

Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme

Leadership in Action Report

**Cambridge Junction Creative Learning Programme - Fundraising Event
Management Project**

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Acknowledgements

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Organisation Overview

Cambridge Junction is a charity, social enterprise and leading cultural venue in Cambridge, presenting a year-round programme of live music, theatre, comedy, dance, and contemporary performance. Since 1990, it has supported artists, audiences, and communities through a combination of cultural programming, artist development, and creative learning.

Alongside its artistic programme, Cambridge Junction delivers an extensive Creative Learning programme that achieves over 7,000 engagements with children and young people each year. These projects support participants to develop confidence, skills, wellbeing, and aspirations, with a particular focus on young people who face barriers to participation, education or employment, including those with SEND and other complex needs.

The organisation works closely with local communities, schools, youth services, artists, and partner organisations to create inclusive opportunities for people to engage in creative activity, gain new skills, and connect with others. Programmes include long-term arts projects, music development opportunities, youth participation activity, artist mentoring, and supported pathways into training and employment (named projects include Total Arts, Total Arts Mini Bytes, Contemporary Youth Choir, Take Two Program, Kit Bank, The Fiver, Open Mic Club, and Next Wave).

Cambridge Junction is committed to removing barriers to creative participation and ensuring that cultural opportunities are accessible, inclusive, and representative of the communities it serves, aligning with the primary UNSDG for this project of *Reduced Inequalities*. The role this project played in aiding the securing of funds to protect the future of this community space that is a social lifeline for many marginalised groups and

safeguarding their access to creative activities that boost wellbeing further aligns with the project's secondary UNSDG of *Good Health and Wellbeing*.

Project Summary

Throughout the six weeks spent at Cambridge Junction (13th July – 21st August), I undertook a project focused on the development of an impact event that showcases the breadth of Cambridge Junction's artistic, creative learning, and community activity, while strengthening relationships with potential supporters, local businesses, and high-net-worth individuals who share the organisation's values.

The aim of the event, scheduled for the 21st September 2026, was to highlight the role that medium-sized arts organisations play in supporting artists, young people, and communities, and the importance of live cultural venues as a pipeline for emerging talent to develop skills, experience, and audiences.

Key Outputs

I produced a number of varied outputs as part of this project, importantly creating resources that will aid Cambridge Junction's future fundraising, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement activity, working to leave a lasting legacy beyond the event itself.



Figure 1 - Interviewing for the short films

The first of these were two short films which are to be shown at the impact event and to be used in future advocacy activities for the Junction. Beyond providing a brief and commissioning these two films, I was directly involved in their production with local filmmakers Liam Togher and Jahmal Crowe, all the way from initial discussions to the postproduction process. This included identifying contributors, coordinating content gathering, and ensuring stories are representative of the breadth of activity delivered by Cambridge Junction as I led each interview with those contributors.

As part of this interview process, I was able to assist Beth Bailey, Head of Creative Learning, in documenting a Most Significant Change (MCS story) with one of their Total Arts Program participants and Customer Service Stewards. This gave me a direct insight into the form of qualitative form of impact monitoring and evaluation that the organisation uses, which was valuable as I began to incorporate the told impacts from many other of these MSCs sensitively into marketing materials given their central

emphasis on storytelling and individual experience which is at the forefront of all the Junction's work.

The third set of outputs were two written guides. The first (titled 'The Conversation Toolbox') is a short, practical guide that was designed to aid front-of-house and events staff in communication with prospective supporters. I introduced and delivered a summary of this guide at the August staff training session. Using learning from research I undertook into communication methods for mid-to-high-value fundraising, I produced a second guide for Board Members that was paired with 'Cambridge Junction – Key Information', a 5,000-word accompanying document. Taking the most important and up-to-date information (such as report outcomes) about the Junction's work and its impact, this document provides the individuals at the forefront of the organisation's development with an in-depth, easily accessible outline of what has already been achieved to aid their own communication with prospective supporters.



Figure 2 - Staff Training



Figure 3 - Original J1 Flooring (Auction Piece)

Another output was the setup of an online silent auction. As part of this process, I spent time working through both the Junction's physical and digital archives, selecting posters, photographs, and historic memorabilia. I was further able to use these archive findings as I worked with the marketing team to produce display materials for the event. A secondary output that emerged as a result of engagement with the archive was the creation of an up-to-date contact list for past performers, from Blur and Radiohead to Lily Allen and Wolf Alice, also recording the dates and contextual information surrounding performances stretching back to 1991. This proved valuable for outreach work.

