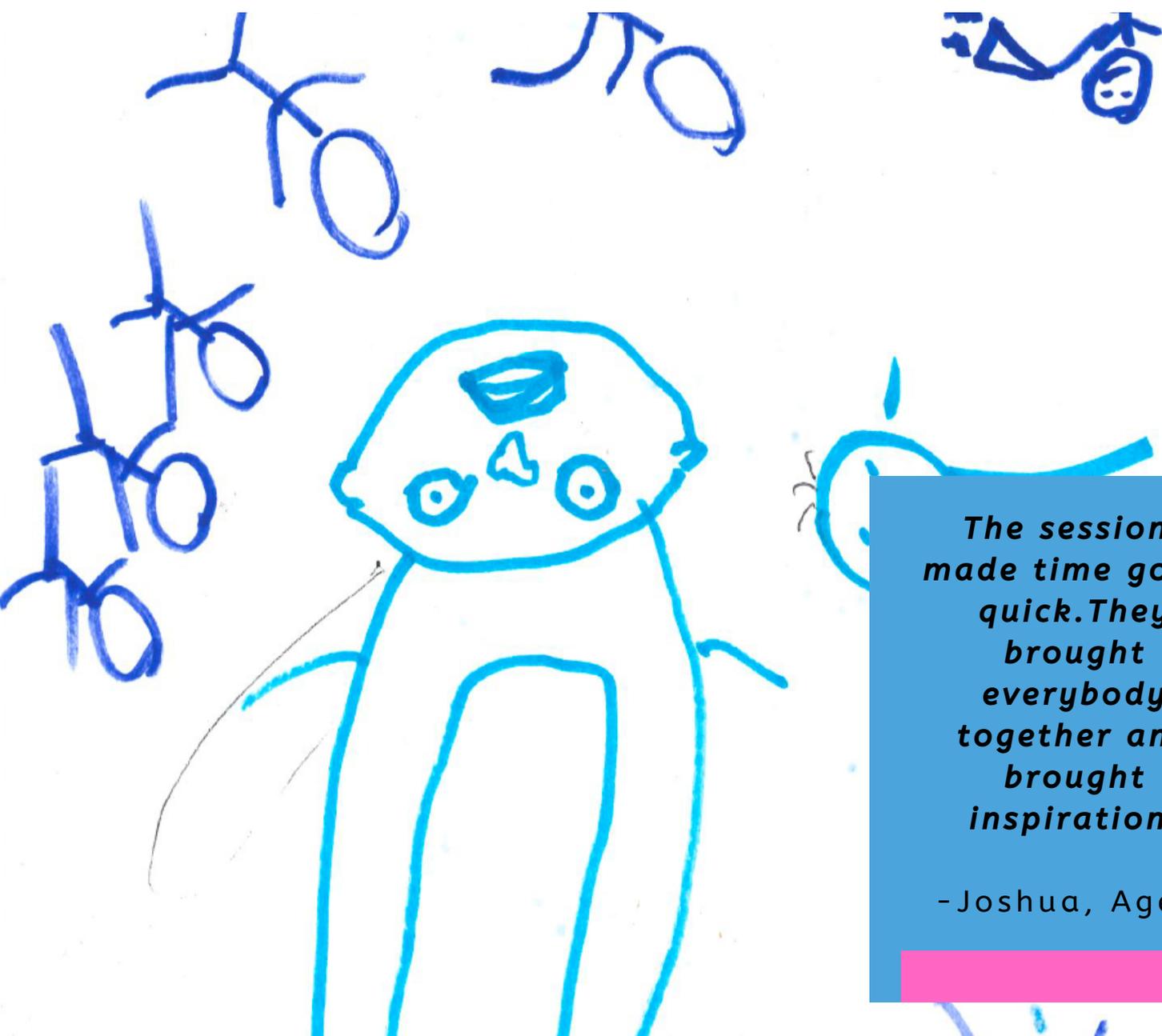


## DELIVERY OF SESSIONS

The programme pilot was an adaptation of The Agency's Cycle 1, using some elements like The Compass, Inventories and Avatars. The sessions ran on Feltham's Platinum Community unit on Sundays from 1:30-3:00pm with 15-17 year old boys who had obtained gold status which means they receive additional privileges based on good behaviour. Facilitators did not have any prior information about their crimes, nor did they seek out that information, in order to avoid bias or preconceived notions about the boys. Some of their offenses were communicated over the course of the programme, but it was left up to them as to whether or not they wanted to divulge that information.

