



Combating Inequalities through Innovative Social Practices  
of and for Young People in Cities across Europe

**WP7 Case Study: Innovative Practice ‘Beatfreeks’**

Date: June 2015

**City: Birmingham**

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## Cover Page

<b>INNOVATIVE PRACTICE/PROJECT TITLE</b>	<b>BEATFREEKS</b>
<b>City</b>	BIRMINGHAM
<b>Pilot type</b>	Based on own fieldwork: This socially innovative enterprise was identified by researchers in anticipation of WP4
<b>Type of target group</b>	Beatfrees targets young people at several different levels <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aiming for 'alternative' ways to get ahead, with sufficient competences and/or social support;</li> <li>2. Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support</li> <li>3. Other: Lacking social competences and networks</li> </ol>
<b>Type of practice</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stimulating and enabling entrepreneurship; self-sufficiency, co-creation; "communing";</li> <li>2. Empowerment: developing ambition, self-belief, competences and social networks;</li> <li>3. Bridging gaps: between disadvantaged young people and Local government (City Council)</li> <li>4. Other: improving employability</li> <li>5. Other: Building relationships with cultural, educational and other organisations (networking)</li> </ol>
<b>Aims/objectives in brief</b>	<p><i>'Beatfrees is a philosophy, a mindset and a reflection of a new generation of creative, freethinking social reformers. We pride ourselves in bringing the creative to the professional, and the professional to the creative'.</i> Quote from Beatfrees' website. This is part of the philosophy behind the initiative.</p> <p>Beatfrees aims to give a voice to young people, develop life and transferable employability skills and create community leaders. It uses art forms such as dance, poetry, music and media as a tool to inspire, engage and empower young people.</p> <p>Beatfrees' stated mission is to develop people and spaces through creativity and create a better world through more equipped, engaged, empowered young people able to apply their creativity to affect personal and social change.</p> <p>Through regular creative development opportunities, it seeks to help young people develop skills, resources, networks and confidence which will improve their employability and readiness for self-employment.</p>

<p><b>What needs, what inequalities</b></p>	<p>Main Needs that Beatfreaks addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of alternative pathways for young people not in training or employment seeking to ‘go-it-alone’ outside the formal job creation/welfare support services and survive in the labour market</li> <li>• The above also includes a lack of alternative approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to personal development and the acquisition of social competences and skills;</li> <li>• The breakdown of trust between disadvantaged young people and those in authority leading to the disconnect between them and opportunities for development and sources of support (lack of signposting);</li> <li>• The need for motivational role models relevant to the life experiences of disadvantaged young people to raise their aspirations and open up new possibilities and ways of thinking about themselves and the wider world;</li> <li>• The need for communities/networks of support for young people to enable them to move outside their zones of familiarity in order to improve their chances of economic and social self-sufficiency .</li> </ul>
<p><b>What (activities in brief)</b></p>	<p>As Beatfreaks has been in existence for almost two and a half years, it has developed a wide range of activities which share the same philosophy ie to do things <b>with</b> and not <b>to</b> young people.</p> <p>The activities broadly fall under one or more of the following three categories:</p> <p>In-house training to develop personal, social and emotional resilience, social competences (e.g. leadership, self-confidence, self esteem and teamwork) and transferable skills (e.g. project design &amp; management, marketing and communications including web design and social media) of its paid staff and interns as well as its core of young sessional freelance artists through arts-based activities. These are all learnt ‘on-the-job’ through delivering activities such as those described below.</p> <p>Engagement/outreach arts-based activities co-created between Beatfreaks’ ‘own’ young people and young people attracted to their programmes in Poetry, Music, Dance,</p>

	<p>Media and Leadership &amp; Enterprise. These happen on a regular basis in different spaces across the city, often in collaboration with the City Council, schools and other cultural organisations. higher education establishments as well as independent organisations – private and charitable/not for profit.</p> <p>Facilitation of youth engagement activities for other agencies and organisations drawing on the resources of its in-house team of young people who develop and deliver an appropriate project plan.</p>
<p><b>Who (actors)</b></p>	<p>The founder of Beatfreeks, founded it as a solo enterprise and then recruited volunteers from her first self-promoted event.</p> <p>Young people keen to develop their creative practice and/or attracted by the ethos of founder form the nucleus of a flexible group of sessional arts practitioners who are employed on a project by project basis.</p> <p>There is now a core of paid staff and apprentices and unpaid interns.</p> <p>These are then joined by young volunteers usually coming from one of the youth engagement events which Beatfreeks has delivered.</p> <p>There are at least twelve young people who now act as Associates or Consultants with Beatfreeks. Most have been involved as trainees or sessional artists.</p> <p><b>Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) and The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP)</b> are two of Birmingham’s major arts organisations which regularly collaborate with Beatfreeks to deliver youth arts/engagement projects.</p> <p><b>BeSeen</b> programme which offers seed funding to students and graduates from the West Midlands region to start up their own businesses (funded by ERDF). <b>UnLtd(Unlimited)</b> a charity offering grants to young would-be social entrepreneurs. Anisa received grants from both in 2013.</p> <p><b>Birmingham City Council’s Culture Commissioning team</b> has awarded grants to Beatfreeks from its funding streams for support to emerging cultural organisations and for specific outreach activities to involve more young people especially from areas of multiple deprivation in the arts.</p> <p><b>ACE (Arts Council of England)</b> grants under specific funding programmes</p> <p><b>Schools and colleges</b> which work in collaboration with</p>

	<p>Beatfreeks on a project basis</p> <p><b>Birmingham and Sandwell Mental Health Trust &amp; Youth Offending Service</b> which have commissioned Beatfreeks to devise and deliver projects</p>
<b>How (involvement of the actors, their roles)</b>	<p>Anisa, the founder and CEO is the driving force. But from the start, her philosophy is that young people are co-creators and co-decision-makers.</p> <p>The company has 4 Directors (over the age of 24) who work with the Youth Steering Committee of 10 young people (aged between 17 and 24) to steer Beatfreeks.</p> <p>Beatfreeks now has two operating arms – Beatfreeks Arts and Beatfreeks Consulting. The founder og Beatfreeks, as CEO, is part of both.</p> <p>She and the Head of Creative Learning and Experiences and Head of Media lead the Consulting arm.</p> <p>Beatfreeks Arts is led by the same three plus a Regional Development Manager. They are supported by a Community Arts Apprentice, a Marketing Apprentice, a Creative Media Apprentice and an unpaid intern.</p>
<b>Scope: number of the participants of practice(s)</b>	<p>As of May 2015, Beatfreeks has engaged with young people in the following ways since it was established in February 2013:</p> <p>5,000 young people via workshops in schools;  150 young people via targeted 10/12 week programme in 2 youth centres in Birmingham;  150 paid sessional facilitators;  4 paid apprentices;  6 unpaid interns;  15 regular volunteers</p>
<b>Duration (when the project/practice started)</b>	<p>Beatfreeks started in January 2013 and was incorporated into a company in June 2013</p>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
<b>Financial</b>	<p>At the start, the founder obtained financial support from 2 programmes (BeSeen and UnLtd) which aimed to assist young people start up their own business.</p> <p>Year 1: 102,000 euros turnover - 12,150 euros surplus But first event self-funded by founder. No overheads and no staff</p>

