

Annual Review 2018-2019

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Foreword by Andrew Adams, GYA Chairperson

Well, where do I start? I guess, by saying my farewells, this is my last foreword as Chair of GYA; by the time you read this I will be at Leeds College of Music and my seven years at GYA will have come to an end. I'm quite sad about this, as are my GYA colleagues Josh, Benjamin and Joe who, like me, have come to the end of their GYA time. I can safely speak for all four of us and say that joining GYA was one of our best decisions, making lifelong friends we wouldn't otherwise have met, taking part in activities and events that just aren't available to everyone and being part of a project that really does have young people at its core.

GYA never fails to surprise me every single year. The amount of work we do is quite something and this year has been no different. We started the year in November with the training weekend, by welcoming new and returning members. We then decided on our plans and priorities for the year, and the number of ideas for projects was amazing. We've continued our work with The Key framework and have also had new opportunities with the City of Dreams initiative. I am proud of what GYA has achieved this year, and I can't wait to watch what happens over the next year. I hope you enjoy reading our Annual Review which is just a highlight of the work; we just couldn't write about every single thing we have been involved with.

Introduction

Welcome to our review of 2018/19. It is a snapshot of the work Gateshead Youth Assembly has been involved in this past year but doesn't truly show the skills and experiences we have had, so, at the end of this report, we have written a little about the skills we develop and the added value of being a member of GYA. This is basically the 'So what?' question. Why is GYA important and relevant to Young People in Gateshead today?

We have tried to cover our plans and priorities from our Welcome Newsletter and think we have managed to achieve all our goals, as well as some new ones that cropped up along the way! We have laughed, cried and set the world to rights this year!

September 2018 (we have a little bit of crossover every year)

Our executive committee sourced funding to go to London to see an amazing exhibition at the Houses of Parliament about women and voting, we also had a tour of the building which was fantastic. Of course, we took in a show too and walked miles!



When we got back, we worked on a series of sessions to be used in schools on democracy and worked with Parliaments Education Department.

During **October** half term, we made trick or treat bags and sweetie packs for Halloween and sold them at Gateshead Civic Centre raising £150 for our holiday activities.

October is often an odd month for us, the current years GYA is over and the new year hasn't quite started, we stay busy though as we like our Tuesdays at GYA,

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so October 2018 was filled with fundraising and planning the next training weekend. We write the training plan, devise the exercises and deliver some of the sessions. Lucy, Sue and Valerie are very conscious that the new members don't feel like they are joining a clique though, so we don't deliver sessions that create a 'them and us' climate. Each GYA year is a complete group of equal members. Schools elect or nominate young people to join GYA or young people can come along as independent delegates, we don't mind, as long as people come along.

The **November** training weekend is our first meeting of any GYA, this year we met at the Lobley Hill Building which is a great space for us. We met the new members and some of their parents and carers before embarking on a packed two-day programme of committee skills, presenting skills, communication, negotiation etc. At the end of the weekend we had our draft outline of our year, our priorities and some plans to tackle them. These priorities were later agreed at our November full meeting and published soon after and people started work!

November sees our regular commitment to Remembrance Day, Andrew, our chair read 'In Flanders Fields' at the Cenotaph and, joined by Josh, our vice chair lay wreaths from Gateshead Youth Assembly and Gateshead Youth Council. Whether you agree with war or not, we believe that commemoration and thanks should be given to those who died to allow us those choices.



December saw us raise funds and donate Christmas food, selection boxes etc to Peace of Mind, a group who support asylum seeking families, we feel very strongly that we should support people in need, and we have over the past few

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years developed strong links and great friendships with Peace of Mind and the families they support. If you would like to know more about Peace of Mind and their work, let us know and we will make connections.

We also had a Christmas party, which was more like a Christmas sit in, but fun! Sue and Valerie let us decorate the office, but we think, by the rolling eyes, they might not let us next year!