The programme began with a smaller group of boys, about 11 on the unit, with a morning of an hour and an afternoon session of an hour and a half, with a two hour break in between. Eventually, due to challenges in the prison, the sessions were shortened to just the afternoon session, with the numbers increasing to 25 in some instances. Sessions began with group check-ins about something they would like to celebrate from that week, leading into games and ending with group activities adapted from the Agency methodology and check out to close. Boys were given £5 phone credit as an incentive to give their time to the sessions.

There was a strong group from the start, but initially there was resistance to generating ideas of how to change prison culture. It was clear from the outset that the vulnerability that takes a bit of guidance and creative activity to tap into with young people in The Agency on the outside was nearly impossible in a group setting with boys in Feltham. Hence, the sessions were light and active at first, focusing on getting them to work together and think creatively about accomplishing tasks. The Compass, the first tool in the Agency toolkit that focuses on their desire for change; skills they have and need; and their motivation, was planned to be introduced in the first session in detail, but it was clear that many were not ready for that level of depth. Disillusioned by the possibility of any positive change taking place in the prison initiated by them, the majority lacked motivation to participate at first. With many disappointments under their belts and privileges taken away, it was not surprising they felt this way. Also, with the majority having had negative experiences with education and in their lives, asking them what they desire and are passionate about in general seemed too abstract for the first session.



***The sessions made time go by quick. They brought everybody together and brought inspiration.***

- Joshua, Agent

As a result of this disconnect, over the course of the following sessions, other techniques were trialled to get them to think more critically about change in the prison and their ability to have agency over those changes and ultimately their lives too. Some of The Agency's creative entrepreneurship tools, such as The Compass that helps to give their ideas a direction of travel, were used alongside many other creative techniques for engagement and expanding their imaginations of what is possible. Some of these included:

- Creative, group business activities
- Designing an exhibition
- Creating abstract art based on their prison experience
- Meditation
- Role playing
- Creative brainstorming and imagination games
- Involving staff in activities to break down barriers
- Inventories- taking stock of their skills and things they need to run their projects
- Avatars- understanding different parts of themselves that help or hinder success