	<p>costs because used volunteers and received other help in kind.</p> <p>Year 2: 202,500 euros turnover – 27,000 euros surplus.</p> <p>Income comes from commissioned projects from public and private sectors, collaborations with other cultural organisations, grants and earnings from own promotions.</p> <p>Staff costs now include the founder and 2 FT staff and 3 apprentices. Office space currently in kind and marketing costs are minimal because mainly online. Individual staff costs were not declared.</p>
<b>Personnel</b>	<p>In 2015, Staff = 6 FTE (the founder and a head - CEO, Head of Creative Learning, Head of Media and 3 P/T apprentices), with a core of 15 sessional freelancers for project work throughout the year. These are supplemented by unpaid youth interns and volunteers.</p>
<b>Other</b>	<p>Know-how of the founder and her Advisory Panel and Board. In kind premises, currently at ‘e-spark’ within the offices of major bank in Birmingham city centre. Spaces provided by partners in return for delivery of outreach and artistic activities.</p>

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## **Introduction**

Beatfrecks was founded in Birmingham by a young graduate of Aston University, in 2013 to engage and empower young people through arts, media, training, enterprise and leadership opportunities. The main aim is to develop transferable life and employability skills in young people, and also to motivate them to believe that through their own actions they can affect positive change either socially, in their community, or in their own lives.

It is a response to the precarious situation of many young people in Birmingham arising from the local impact of the global economic crisis of 2008. The city is the largest in the UK outside London with a population of over 1 million, of which an estimated 16% are aged between 15 and 24 (BCC 2013). Levels of youth unemployment have remained persistently higher than the national average since 2008. In June 2013, four months after the start of Beatfrecks, the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate was 19.8%, compared to 11.1% for the UK as a whole with some deprived areas of the city seeing rates of long-term youth unemployment of between 26% and 31%. In addition, cuts in welfare, housing, educational support and tighter regulations relating to claiming unemployment benefits plus zero hours or part-time contracts have created a climate of uncertainty especially amongst young people in deprived areas of the city.

This social enterprise is not the first to use the arts as a way to engage with hard to reach young people in order to offer them alternative routes into training or employment. But it is the first to do so with a business model that requires relatively modest resources to keep it going, emphasises the value of peer to peer learning and the importance of identifying and meeting individual needs. It is of its time and it has the potential for transferability largely because of its philosophy which determines its success.

It is the ethos and the ways of working and building trust with young people which distinguish Beatfrecks as a socially innovative practice with the potential for transferability.

### **1. Evaluation methodology**

Beatfrecks was founded in February 2013 and so is an established organisation with a well-documented track record of engagement with young people. It was identified as a potentially socially innovative enterprise during the fieldwork phases of CITISPYCE in Birmingham. Elements of its approach and activities have been implemented in Venice and Krakow in two pilot projects to test the possibilities for transfer from one context to another and the requirements for success. This evaluation, therefore, is largely qualitative but draws on evidence of Beatfrecks' work prior to our encounter with the company and seeks to understand what makes its work different from other youth arts engagement activities and why it is considered to be innovative and more effective in its approach to tackling young people's inequalities.

Beatfrecks itself has a well-developed system for project evaluation: written evaluation which usually covers an overview of the process, success factors, improvements/lessons learnt, key impacts, key quantitative data and conclusions and alternative electronic evaluation media e.g. Facebook comments, storify, video reportage including vox pops, pictures, tweets.

The main methods of evaluation used by Aston have been the following:

**Field Observation** – over the past 18 months involving:

- 1) observing preparatory work for and the actual delivery of four separate youth engagement events undertaken by Beatfreeks in different locations across greater Birmingham involving different target groups of young people.
  - 1. Library of Birmingham 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014 (formal location in the city centre)
  - 2. Langley Park Community Centre 12<sup>th</sup> May 2014 (informal location in deprived area of Oldbury, W. Midlands)
  - 3. Bournville College, Longbridge 24 February 2015 (FE College in SW of city in deprived area which has undergone major industrial change and regeneration)
  - 4. Library of Birmingham, 16 April 2015

1 and 4 targeted disadvantaged but ‘motivated’ young people  
2 and 3 targeted disadvantaged young people with low social competences and below average skill levels and educational attainment
- 2) Observing the final showcase of a 12 week creative arts programme involving young people from Aston, a deprived inner city neighbourhood adjacent to one of the areas used for fieldwork in WPs 3 and 4. It took place in a municipal Youth Centre, The Lighthouse

**Interviews** – Mainly undertaken within the last month prior to the writing of this Case Study in order to reflect the company’s experiences with Venice and Krakow.

Interviews were conducted with the founder of the organisation and three young people who had become involved with Beatfreeks as volunteers and then progressed to being an integral part of the core team. They were, therefore, both beneficiaries and creators/deliverers of the organisation’s activities. In addition, a **telephone interview** was conducted with a key stakeholder from the City Council who had been one of the first to commission Beatfreeks to assist with connecting institutional decision-makers with young people.

**Documents printed and electronic** - including Beatfreeks own project evaluations, testimonials from other collaborators or commissioners, video reports

**Monitoring of Beatfreeks’ online presence** (website, blog, twitter and facebook feeds). Its online presence is integral to Beatfreeks approach to engaging and working with young people and is thus an important source of information concerning the overall design of its business model.

The interviews with beneficiaries were loosely structured in order to give the respondents freedom to express themselves without being over-influenced by the interviewer. The interview with the founder, however, was more structured as it was felt to be important to understand her motivation for the creation of the enterprise and her perceptions of the needs which she believed she could meet. The telephone interview with the key stakeholder from the City Council began in a structured way but it soon became clear that it was more valuable to use a more flexible approach.

Beatfreeks runs a number of different but interconnected areas of activity relating to young people from organising opportunities for young artists and would-be artists to perform in public to providing facilitation services using creative practice for organisations seeking to

engage with young people. It was not possible to observe every type of activity that Beatfreeks undertakes and so we chose to focus on those which provided opportunities to see how the members of Beatfreeks work together, to see their approach to designing an event to meet specific objectives and how they deliver such events on the ground. In addition, we were particularly interested in activities which involved the development of competences which relate to employability and enterprise.