January 2019 started busy and kept on going! We took part in the LSCB big conversation, which is where members of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board work with young people from a variety of groups, GYA, One Voice Youth Network, Care Leavers, Primary and Secondary schools to look at the priorities set by the LSCB and how that works with priorities young people choose. Both groups were very similar actually, young people's mental health featured heavily. We are going to continue developing our relationship with the LSCB, or whichever body replaces it.

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February half term saw us doing some more fundraising at the Civic Centre because, whilst we get funding for our residentials, we still feel that it's important for us to understand and feel that sense of pride that we get by raising money for ourselves and reap the rewards when we are having fun at Gibside!! We raised £150 which just about covers the food bill for us all to have three days away.



We have worked with various people at the QE on loads of projects over the years, this year we worked on a 15 steps assessment of the Paediatrics Unit at the QE. It was a little bit nostalgic for some of our members, who were around when GYA worked with the QE on the design of this new unit. This time though, we assessed whether the QE have done enough so that families feel like they know whats going on when their child is admitted to hospital.



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After the QE we popped back to GYC to have lunch (Thanks Greggs for your very welcome food donations that keep us going on Tuesdays) then straight over to the Live Theatre to work on the City of Dreams Launch event planning. City of Dreams, in case you don't know, is a project and ambition for all children and young people in Newcastle and Gateshead to have access and get involved with cultural experiences, whether that's dance, drama, creative writing or game design and everything else in between



March was a quiet month for the Youth Assembly. It's that sort of time when you have to do so much planning for the events coming up that you just have to stick in and have some worky days - which is what we did. Very productive they were too!!

April saw us working with Mortal Fools Theatre Group on their i-Weigh performance. It was highlighting body image - a really important topic dealt with very sensitively through drama. Our sessions saw us exploring the topic through drama and fun exercises.



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During the Easter holidays our Audacious Aramidillos (Andrew, Benjamin and Josh) once again raised the money for one of our infamous bus days. We feel it's such an important skill to promote independence and learn how to navigate the mystery that are bus timetables!! We travelled far and wide enjoying the Sunderland Winter Gardens, Sunderland Glass centre - finishing off with Fish and Chips at Roker Pier. Whilst we used local transport - we also walked plenty too. Our step average was brilliant!



Drip at Live Theatre



This has got to be one of the best and most bizarre things that we have ever seen!! The Armadillos project also included going to see Drip at the Live Theatre. Now, when you are handed a blue poncho as you go in the door - it makes you

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worry a little. However, it turned out to be one of the most hilarious things we have ever seen - very, very funny. Just so you know - we didn't get wet - the ponchos were to turn the theatre into a sea of blue as in a swimming pool. Very clever!!

In May we had a visit from Adalina from the Police Engagement team Lots of interesting work discussed. Adalina was new to the role and the area so we briefed her on what we do.



We celebrated National Vegetarian Week in May with a grant kindly being given by the Vegetarian Society and one of our support workers doing some fabulous cooking. We had three sittings a day over three days - all filled very quickly with people enjoying a very tasty tea. We fed over 100 people with biryani, pakora, samosas, salads, cake and sorbet. It was fab! And showcased good, inexpensive and tasty vegetarian food. Some of our guests had NEVER eaten a vegetarian meal before!



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We were very lucky once again, to be nominated for the Key Awards. Our Audacious Armadillos and #Jellybeans attended and had a fantastic night. Not as successful as last year but still completely delighted to be up there and nominated with some other amazing groups. Our fantastic volunteer Mahnoor won Volunteer of the Year, we are so, so proud. Of course, we did the prerequisite photo calls!



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We also had a visit in June from The Trailblazers. This is an NHS initiative about mental health and trying to intervene early. We did a lot of talking, and a bit of crying, at this session - about what we felt would work with young people and what wouldn't. This is a really interesting project to be involved with and we look forward to working with and seeing the work that they do with young people.