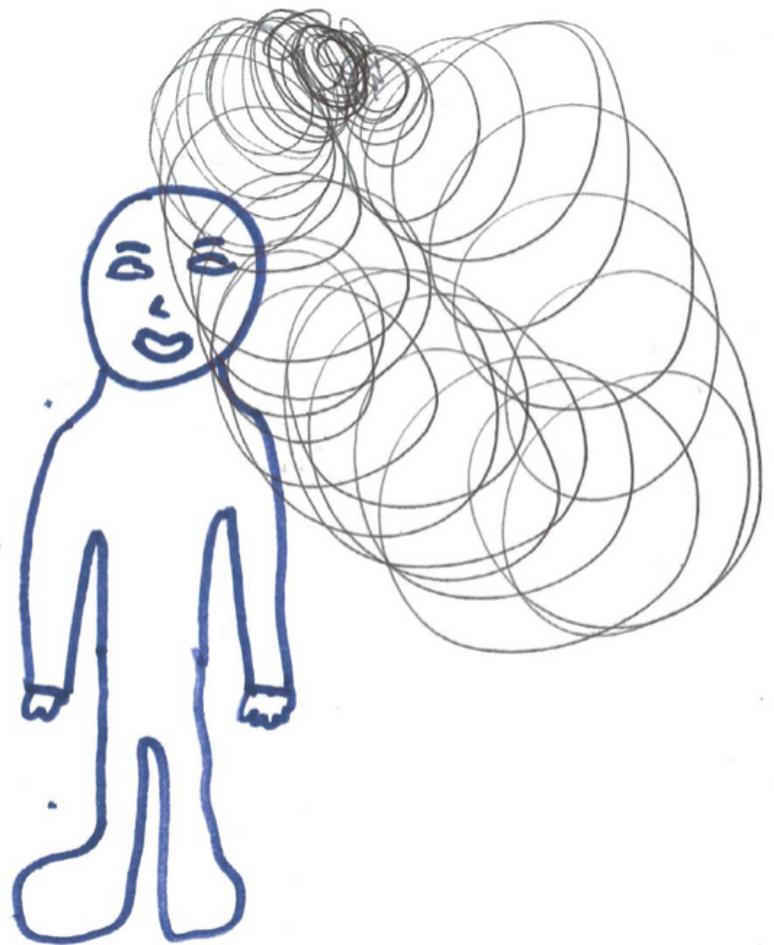
# THE PANEL

After the 12 weeks of Cycle 1 delivery, the boys pitched to a Panel of experts to receive £150 worth of supplies they can use to support their projects to grow. A total of 5 projects and 6 young people pitched for 5 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions and feedback from the Panel. Present on the Panel were:

- Meg Peterson (Chair)
- Emily Martin- Governor, HMYOI Feltham
- Thiago Jesus- People's Palace Projects
- Dee Norval- Breakthrough
- Jerome Ince-Mitchell- The Agency assistant, Blackhorse Workshops
- Sydney Sylvah- The Agency assistant, Battersea Art Centre
- Jay Madden- Custodial Manager, Heron unit

***Despite the challenges and limitations of the process, the five young people arrived very well-prepared and articulated their ideas with confidence to the panel. Proposals were well thought through and not only had a strong desire to improve the wellbeing in the prison, and some of them recognised the need to develop important skills - such as trading and cooking - for their successful resettling.***

-Thiago Jesus, PPP



# THE PROJECTS

The following outlines the five projects that pitched to the Panel. As cameras are not allowed inside Feltham, drawings were used instead of photos, drawn from memory by BAC project lead, Meg Peterson. Names were changed to protect their anonymity.

## Joshua- *Operation Instrument*

The project aims to:

1. Promote rehabilitation and good music making
2. Provide a therapeutic tool, encouraging young people to be creative

Joshua's idea is to organise a keyboard rental programme for the Platinum Community, using his money to buy keyboards that can be rented out to use with headphones in their rooms. The boys will teach themselves how to play keyboard and eventually, hopefully, find some time to jam and play together with the support of a music teacher. The benefits will be providing a therapeutic outlet for the boys to hopefully reduce violence and add an extra incentive for young people to work towards their gold status with good behaviour.

### Materials/resources needed:

- Keyboards £30-£50 to order
- Learning music books
- Time from music teacher
- System planned and put in place on unit

### Notes from facilitators:

The Agency facilitators saw how creative and kind Joshua was from the beginning. A quiet leader, he was able to mobilise other boys to engage more and more positively in the sessions. He is a young man full of ideas and potential, proudly sharing stories of the graphic design work he was doing before he came to Feltham. He had about ten ideas for projects before he decided on Operation Instrument, which he worked diligently on preparing his pitch for without needing much guidance from facilitators. He spoke proudly and confidently when he pitched to the Governor and the rest of the Panel.



*I wanted keyboards in our cells,  
Battersea Arts helped me to  
make that happen & it's  
slowly happening.*

## Marvin and Evan- *Marvin & Me*

The project aims to:

1. Help young people feel more human and connected to home by having access to items they are used to on the outside.
2. Teach the boys who manage it about business and money/life skills through running the project.
3. Allow young people to use good behaviour to get privileges.

Marvin and Evan's idea was to create a tuck shop called Marvin & Me happening once a month in the prison. The tuck shop would be run by Marvin and Evan to teach them maths and customer service skills and be only open to young people who are on platinum unit. Items that young people cannot buy normally inside the prison will be available there.