## **2. Project/Practice Design**

### ***2.1 Social Issue(s) addressed***

#### *Background*

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK with a population of over 1 million, of which an estimated 16% are aged between 15 and 24 (BCC 2013), thus making it one of the youngest cities for its size in Europe. It is also a superdiverse city with both long established minority ethnic communities and, in recent years, growing numbers of newly arrived migrants (often in small groups or as individuals) from more than 180 countries. In addition to its characteristics of a super diverse and youthful population, Birmingham is one of the UK's most deprived cities, ranking as the 9th most deprived out of the 354 authorities in England based on the UK Index of Multiple Deprivation.

#### *Social issues addressed by Beatfreeks*

The performance of the local economy, swingeing cuts in public sector spending with its disproportionate affect on Birmingham City Council (NB It has already experienced cuts of a third of its budget compared to the 12% average across all UK local authorities) and very high unemployment are the backdrop to the way young people experience their lives in Birmingham. In addition, cuts in welfare, housing, educational support and tighter regulations relating to claiming unemployment benefits plus zero hours or part-time contracts have created a climate of uncertainty especially amongst young people in deprived areas of the city.

In 2012, it is estimated that nearly a quarter of 15 – 24 year olds were unemployed and in June 2013, the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate was 19.8%, compared to 11.1% for the UK as a whole. Many of these young people were – and still are - concentrated in areas of high deprivation close to the city centre. There are also, however, pockets of high youth unemployment in the outer suburbs where traditional manufacturing had declined or disappeared in previous recessions and there are few opportunities for employment for anyone in the area, particularly for young people with low skills and social competences.

During research for WP3, we heard accounts from a range of stakeholders about services for young people being reduced and becoming fragmented as a result of government spending cuts, realignments of power and introduction of new policies targeting young people's employability as opposed to social welfare per se. All this at the time of greatest need for support of both vulnerable young people with poor social competences and educational attainment and those with higher level skills and competences.

Furthermore, research in Birmingham with young people has also revealed a lack of connection between those living in deprived parts of the city with other areas of the city and particularly the city centre (Birmingham Social Inclusion Process, 2013). Young people also complained of the negative images portrayed about them by and within statutory

organisations and the media leading to a lack of trust and a distancing of them from those in authority.

Therefore, amongst the many inequalities facing young people in this context the following are particularly relevant to the work of Beatfrees:

*Structural causes:* high levels of unemployment and the lack of employment and training opportunities; poor levels of educational attainment; cutbacks in social welfare support;

*Individual causes:*

Lack of social and emotional competences; lack of self-confidence and self belief; poor motivation/fatalism; lack of positive personal support structures arising from family, community or peer networks; distrust of and distance from those with power.

The main issues which are targeted by Beatfrees are:

- A lack of alternative pathways for young people not in training or employment seeking to ‘go-it-alone’ outside the formal job creation/welfare support services and survive in the labour market
- A lack of alternative approaches (e.g. arts-based experiences) to personal development and the acquisition of social competences and skills;
- The breakdown of trust between disadvantaged young people and those in authority leading to the disconnect between them and opportunities for development and sources of support (lack of signposting);
- The need for motivational role models relevant to the life experiences of disadvantaged young people to raise their aspirations and open up new possibilities and ways of thinking about themselves and the wider world;
- The need for communities/networks of support for young people to enable them to move outside their zones of familiarity in order to improve their chances of economic and social self-sufficiency

Beatfrees operates at different levels and offers a range of arts based activities aimed at assisting young people into enterprise or employment. Essentially anyone who becomes closely involved with Beatfrees (as employee, apprentice, intern or volunteer) is taken on a personalised journey involving personal and social development, the improvement of their creative practice and the acquisition of transferable skills which will improve their employability or lead to self-employment.

They are all involved in the creation and delivery of programmes and projects in youth centres, schools and other spaces which are aimed at empowering and raising the aspirations of other young people who may range from those who have negative attitudes towards their situation and are limited by their educational attainment and social competences to those highly motivated but lacking direction and connections.

### *Philosophy and Innovation*

The innovation comes from the philosophy behind the approach to engaging with young people. It is work **by** young people, **with** young people, **for** young people. Young people are involved throughout the organisation as decision-makers and co-creators. They are at the heart of it and everything is directed towards doing things with young people not to them. They are accorded respect and provided with an exciting but nurturing and safe space in

which to let their ideas run free. Nothing is ruled out – they are free to challenge accepted practice and to propose something different.

This social enterprise is not the first to use the arts as a way to engage with hard to reach young people in order to offer them alternative routes into training or employment. But it is the first to do so with a business model that requires relatively modest resources to keep it going, emphasises the value of peer to peer learning and the importance of identifying and meeting individual needs. It is of its time and it has the potential for transferability largely because of its philosophy which determines its success.

## ***2.2 Project goals and plans***

Beatfrecks originally targeted young people who were interested in the arts, showed potential in their own creative practice and were motivated to use their artistic skills to navigate and survive their inequalities ‘outside the system’. To this group were rapidly added young people who needed support in terms of developing their social competences and connecting to institutions and organisations which might have resources available to help them into training or employment.

Beatfrecks’ main target groups, therefore, are those who are:

1. Aiming for ‘alternative’ ways to get ahead, with sufficient competences and/or social support – these are most frequently
  - a. those who wish to develop their creative practice in ways which might lead to self-sufficiency but who are not networked with likeminded others and are unable to locate sources of advice and possible funding in the city/region;
  - b. those who do not wish to become dependent on the state for assistance e.g because of the constraints this may impose on their employment prospects;
2. Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support - these are often young people who wish to participate in civil society in some way but again may lack the social competences, confidence and connections and sign posts to do so.
3. Lacking social competences and networks – these also may lack motivation and self-confidence to move beyond their zones of familiarity in order to expand their connections and possibly their opportunities to access training or employment.

*What are the ‘official’ goals (if any) against which the results might be compared?*

Beatfrecks operates at different levels and offers a range of activities aimed at assisting young people into enterprise or employment. Essentially anyone who becomes closely involved with Beatfrecks is taken on a personalised journey involving personal, social development and the acquisition of transferable skills which will improve their employability or lead to self-employment

**The goals** of Beatfrecks for its in-house apprentices and interns as well as its sessional artists (Target group 1 above) are to empower them and equip them to enter the labour market either as a self-employed or as a contracted employee through:

- An improvement in their social competences opening their minds through challenging the norms which are derived from their personal history and culture

- An increase in opportunities for employment through building their skills – artistic, organisational, project management, marketing, media
- An increase in opportunities for employment through access to social and other networks which they can use to develop their own contacts and opportunities for employment as freelancers or on contract

These goals can be measured quantitatively through the number of young people who have gone on the Beatfreeks journey who have subsequently registered with the tax authorities as self-employed and/or have obtained additional sessional work through Beatfreeks itself and its wider network.