We had a really interesting visit from Balance Northeast. They came with a presentation about alcohol that they have put together to deliver to other young people. This was an absolutely fantastic session about alcohol misuse, alcohol marketing and misrepresentation of the effects of alcohol on young people. #balancenortheast



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July saw us have a lovely evening at the Rivers Hotel. The Audacious Armadillos had some money left and we were able to use for a bit of a treat. We took ourselves out for tea and had some amazing time with some amazing company. Sometimes it's nice to be able to play hard as well as work hard. If you haven't been to The Rivers Hotel, we really recommend that you give it a go. It's an autism friendly hotel and diner, its also a training agency for young people with autism and learning difficulties who are looking for careers in hotels and hospitality. You can google Rivers Hotel or search for them on Facebook.

We combined another Bus Day with a project we have started with Public Health and the QE Paediatrics department around food poverty and food inequality. We have been taking photos of places where people can buy food, sounds odd we know, but bear with us. We bussed around Gateshead hopping on and off at various locations and took pictures of every place in that area where you can buy food; butchers, bakers, greengrocers, supermarkets, takeaways, restaurants and corner shops. We are going to carry on with this project in the coming months and while we know it isn't proper, university standard research, our results so far show, quite clearly, that in areas that are considered 'well off' good quality fresh food is really easy to find, in areas less well off, the choices are often limited to takeaways and corner shops. We also know that the issues are really complicated, but we are doing our bit!



We also had a visit from Sarah Kilpatrick and Steph Hancock from the National Education Union talking about SATS testing and its effects on both young people and staff alike. It was a really interesting evening. As young people, whilst we struggle with SATS, it seems that Staff administering the tests struggle with them also. They are only too aware of how detrimental they can be to mental health.

As a Youth Assembly, we observe Holocaust Memorial Day and a few years ago added Remember Srebrenica to our list of things we believe need remembered and commemorated. The 11th July saw The Millennium Bridge lit up to remember the genocide in Srebrenica. This is something that we are proud to commemorate. #Neveragain We also have sessions and workshops about the massacres at Srebrenica and use these to develop wider conversations around hate, war, peace and love.



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Also, we feel we must mention the amazing achievement of a past GYA member and current GYA support worker, Lucy Adams, who was on the Youth Assembly for seven years. Lucy was presented with the Diana Award. We are fiercely proud of her.



Once again, we had the most amazing time at Gibside in August for our annual residential. We worked hard and played hard. Having been given a grant by Greggs, we were once again able to go to one of our favourite places. We worked this weekend with the hashtags #fun #workhardpayhard #putyourpositivepantson. This encompasses all that the resi was. GYA focusses largely on aspects of mental health and a huge part of this, for us, was to do with switching those phones off; quality time with quality people; talking and having some really important conversations. Our residentials are important to us. We also did other exercises



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like talking about the wider world - we learned just how difficult it is to balance a Government budget - not as easy as it seems. Valerie and Sue create fantastic exercises for us, that make us really think about how the world works and how decisions are made.

The second day we had visitors. We were joined by reps from National Education Union who spoke to us about SAT testing. This was really interesting and was as informative for us as for them. We all talked about how SAT testing makes us feel - and wondered, is there a better way to be assessed? This is work for us for the future and we are looking at producing a Myth buster leaflet to send out.



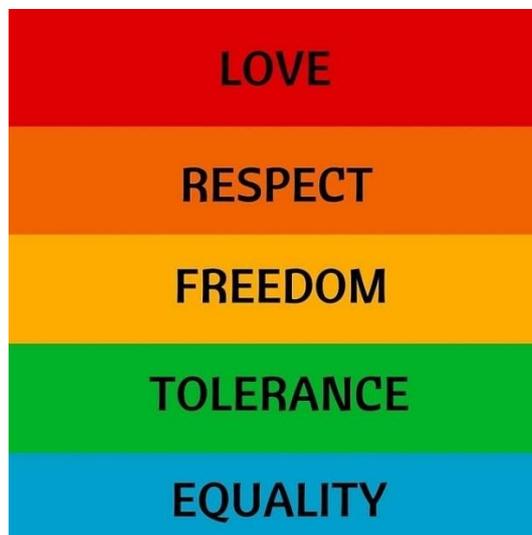
We have to say, one of the visitors trumped the rest. Meet Hector 😊



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In September, some of our members set up the LGBTQ+ and Bullying awareness Facebook page. This is going to be monitored by some of our members. It was part of our priorities at the beginning of the year so it has been good to bring the project to fruition.