### Materials/resources needed:

- Order items or bring them in from the outside
- Space/capacity to get young people to come and buy things
- System to pay from their commissary funds



### Notes from facilitators (Marvin):

Marvin was a natural leader on the programme and someone who was able to get the boys to follow suit once he makes up his mind to give something a go. He is mature and has great relationships with many of the other boys which was clear in how well he works with others. Marvin said he developed his leadership and confidence as part of the programme along with feeling like he has a better understanding of things he can do on the outside.



### Notes from facilitators (Evan):

Evan often struggles with attention and taking things seriously, but he decided he wanted to take part in this programme and put his focus and attention on being involved with it, with a great deal of success. Evan is so creative and imaginative both in how he works in a group but also in his approach to the project working with Marvin. He's off the unit now but hope to somehow keep him involved with the project.

## Blake- PGS (Prison Game System)

The project aims to:

1. Give young people the opportunity to connect with each other in constructive ways.
2. The opportunity to play video games as part of privileges based on good behaviour will incentivise more positive behaviour.

Blake came up with the idea to start a prison video game system called PGS so that the boys could play together in the prison to bond them closer together in hopes of reducing violence and to give them a positive outlet for their time. He wrote a long list of rules that accompany the project around what is and is not allowed and will organise tournaments for the boys to play together and compete in a friendly way with each other.

### Materials/resources needed:

- PS2 with games
- Blake going out on ROTL to buy the supplies



### Notes from facilitators (Blake):

Blake was the young person we probably saw the most change in throughout the programme. He was checked out for many of the sessions in the beginning, not sure what we were doing or if he wanted to take part. He opted out of many sessions and decided he wanted to stay in his room instead of taking part in the sessions. There was a shift about half way through though- he started to become more engaged with us and interested in coming up with his own project. He spoke confidently to the Panel and overall just seemed happier and more excited about his future from taking part in the programme. Towards the end, he was really focused during the sessions, often needing little or no help from us to get on with his work. We were impressed with his progress and look forward to seeing how his project evolves.

***Being asked to be a member of the panel to listen to the young people at Feltham was insightful, rewarding and thought provoking. Listening to creative ideas that the boys had to improve the living conditions of themselves and others has lead me to firmly believe that it is the responsibility of society to nurture and encourage these seeds of creativity, so as to improve the future prospects of our young citizens that have had challenging starts at life.***

- Jerome Ince-Mitchell,  
Panellist

## Kelvin- Cooking Courses

The project aims to:

1. Help young people to feel more at home
2. Learn basic life skills
3. Promote healthy eating
4. Encourage bonding through cooking



Kelvin's project gives young people the opportunity to learn how to cook and eat homemade food through his cooking project. In this project, young people will learn how to cook recipes they miss from the outside and would like to make in the future when they get out. This will teach key life skills and be offered as an extra bonus to young people on the platinum unit to improve behaviour and help with creativity. The feasibility of this idea is still unknown as Kelvin has been transferred off of the unit, but we hope the project can still happen, just with another young person leading it.

### Materials/resources needed:

- Food brought in from outside
- Access to catering area on Feltham B
- Organising time and supervision for young people to cook

### Notes from facilitators (Kelvin):

Kelvin was part of the programme from the beginning and always came across as a positive force on the unit and a leader amongst the fluctuations of boys coming off and onto the unit. We could tell many of the other boys looked up to him, and he was more mature than many of the others. He had many strong ideas that we tried to encourage and was really helpful with the group and the other boys as well. He was nothing but polite and helpful throughout, with many creative ideas for change.



## Saman- *Boxing Beats*

Saman had the idea to run a boxing programme in Feltham, using research he had done about the benefits of boxing in PRU's and other prisons. Unfortunately, this idea cannot happen in Feltham because of the possibility of negative press around teaching young people how to fight, though he was able to use the pitch as a platform to express the issues he has with the prison. He will brainstorm with staff about how some of the same things that boxing might help address can be implemented in Feltham.



### **Notes from facilitators (Saman):**

Saman is a natural leader, with a bold personality and lots of ideas. Even though he came onto the unit towards the end of the programme, he still engaged and connected with us right away. He was always open-minded and without even spending time to plan for the pitch at all, he was brave enough to pitch in front of a Panel about his idea.