The development of transferable skills can be assessed through observation of the actions of individuals in organising and delivering workshops, giving presentations, writing concept proposals for a workshop or other event.

The goals of Beatfreeks for Target groups 2 and 3 are to improve their social competences including self-esteem, confidence, ability to relate to others and introduce them to networks of similar young people in other parts of the city to provide opportunities to bridge the physical and symbolic distances between their own neighbourhood and other spaces and places.

*Activities which are crucial to the project?*

Work with In-house team members:

- 1) Some activities are directly targeted at young people who are motivated and who already possess some of the required skill sets for employment in the cultural sector. Through action learning with the company, Beatfreeks improves their readiness for employment in the sector and then supports them in their initial phase as freelancers. They are given performance opportunities e.g. Poetry Jams in the evenings at the Urban Coffee Company café, an independent coffee shop in the main professional and financial services quarter of the city or the Repertory Theatre also in the centre. They receive feedback and mentoring about their creative skills and use them also within workshops commissioned by organisations which wish to engage with ‘hard to reach’ young people. E.g. Aston University’s series of events in 2013, 14 and 15 to engage with such young people re: the EU and political participation.
- 2) Others may be much less work ready and are encouraged to contribute on an equal footing with more experienced members of the team to the creation and delivery of arts-based projects (peer to peer learning). They are provided with a safe environment in which they are free to experiment and express themselves and given opportunities to experience and learn a wide range of transferable skills.

Work with external young people:

- 1) Disadvantaged young people with poor social competences. Beatfreeks uses the arts as a medium through which to empower these young people by working with them over a period of time to establish trust so that they can begin to build their social competences, motivate them to develop self-belief. Beatfreeks runs a series of performing and visual arts programmes in two of the main Youth Hubs in the city e.g. The Lighthouse in Aston. They last for up to 10 weeks each and use participation in a creative activity with others as a vehicle through which to develop teamwork,

confidence, self-discipline and provide a feeling of belonging. The emphasis is on co-creation whether in dance, poetry, music or video production.

- 2) Young people who are already motivated and active in civil society but lacking direction and connections. Again Beatfrecks uses the arts as a vehicle for co-creation and creative expression, leading to confidence building and the development of ambition. Some will go on to be volunteers at Beatfrecks events and become part of the Beatfrecks 'family'. Thus, they start on the journey towards self sufficiency and the acquisition of transferable skills which enhance their chances of further training, employment or entrepreneurship.

The main areas of inequality that these activities address are employment, formal education/training and informal education (personal , social and emotional resilience) and social welfare.

For each project/activity, there is a clear process which includes:

- Initial brainstorming of the project objectives by Beatfrecks' team (including the apprentices and intern);
- Development of a concept and drafting of a proposal for discussion with the commissioning body/person, including a methodology;
- Preparation of Budget;
- Agreement re: appropriate methodology (ies) e.g. for learning or facilitation ;
- Allocation of roles and responsibilities e.g. Project management, marketing and promotion;
- Identification of other partners/collaborators if relevant;
- Event delivery;
- Evaluation against objectives of the project and feedback internally and to commissioning body;
- Internal evaluation of organisational aspects;
- Post event feedback via social media

Whether this process is for a one off event or for a regular series of activities, whether it is for performances, arts workshops or the facilitation of workshops /conferences, it is underpinned by the philosophy of the company ie that young people are involved at every stage from concept and design to promotion, project management and delivery and evaluation.

### ***2.3 Competences and resources required***

#### *Competences*

The personnel involved in designing and delivering activities have a range of skills but not necessarily a great deal of experience in the types of event which they are called on to design and run. BUT they are all young people who are motivated to learn from others, improve their professional practice as well as add to their skills-base. The emphasis in Beatfrecks is on young people and peer to peer learning.

Very little is specified re: competences required of young participants for any of Beatfrees events. The stress is more on their interests and their readiness to engage. E.g. participants on a 10 week arts based programme run in one of the city's youth hubs located in an area of high deprivation are limited only by the age range (13 – 19) fixed by the youth centre in which the programme is located. .

*Other resources:*

Space for all Beatfrees own initiatives. This is where collaborative arrangements are made with external stakeholders such as the City Council and its main Youth Centres; offered also by The REP and MAC ( cultural organisations);

Earned income through being commissioned to run projects e.g. workshops, youth engagement events by institutions such as City Council, local universities and NGOs like the Youth Offending Service, BBC Radio1 Xtra.

Corporate sponsorship from companies such as ASDA national supermarket chain and Network Rail.

Grants from public bodies such as Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council

## ***2.4 Degree of organisation***

The practice was conceived as an 'on the ground' approach in terms of project design and initial implementation as it was responding to a gap in support for individual young people seeking to become self-sufficient through the deployment of their creative skills. It operates, therefore, mainly at the micro level focusing both on young people in Birmingham with creative skills and ambitions to become freelancers in its cultural sector and on young people often from disadvantaged areas of the city who are in need of support to empower them and build their social competences. The company also operates at the meso level as it liaises with a range of institutional, educational, private and not-for-profit stakeholders on youth engagement to help them deliver against their own goals for corporate social responsibility, Personal and Social development and community outreach.

Although its activities are mainly but not exclusively confined to Birmingham, Beatfrees has shown that it can have an impact on causes of inequalities which are a source of national and international concern. This is through the evidence of its young trainees' registrations with the tax authorities as self-employed. It also has an impact nationally and internationally as an exemplar of innovative practice through its presence online e.g. its followers on twitter and facebook.

Beatfrees is a deliberate attempt not only to change the way young people see themselves and their future but to change the way they are regarded by policy-makers and practitioners as well as wider society. It is a conscious practice which has gone from a small scale activity to one that involves more people and is now organised. It has grown from a one person initiative to a social enterprise which has adopted a formal structure and expanded with demarcated roles and responsibilities. It no longer relies on self-funding and support in kind but has a core of paid staff and a business plan which sets targets for a mixed income stream (fees, grants and sponsorship).

## ***2.5 The logic of intervention***

Beatfrecks activities can be regarded as primarily aimed **at social integration** of young people, particularly those who are finding it difficult to enter the labour market and have sought to use their creative skills and interests as an alternative pathway to employment. It could also be said to aim at the **redistribution of resources** towards disadvantaged young people through projects often funded by public institutions such as schools, colleges and local authority to empower young people through the development of their social competences and networks of support.

## ***2.6 Transfer adaptation***

More important than actual facilitation and engagement tools based on the arts practice, are the principles and philosophy behind the way in which Beatfrecks works. These may be transferable to other contexts- as may be illustrated in the pilot projects in Venice and Krakow which each adapted elements of the Beatfrecks approach.