Other projects are still ongoing - such as equality, human rights, poverty and feminism. Groups are hoping to go to the Key panel produce a resource to go out to schools. We had a great meeting with Ben Dickenson from City of Dreams explaining to our newer members exactly what City of Dreams all about. We've had a fabulous time with City of Dreams and it would be great to keep the project going. This is a link we love and will hope to keep it going with new representatives from GYA.



Sadly, September and October are always bittersweet as we have to watch some people leave before our new members start. We said goodbye to four of our members this year who are off to pastures new. A cake to wish them well seemed to be the way to go.

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Andrew is off to Leeds College of Music, Benjamin to Newcastle Uni, Joe to Newcastle College and Josh to the Royal Veterinary College.

These four young men have been absolutely crucial to the development of GYA over the past few years and we are already missing them! On the upside, they are now allowed to go to the annual Christmas GYA reunion, which is held in a pub so we can't go!



OK, so what?

You may well ask

Well, apart from the benefits we make to the wider community in terms of poverty relief, intergenerational harmony and political awareness, we get involved with loads of projects and develop massively in terms of our personal and social skills.

We think Young People are given a rough ride and frankly, we don't deserve it. Young People are amazing individuals who, with support, encouragement and opportunity can achieve great things. The skills Young People develop while working on their projects are the soft skills that employers seek, the everyday things we often take for granted but aren't part of a school curriculum.

We did a little bit of brainstorming recently, and by little, we mean little, this was five minutes' worth. Imagine if we had more time?

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What are the benefits to being involved in GYA?

- Developing a 'can do' attitude.
- Learning to problem solve.
- Developing resilience.
- Learning and developing life skills.
- Developing political awareness.
- Starting to understand civic society.
- Developing civic responsibility.
- Learning about citizenship.
- Developing awareness of community ownership, leadership & responsibility.
- Increased self-esteem.
- Increased self-confidence.
- Developing critical thinking skills.

- Learning to recognise and challenge inequality and stereotypes.
- Experience of people from different social groupings.
- Learning to work with people from different groups to achieve common goals.
- Developing an awareness of others, their feelings, needs, qualities and limitations.
- Recognising and appreciating all of these differences.
- Developing empathy with others.
- Developing mindfulness about self and others.
- Practicing effective decision making.
- Learning to negotiate.
- Developing communication skills.
- Developing research skills.
- Developing skills in presenting self and ideas.

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- Working with people in positions of power.
- Understanding power structures, how they can be a struggle to comprehend.
- Developing awareness of how power structures can affect self and others.

Funders

Of course, we can't do any of this without the help and support of our wonderful funders. They are fantastic and we are so grateful for their support.

Our work in 2018/19 was funded by The Tyne and Wear Community Foundation; the High Sheriffs Award; Gateshead Council; Trinity College London; Greggs; The Reading Agency; The Willan Trust; and, crucially, The Key who enable us to access funds to deliver our projects by way of a skills framework which allows and enables us not only to develop skills and experience but also to map it, and track our developments.

Thank You's

Huge thanks go to Gateshead Council for their support, particularly around staffing (Valerie); also to all of our members parents and carers; the former High Sheriff of Tyne & Wear Robin Brims; the current High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear; Greggs for their generous donations of food; schools and organisations for accommodating GYA requests; Rachel Hamer for the help with our arts awards, all of the other organisations that we have worked with this year and those who support us with hugs and funding ideas!

Special thanks to the Board of GYC, particularly Sue, Lucy and Mahnoor who are there every single week, but also the rest of the Board, without whom, we just couldn't operate. Also, thanks to Valerie, who makes GYA happen, some of that in her work time, but lots in her own.

But most of all, thank you to our fantastic members who turn up, week in, week out and deliver all of this!