Though this project was not able to be funded, we hope he will continue to contribute to another project.



*The sessions opened up my mind. I loved being imaginative creating my own project and hopefully seeing it grow.*

–Joshua, Agent



IMPACT

## YOUNG PEOPLE

The evaluation was social impact-focused but more exploratory, responsive and iterative than other Agency programmes as there was an ambition not to be presumptuous about what the programme could achieve in a new setting. Hence, impact was primarily determined by ongoing testimonials and retrospective, self-reported social impact from the boys and staff. Young people, facilitators and staff were also interviewed at the end of the first cycle and young people who pitched to the Panel filled in a questionnaire about how they found the programme and what sorts of skills they believe they gained from it. Impact was assessed retrospectively by asking young people what changes they have seen in themselves and their environment.

Overall, young people reported that it improved their confidence in themselves and in presenting their ideas. It helped them to think more creatively about their futures and about how they might use skills that others think are negative for more positive means both when they are in prison and when they get out. Some were asked to list the skills they feel they gained from Activate including:

- Confidence
- Leadership
- Listening
- Belief in myself
- Social skills
- Thinking skills

As one of the evaluation activities, young people were asked to list how they felt, thought and acted before the sessions started and how they changed as a result. Here are some of their responses:

Feelings before sessions:

- Unsafe
- Stress
- Worried
- Scared
- Lonely
- Lost
- Angry

Feelings after sessions:

- Comfortable
- Welcomed
- Friendly
- Happy
- Pitching ideas
- Having fun
- Ideas



Thinking  
Stressed

Feeling  
Stressed

Doing  
nothing



Thinking  
ideas

Feeling  
welcomed  
friendly  
happy

Doing  
pitching  
ideas  
having  
fun

*In all of the four years I've been here, I have never seen these young people so engaged in an activity here before.*

-Platinum unit staff



## STAFF FEEDBACK

There was a mixed response in terms of engagement from staff, but overall, the staff feedback was positive. They enjoyed having the sessions on the unit and some said that it improved their relationship with the boys. They learned new ways to interact with young people and could benefit with some further support and training on creative approaches to engaging with young people, specifically for staff.

Observations of working with the staff is that some focus on rehabilitation and most staff members clearly had a trauma-informed approach when dealing with young people. This approach affected the way the sessions went from week to week.

Staff were eager for a space to share how they found working in a prison. Many really loved their jobs and felt they were making a difference through working there. Generally, it was evident that giving them a space to talk more openly about things affecting them and showing them new strategies could be beneficial.

# INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMME OBSERVATIONS

There were also a number of institutional observations we had throughout the programme that affected how the programme was supported and run from week to week. Initially, the days were intense and grueling. First and foremost, the first impression of seeing children in prison is quite difficult, and one that you don't really ever get over, leaving facilitators and support staff drained by the end of the day and into the day following. Secondly, while there is normally a mix of ages and sexes in The Agency on the outside, it was an all-male environment with younger offenders, almost all of whom have struggled in mainstream education, so activities with much writing or focused work involved were steered away from in the beginning to keep engagement levels up. There were no official statistics or background information given about the boys we were working with in terms of their education or proficiency, but generally in the prison, 95% have been kicked out of school before entering into the prison.

The sessions were designed, therefore, to be quite active, light, fun, and engaging. Sessions were held in their home as it was on the wing where their rooms were located so there was fair amount of distraction in addition to others such as radios going off; visits scheduled; and boys with chores to do, some of which happened during sessions. A summary of the general challenges were as follows:

- Boys being released, transitioned to other establishments and social visits – some weeks numbers were low, around 11 and others were much higher, around 25, so was difficult to prepare and integrate new comers half way into delivery.
- Staff buy-in – when staff were on board, it was evident by the smooth running of sessions.
- Other things happening at the same time – due to the operational running of the establishment sessions needed to be interrupted at times.
- Trust in the prison making changes- initially young people held some mistrust in the prison system which the programme aimed to circumvent. Ultimately, there was a perspective change in this area.
- Staff changes – staff on the unit were different from week to week so every session ran differently, and we were unsure of what to expect on the unit.