# **3. Organisational context of implementation**

## *History*

Beatfrecks was founded by a young graduate of Aston University, Anisa Haghdadi, in 2013 to engage and empower young people through arts, media, training, enterprise and leadership opportunities. The main aim is to develop transferable life and employability skills in young people, and also to motivate them to believe that through their own actions they can affect positive change either socially, in their community, or in their own lives. It arose from the personal experience of the transformative power of the arts of its founder and her concern at the mounting external pressures on young people arising from the impact of austerity measures in the UK. These included the lack of job opportunities, the increasing conditionality of financial assistance and cutbacks in welfare benefits for young people; all giving rise to a growing sense of uncertainty about their future life chances. She felt that there was a role that the arts could play in improving their chances of enterprise and employability. She had recently completed a degree in Business and Management at Aston University and sought to combine her love of the arts with her business knowledge to develop a new approach to helping young people take control of their own lives and their life chances.

*‘I knew that I would never go onto a traditional career....I wanted to help young people by helping them to solve problems for themselves’.* (from an interview with Citispyce researcher)

She wanted to create *‘a genuine social enterprise - something that’s sustainable, and where social impact is embedded into the fabric of the business.’* (from an interview she gave to Aston University in 2015).

Her ambition was to provide a platform or catalyst for young people to change their mind-set and aspirations and so broaden their horizons beyond the limitations often transmitted by family, community and educational norms. They would be supported to develop their personal and social competences and build their transferable skills through their active participation in the arts. This was key to improving their chances of employment or self-employment.

### *Philosophy, core beliefs and values behind Beatfrees*

The core philosophy/approach of the company is that young people are at its heart. Beatfrees attitude towards young people is actively to show faith and trust in them through involving them as co-creators in everything that it does. Its core values are ‘integrity (be true to yourself), showing love, co-creation and supporting risk and innovation within a safe place in which to make mistakes’. The ‘Free’ in Beatfrees underlines its commitment to encouraging ‘free thinking’. One of its current apprentices explains: *‘It’s about (young people) being free to be the way they are, building their own pathways and ways of making money and (being) self-sustaining’*.

### *Organisation: How Beatfrees is constituted and structured*

Beatfrees Arts was founded in January 2013 and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (ie not-for profit) in June 2013.

Its founder is the CEO.

The company has 4 Directors (over the age of 24) who work with the Youth Steering Committee of 10 young people (aged between 17 and 24) to steer Beatfrees.

Beatfrees Consulting Ltd has recently been incorporated as a company limited by shares in order to deal with marketing and external engagements.

The work is lead by the CEO together with the recently appointed Head of Creative Learning and Experiences and Head of Media.

Beatfrees Arts is led by the same three plus a Regional Development Manager. They are supported by a Community Arts Apprentice, a Marketing Apprentice, a Creative Media Apprentice and an unpaid intern.

As can be seen from the changes in organisational structure, the practice has grown considerably over the two and a half years of its existence. It began as a pilot project testing different ways of working and by October 2013 had fixed on a pattern of operation which was highly flexible and thus capable of responding to specific needs.

The capacity of the company is largely determined by the number of staff, apprentices and sessional workers it can call on at any time together with the financial resources available.

Beatfrees conducts its own evaluations of all its activities. It also has to abide by quality standards of service provision defined by external commissioning bodies as well as national legislation and regulation e.g. with regard to Safeguarding of children and young adults, Risk Assessment and Health and Safety.

Youth and cultural services.

Practices are implemented in parallel – because they have different objectives.

## 4. Project implementation and outputs

### 4.1 Targeting of programme

As has been pointed out above, Beatfreaks seeks to reach several different target groups.

Beatfreaks' own events are largely open access, free to attend or participate in. They are actively – almost frenetically - publicised on their own website and via facebook and twitter (their account has more than 5,000 followers). Word of mouth is also an important tool for disseminating the message about the company, its principles and its benefits for participants at different levels. For certain programmes which are either in partnership with or commissioned by the City Council, young people are signposted towards the company.

It is not clear precisely what skills and competence levels are required for young people seeking to get involved as an apprentice or sessional workers, but it would appear that there are expectations with regard to would-be Beatfreaks in terms of their attitude and motivation. The original participants were attracted to a free Poetry Jam in a coffee shop in the middle of the city. It was organised by Anisa as a tester to see if young people would respond to an event just for them and 45 young people with varying levels of creative ability and skills took part. These were self-selecting and some then accepted an open invitation to get involved in a new venture (Beatfreaks).

For outreach activities, Beatfreaks recruits young volunteers from local colleges and secondary schools. Sometimes these young people are encouraged by their teachers, as participation in extra-curricular activities looks good on their CV. These are likely to be young people who are 'Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support'. They may then go on to become regular volunteers as they get drawn into the ethos of the company and are encouraged to open their minds and challenge their own culture or history.

A volunteer who has gone onto become a Beatfreaks intern and now an apprentice claims: *"Beatfreaks has completely changed my whole mindset..... there is so much more that I could do ....there are other ways of making a difference – change through the arts"*.

The interviewee from the Culture Commissioning team at the City Council gave an example of a young woman from a 'care' background who was very bright and politically aware but socially isolated. *"We connected her to Beatfreaks. She found it amazing and exciting at first and went on to become an apprentice."* Part of this excitement was the feeling that she was part of a community of energetic like-minded young people.

Beatfreaks is a highly networked company with connections to creative young people, institutions, cultural organisations and funders of all kinds. This is now one of the most effective 'ports of entry' for would-be participants, particularly for young creatives who lack their own contacts and are not sure about how to realise their potential. He is now a research associate with Beatfreaks, having been one its first apprentices. (In fact, he was co- team leader for the facilitation by Beatfreaks of a youth engagement event commissioned by Aston in 2013 to find out what young people from deprived communities in Birmingham thought about Europe.)

The ‘hothouse’ environment of the Beatfreeks journey from volunteer to apprentice or sessional artist or facilitator, however, is not for everyone. But there are no sanctions as participants are mainly self-selecting in the first place.

## ***4.2 Addressing needs***

The young people who are part of the in-house Beatfreeks community are effectively supported in terms of :

Stimulating and enabling entrepreneurship; self-sufficiency, co-creation; “communing”;

Their ‘on the job’ training offers a wide range of experiences which can be tailored to individual skills and needs. At the time of interviewing, 150 young people had become paid sessional facilitators for Beatfreeks’ projects and programmes as well as undertaking other freelance work. Two former apprentices had been taken on as paid employees of the company itself.

They emerge with a set of transferable social competences as well as enhanced artistic skills and contacts. This is, however, a relatively small proportion of the overall numbers of participants in Beatfreeks programmes.

Through its outreach and engagement activities, Beatfreeks addresses the needs of both those who are ‘Motivated to integrate into mainstream society but in need of support’ and those who ‘Lack social competences and networks’. Its 10 week arts-based engagement projects and its summer academies are targeted at these kinds of young people. They are drawn into them by the prospect of participating in music, dance, spoken word and media workshops and again this framework is flexible enough in its operation to be able to deal with their individual interests and needs.

For all participants Beatfreeks provides a bridge between them and institutions. It is one of the best networked of all the organisations which engage with young people. Participants recognise that the company has the knowledge and the information that young people need to navigate their way through the system.

## ***4.3 Empowerment, engagement and choice***

The philosophy behind Beatfreeks means that young people are involved at every stage of a project/activity. They are expected to co-design and co-create projects but within a safe and supportive environment provided by Anisa and, now, her young key co-leaders.

Young people are, therefore, frequently in the roles of design and delivery partner, actor and principal agent in a practice or a project. When Beatfreeks first engages with an individual it is likely to be in a community outreach activity involving a range of creative opportunities. The young person is encouraged to choose what he/she wishes to do and can change their activity if they so wish.

Some will choose to be active rather than passive participants in these activities and will have the chance to become ‘volunteers’ and work with Beatfreeks on other projects. If they wish to develop an initiative themselves, then Beatfreeks provides them with the space and support to explore the idea with other young people. Beatfreeks has a number of different entry

points for young people to engage and it is possible for them to start in one place and move between the various opportunities/activities offered. For some, it is a progression route in social competences and/or skills, for others it is a chance to find out more about themselves and to benefit from ‘communing’ with others.

#### ***4.4 Stakeholders involved***

The key external stakeholder involved is the City Council, especially its Culture Commissioning department and its Youth Service. Beatfreeks receives funding from the City Council via the Culture Commissioning department’s grant application process. It is also contracted by the Youth Service to deliver youth engagement initiatives e.g. its 10 week programmes which reach out to disadvantaged young people through arts activities. The Arts Council of England (ACE) supports Beatfreeks with grant aid on a project basis. Two major arts organisations in the city, The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP) and the Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), actively work with Beatfreeks on initiatives to engage with young people. This may mean commissioning the company to run a project or joint collaborations e.g. running a series of spoken word events (Level Up) or holiday/short courses (Beatfreeks Summer Academies) in the premises of MAC. Other stakeholders are private companies, NGOs and public institutions which commission Beatfreeks to deliver projects targeted at specific groups of young people e.g. BBC Radio1 Xtra, Network Rail, ASDA Supermarket chain, Aston University, Youth Offending Service.

Other stakeholders have included the now defunct Government Office of the West Midlands which provided low cost office space for a number of creative businesses in a disused office block. A commercial Bank also provided temporary office space its e-spark centre (low cost space within its main building for business start ups).

#### ***4.5 Competences and resources involved***

A key competence is the business management skills of the founder and her knowledge and understanding of how to engage with young people.

The personnel involved in designing and delivering activities have a range of skills but not necessarily a great deal of experience in the types of event which they are called on to design and run. BUT they are all young people who are motivated to learn from others, improve their professional practice as well as add to their skills-base. The emphasis in Beatfreeks is on young people and peer to peer learning.

Very little is specified re: competences required of young participants for any of Beatfreeks events. The stress is more on their interests and their readiness to engage. E.g. participants on a 10 week arts based programme run in one of the city’s youth hubs located in an area of high deprivation are limited only by the age range (13 – 19) fixed by the youth centre in which the programme is located.

See Annexes for examples of the types of activity run.

*Other resources:*

See 4.4 above.

## ***4.6 Process and evaluation criteria***

### *Barriers to implementation*

One main barrier is funding. Business start up grants are available and Beatfreeks has accessed two or three but developing a self-sustaining business model is a challenge. Finding office and rehearsal space at an affordable rate has been a challenge and has meant that the company has had to be quite creative about accessing ‘redundant’ spaces.

Operationally, a key barrier at the beginning was finding personnel with appropriate skills and competences at an affordable cost. Beatfreeks drew on volunteers initially to develop and deliver its early projects. Some of these went on to be paid as sessional workers and finally the company had sufficient resources to employ staff.

Public grant programmes, whether from the City Council or national funding bodies such as the Arts Council England and particularly from EU (ERDF and ESF) are time consuming to access. Grant applications are often complicated to complete – even when they come with detailed guidance. Applicants may be required to satisfy a large number of eligibility criteria e.g. legal status of the organisation, level of financial reserves, evidence of policies to comply with Health and Safety regulations etc etc in order to be able to apply for the funds in the first place. The requirements for monitoring and evaluation of the projects may be a heavy burden on small-scale organisations which have limited administrative capacity.

Beatfreeks has managed to overcome some of the public funding barriers largely through the support of key individuals in the public institution concerned who are willing to take a more flexible view of how they can achieve compliance with the regulations. This is not always the case. It can vary from one department to another.

Other solutions to financial, personnel and space barriers have involved collaboration with larger-scale organisations. This has also helped in the promotion and marketing of activities e.g. the relationships with The REP and MAC.

Less tangible barriers arose from being the ‘new kid on the block’; how to establish Beatfreeks as a key player against well-established competitors and how to build trust with funders, other potential partners as well as young people. Beatfreeks have succeeded by delivering what they claimed they could do.

## ***4.7 Innovativeness***

Beatfreeks activities can be regarded as primarily aimed at social integration of young people, particularly those who are finding it difficult to enter the labour market and have sought to use their creative skills and interests as an alternative pathway to employment. It could also be said to aim at the redistribution of resources towards disadvantaged young people. This is largely done through projects, often funded by public institutions such as schools, colleges and local authority, to empower young people through the development of their social competences and networks of support.

Its actions address distance through its ability to connect young people with local policy-makers and practitioners and others in positions of authority. Its determination to put young people at the centre of what it seeks to achieve has enabled it to win the trust of young people with whom it engages. It also ensures that these young people are supported in their efforts to

connect with others, coaching them to find the right person to contact and then the right questions to ask. These are both key aspects of its success in engaging young people in comparison with other organisations.

According to one cultural policy-maker/practitioner:

*“We have lots of organisations who do youth engagement but when we ask the question: How are you involving young people in what you do? Or: How are their leadership skills being developed? Their answers often seem tokenistic – ‘we’ll consult with young people’. But Beatfreeks is different because young people are actually in there doing it.”*

Thus, it is the ethos and the ways of working and building trust with young people which distinguish Beatfreeks as a socially innovative practice with the potential for transferability. It is of its time and it has the potential for transferability largely because of its philosophy which is what determines its success.