In the next iteration of the programme, all of these challenges will be addressed with the prison staff with further interventions designed to mitigate issues in the future.

## NEXT STEPS

The next stage of Activate is to support the young people still at Feltham to implement their projects and to plan another iteration of the programme. From March-May 2020, the young people were meant to have an opportunity to turn their ideas into actual projects, with the support of BAC and Feltham staff. Each project was meant to be trialled and evaluated with the hope that they will stay on as longer projects in the prison. The team planned to also work with staff to make sure they feel equipped to support the projects on an ongoing basis. Once lockdown measures ease, we aim to resume with the projects still possible to implement.

The programme also has the potential to work as an education pathway and as a programme that works with more young people on both A and B sides respectively. Running this prison-wide could be a great opportunity to make more of an impact. In future iterations, staff will be more involved in the programme, providing some sessions for them as well to learn the methodology so they know what to expect from sessions and to hopefully build some of the ethos of The Agency into their work.

There is also potential for Activate to be run for young people who are close to their prison release date or in resettlement when they are released, making projects and businesses they can run on the outside. That would require more more planning so there is enough time before their release date but is very possible and could have a bigger impact on their opportunities upon release.

Lastly, we see immense potential to also work closely with prison leadership and staff in adapted versions of The Agency and Agents of Creative Change to encourage wider, more systemic shifts in prison culture.



# LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

There is an ambition to help Activate grow as a more well-established programme in Feltham and other HMPPS establishments. As part of that ambition, a list of longer term outcomes have been discussed to address in future projects. These are as follows:

## **Young people will:**

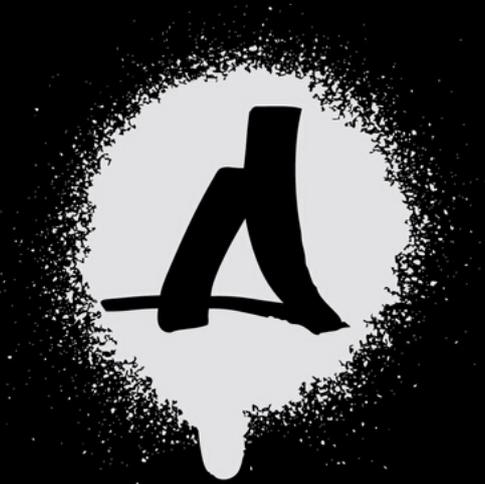
- Have a greater sense of accomplishment from taking part in Activate and implementing actions around ideas they have for positive change in their environment
- Feel an increased sense of agency over their future, improving their experience in prison and their perspective of their lives once they leave prison
- Have increased aspiration around their future and their potential to create the life they want to live
- Improve their relationships with other young people and with staff

## **Feltham will:**

- Have a better understanding of the needs of the young people
- Have a more positive, proactive, rehabilitative and supportive environment for its young people
- Be more engaged in empowering young people to be a part of change to issues they identify in the prison environment
- Utilise more creative approaches to support rehabilitation of incarcerated young people

## **BAC will:**

- Learn how they can adapt and test the model of The Agency in collaboration with different stakeholders
- Explore pathways of how the methodology can be supported by different sources
- Have an increased understanding of how the methodology can be adapted to continue to have an impact on young people who take part
- Use this to raise the profile of The Agency as a tested pathway for change in diverse settings
- Provide multiple pathways for engaging young people who have just left prison or are on day release, either through opportunities in the building or the organisation's networks



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Current partners include:

Blackhorse Workshop, The Kiln National Theatre Wales and Fablab Belfast

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The Agency is a programme originally conceived by Marcus Faustini in Rio de Janeiro where it is delivered by Agência de Redes para a Juventude. The UK pilot (2013-15) was funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Report by Meg Peterson.

Report designed by Meg Peterson

Drawings by Meg Peterson and boys on Feltham A

Special thanks to Platinum Community staff on Feltham for making this project a success.