Beatfreeks’ work reaches more than one of the target groups within the typology. Its ‘in-house’ work supports young people who are ‘Motivated to integrate into mainstream society, but in need of support’ and also those who are ‘aiming for ‘alternative’ ways to get ahead, with sufficient competences and/or social support’. Its activities – often supported by the local authority or in partnership with other organisations – which seek to engage with the ‘hard to reach’ young people who face multiple inequalities are directed at those who are ‘living day by day, opportunistically and may be fatalistic about their future and who are lacking competences, social support and motivation to change.

Beatfreeks appears to have more success than other organisations seeking to engage with disadvantaged young people because of its philosophical approach which not only puts young people at the centre of any activity but is more effective at building trust not only with them but between them and those in authority in other organisations and institutions.

One important reason for this is that they seem to be able to match their support to individual needs, providing each participant with the confidence, the networks and the appropriate competences to take the next step(s) towards self-sufficiency.

#### ***4.8 Success factors and conditions, critical implementation barriers***

The original project intentions have not changed but the scale of its operations has. Over nearly two and a half years, Beatfreeks has remained true to its original approach but has expanded its range of activities to meet the needs of wider range of target groups.

The company has changed its structure in order to manage the expansion of its activities. It clearly now has a core team of young people with different creative skill sets who benefit from peer-to-peer learning and the practical experience from delivering a range of projects on behalf of the company. It has also expanded its arts-based engagement activities with young people with low self esteem and low levels of social competences at the same time as continuing to facilitate opportunities for young aspiring creatives to gain performance experience and make contacts through Beatfreeks extensive networks.

Critical success factors:

From the founder's perspective –

- the approach to engaging with young people – ie everything is based on doing things **with** and not **to** young people
- an open approach which enables Beatfreeks to meet individual needs and see them progress re: competences and/or skills
- enabling individuals to access employment through the skills development and networking activities of Beatfreeks

From key partner institutions –

- the approach to engaging with young people (as above) attracted and sustained participation of more hard to reach young people than any other organisation appeared able to do

From young people themselves –

- being involved in all aspects of the activities offered and feeling empowered and trusted
- the openness of the company to collaboration/sharing knowledge and connections

The innovative nature and the critical success factors of Beatfreeks are very much aligned. They can be summed up as follows:

- its philosophical approach to young people (see above), building trust
- its social capital/networks which tackle the isolation and distance of some young people and enable them to connect with those in authority as well as with like-minded others through virtual and physical networks
- its methods of operation -
  - the way in which connects young people and institutions
  - its focus on the individual's development of skills and/or social competences as a direct contribution to tackling wider societal causes of inequality e.g. unemployment, inadequate qualifications and low levels of 'soft skills'
- the use of arts-based practice in a sustainable business model requiring relatively modest resources to engage with hard to reach young people in order to offer them alternative routes into training or employment\_
- Its support for young people seeking to earn a living through self-employment as freelance practitioners notably, but not exclusively, in the creative industries

Implementation barriers

Please see 4.6 above for detail.

Initial funding and finding personnel with appropriate skills and competences at an affordable cost. Beatfreeks drew on volunteers initially to develop and deliver its early projects.

Finding office, rehearsal and sometimes performance spaces at an affordable rate.

Complexity of applying for public grant schemes.

Difficulties in meeting all official, legal and financial regulations in order to access public EU, national or local grant schemes.

Inflexibility of some officials in public sector towards the requirements of Beatfreeks for their work in publicly managed spaces.

Less tangible barrier is that of being the ‘new kid on the block’ and having to build trust with funders and other potential partners as well as the young people themselves.

The success of Beatfreeks has been incremental. From an initial Poetry Jam in January 2013, the founder began working with a group of 45 unpaid young volunteers to test out different ways of engaging with young people. By October 2013 she had her first structured programme of activities in place, using sessional facilitators and volunteers to co-design and deliver projects. Beatfreeks was known by then to the City Council Culture team and steadily gained commissions and funding from then as well as from other public and private sources. It has reached more than 5,500 young people through workshops in schools and has developed a round the year series of arts-based engagement programmes for young people in City Council Youth Hubs in deprived communities and in venues which attract young people from across the city and beyond.

## **5. Project results/outcomes**

Beatfreeks goals for its in-house apprentices and interns as well as its sessional artists (Target Group1) are to empower them and equip them to enter the labour market either as a self-employed or as a contracted employee. These are being achieved on an ongoing basis as different young people move through the programmes of the organisation.

- An improvement in their social competences opening their minds through challenging the norms which are derived from their personal history and culture
- An increase in opportunities for employment through building their skills – artistic, organisational, project management, marketing, media
- An increase in opportunities for employment through access to social and other networks which they can use to develop their own contacts and opportunities for employment as freelancers or on contract

For these ‘motivated’ young people, Beatfreeks has contributed to the development of their skills and competences to the point that they are able to earn money from their creative practice and move towards self-sufficiency. At the time of interviewing, 150 young people had become paid sessional facilitators for Beatfreeks’ projects and programmes as well as undertaking other freelance work. We understand that up to 40% of these young people had been assisted by Beatfreeks to register with HMRC (Her Majesty’s Customs and Revenue) indicating that they were earning money from their creative practice and needed to register for tax purposes. Two former apprentices had been taken on as paid employees of the company itself.

There is a clear progression route from volunteer to unpaid intern to apprentice. It is only for a limited number of participants but it shows what can be done to create an informal training pathway outside formal structures. One young female from a close knit- Muslim family background got involved from school, then was invited to volunteer on the Beatfreeks Summer Academies in 2013. She became a member of the company’s Youth Steering

Committee in 2013/14 and applied to be an apprentice in 2014 in her gap year before university. She claimed that getting involved with Beatfreesks *'completely changed my whole mind set...I realised there was so much more that I could do. My career focus has completely changed.....'*

The goals of Beatfreesks for Target groups 2 and 3 are to improve their social competences including self-esteem, confidence, ability to relate to others and introduce them to networks of similar young people in other parts of the city to provide opportunities to bridge the physical and symbolic distances between their own neighbourhood and other spaces and places.

Beatfreesks's own assessments show that improvements in the interpersonal skills and social capital of young people participating in the company's engagement programmes/projects have been made. Qualitative assessment of their progress in social competences indicates that many gain in confidence and self-esteem. They are more open to new possibilities for their future. They are more socially aware and communing with other young people has enabled them to develop their social networks and widen their horizons beyond their neighbourhood and family ties. These are relevant to the development of the competences and skills needed to improve their job/training opportunities.

An important observation relates also to Beatfreesks' ability to cross not only territorial but ethnic boundaries. Activities are developed for 'young people' irrespective of their backgrounds. The founder said: *'We engage with many from BME communities be never target on demographic grounds but on passion or interest. For example, young Somali females (for whom spoken word performance is not part of their culture) make up the majority of the audience at our Poetry Jams.'*

A further aspect of the success of Beatfreesks in tackling inequalities is the sense of 'belonging' which it creates amongst its participants. The founder stressed: *'Beatfreesks is a family and anyone involved knows that they've always got a home with us.'*

One of the Beatfreesks apprentices said: *'It's about trust, building networks and that family feel. There is constant mentoring and you're always learning.....You can do whatever you want, if you work hard enough'*.

They feel empowered and get to share in the company's strong and wide ranging social networks. This helps those who feel distanced and isolated. Beatfreesks is able to offer links and signposting to other organisations, institutions to any of its participants and help bridge the gap between them and young people. Some gain the confidence to go beyond their 'zones of familiarity' and others who are motivated but without support find connections with like-minded young people.

## **6. Final reflections**

### ***6.1 The role of the pilot/project/practice***

Beatfreesks is an example of a socially innovative practice which has been in operation for more than 2 years. This trajectory provides us with additional insights into the reasons for success. Its business model relies on a mixed range of income streams (earned income from

providing services to other organisations, public grants, funds from charitable trusts etc), low overheads and a combination of salaried, freelance paid staff and volunteers.

Its core values/principles clearly appeal to young people as do its styles of communication and working together. Their values or core principles are not context dependant but could be transferable in conjunction with a style of working which places young people at the centre of all they do.

Beatfrees has grown rapidly since it began in early Spring 2013 and it appears to be remaining true to its original ethos whilst widening its repertoire of projects and programmes. The founder has managed to start building a core delivery team in order to share the work load as the company expands.

It has reached approximately 5,500 young people since it began in February 2013 through a combination of its own projects and promotions, collaborations with other organisations and activities commissioned by public sector institutions, private companies and NGOs. It has enabled at least 150 young people to develop existing skills and secure work as freelance creative practitioners. Equally important is its outreach work with young people with low social competences and low levels of expectations to improve their soft skills and self-esteem.

Beatfrees is tackling inequalities at a local level but its philosophy could be applied more widely as could its approach to bridging the distance between young people and public authorities. It is not afraid to challenge traditional institutional ways of working and to find ways to encourage change.

<http://www.beatfrees.com>

[Beatfrees annual report2014.pdf](#)

## **Appendix: Make your Mark Event Evaluation by Beatfreeks**

### **Overview of the Process**

The European Commission and Aston University approached Beatfreeks to run a series of events around young people and Europe. Beatfreeks brought in collaborators Uprising and Bite the Ballot to share expertise and knowledge on young people. As it was also the lead up to the elections we tied this in with young people voting, being in Europe and understanding the difference between ‘I don’t know’ and ‘I don’t care’

### **What was successful?**

- The co-creation of the organisations brought more resources to the table, we were able to give clear aims and objectives for the event. The process felt equal and that each partner brought something different to the table.
- Uprising and Bite the Ballot facilitated conversations around young people, Europe and voting.
- The performance element was innovated in a style young people felt they had a choice in what they wanted to listen to, with a tactical element of finding out the young people who said they were going to vote to those who said they weren’t and what topics they wanted to listen to.
- It felt clear who was leading from each organisation, who the point of contact was and what each were doing on the day. We felt a meeting with Aston University and Beatfreeks lead beforehand meant we were clear on the journey, this was something Beatfreeks had took on from the last event Hear Me Out.
- On the evening successes, the coffee was great! The range of activities young people could get involved in ranged from quiet time and group activities so young people throughout the event felt they had things to do that were relevant but fun.
- The communication between partners meant that the facilitated conversations transitioned smoothly. The space was curated very well and felt warm and welcoming to young people.
- Having elements where young people found out a breakdown of what party they are alike meant they was an opportunity for a sit down facilitated discussion, they were engrossed and intrigued by the results
- Prince’s Trust young people attended the event and got involved in the debate as well as having guests from Athens.
- The mix of conversations and activities felt like you could do either/or and it would still be beneficial. Having young people so passionate about politics in a space meant that there was never a moment of silence.

### **Improvements / lessons learnt**

- The poets could have been briefed better on the idea of busking poets, to understand they’ll be performing as much as young people put their token in the box.
- A get in for the space beforehand to ask for tables/chairs to be moved as needed as well as understand the physical space before the event. A brief for the booking so we had the information on the space and the do’s and don’ts
- On the afternoon of the event, if we had paper copies of the event and flyer around the library. From doing it as the event started we attracted 9 young people, if this was done earlier we would have had more.
- Although the event was a success from our part, more lead in time would have given us scope to make the event bigger and attract more young people
- Small but relevant, snacks weren’t young people friendly, although drinks were lovely!

- Pack down time, this would have been discussed in the briefing but to know if it was event finish at 8 or out by 8 as it felt a little rushed towards the end
- Bringing the young people in after playing Verto (online game) to discuss their results and how they found them together
- Building general buffer time between activities for people to converse
- More new young people would have been fab, although the event lead up fell into a bank holiday weekend and to engage young people in coming to an event around politics was hard

### Takeaways

- We asked young people are you going to vote, majority said they were, 3 young people said no 5 said they were not old enough
- At least 6 people registered to vote at the event
- The event really highlighted complexity of people and parties

20 young people took part in the online game Verto.bite, although the majority weren't surprised by their results they were highly engaged in the activity and interested to see the breakdown of parties

The vote on your feet about Europe showed only 1 young person insisting UK should leave Europe whilst more than 50% claiming they didn't know enough to care

Final comments from young people who were in the library already and came to make your mark:

"This event was brilliant, it opened my eyes to things I don't usually see around me"

"I think the event went extremely well. I felt like I was heard, by people who understand"

### Conclusion

The event can be summed up in the words of a participant

"I have never been to this kind of event before, but it feels like a peaceful revolution"

To create the right atmosphere and space for young people to feel heard and understood felt like we had created a silent movement, this feels like the start of something, we are making our mark.

**Key Figures:**

- √ 45 young people through doors
- √ 2 guest young people from Athens
- √ 2 green candidates (weren't invited but attended anyway!)
- √ Independent candidate for Kings Heath
- √ BBCWM picked up the event and vlogged as #brumvotes
- √ Invited onto BBCWM to discuss the event
- √ Guest blogger is submitting a piece to Huffington Post
- √ We were featured on 13<sup>th</sup> April on BBC Coventry and warrickshire RE the event
- √ 2 partners from high profiles; Uprising and Bite the Ballot

**Extra Evaluation:**

Link to storify is here: <https://storify.com/beatfreaks/make-your-mark>

Link to pictures from makeyourmark campaign here:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.985189131492266.1073741867.548730405138143&type=1>

Link to general pictures from the event:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.985189131492266.1073741867.548730405138143&type=1>