Leadership Skills Development

My LiA was highly collaborative as I worked closely with colleagues across fundraising, marketing, Creative Learning, programming, and operations, as well as external partners including filmmakers, artists, and participants. Whilst I considered myself a strong collaborative worker prior to my LiA, spending 5 days a week in an office really taught me to appreciate the value of working within a communal environment. There is only so much you can learn from reading about an organisation, which I realised very early on into my project as the informal in-person conversations I was having within this

environment cemented my understanding of how the Junction operates. My understanding of collaboration expanded as I learnt that it can look like trusting others to make individual contributions to a task or project which can then be collaboratively reviewed, as opposed to having multiple people working on the same task. During my project I met fortnightly with the key people involved in the development of the impact event where we would review our progress and delegate tasks to be completed in the period of time before the next meeting. Whilst we would continue to communicate between meetings, this simple yet effective means of collaboration enabled us to make clear, measurable, and efficient progress as a team across those six weeks. As a leader, you have to ensure the cogs are free to turn if you want the machine to run.

One of the main leadership skills I developed at the Junction was a more nuanced understanding of adaptability. After spending time coordinating the work that had already been undertaken by other members of the team in preparation for the impact event up to the point of my project start date, more had been achieved at this point than initially anticipated. At first this caused me concern about the direction of the project. However, the conversations that emerged as a result of vocalising these early concerns helped me establish my role within the organisation moving forward. As an organisation who are experts at events planning, my role was in part to manage all the moving parts, and beyond this it was to utilise the strength of my perspective as someone from outside of the Junction to review and guide the direction supporter engagement strategy was moving. I would define this type of adaptability as the adaptability of expectation – in this instance, it is the ability to critically review your own role and assumptions about it to ensure you are able to adjust your work to execute the goals of project and meet the needs of the organisation.

Another form of adaptability I learnt was a more literal one: how to tailor outputs to different audiences. As I conducted interviews and produced guides that served similar functions but for different audiences, I had to consider how the delivery of questions and information needed to be adapted to best support each audience or individual. The best communicators I had the pleasure of working with on my LiA were the ones who spent enough time understanding their audience that they were able to adjust their communication technique accordingly. Getting it correct was a trial-and-error process, which is why routine feedback is always valuable.

Additional Learning

The diverse range of tasks I undertook on my LiA presented me with a number of additional learning opportunities. This enabled me to acquire practical skills such as how to efficiently use and extract relevant information from local and regional data bases on charities, businesses, and organisations, how to use data visualisation software for heatmapping, and through observing Beth's MSCs story collection

interviewing technique, learning how to empower people to communicate their experiences honestly. Gaining hands on experience with this participatory, story-based evaluation method has opened my eyes to how the ways we choose to measure and analyse impact can affect the very data we seek to collect.

Additional Highlights



Figure 4 - Staff Bake Off

There were many special moments across the time I spent at the Junction, and these include partaking in a Bake Off with the team, meeting young performers at the Bridge City BBQ, having the opportunity to spend one morning at Total Arts Mini Bytes (a fortnightly participation group for disabled children aged 9-13yrs), as well as the many small moments shared with members of the team (with plenty of cups of tea).

The one thing that threaded

all of these experiences together was the overwhelming sense of community, the ability to foster this being the Junction's greatest strength. I witnessed and experienced so much joy in such a short space of time, and it has reinforced for me an appreciation of the critical need for continual support for local arts organisations within our communities.



Figure 5 - Bridge City BBQ

Conclusion

As a university student, it is easy to feel like a tourist in the very town you live in. This project really changed that for me. When I was first given the opportunity to become a Laidlaw scholar, I was asked what I was most looking forward to regarding the LiA. At the time, I said that I was most excited 'to help support and learn from those working to create lasting change within the local Cambridge community [...], as this is paramount to continue limiting the so-called "town and gown" divide.' Whilst the former was true, and remains so, my summer at Cambridge Junction has taught me that limiting or closing the 'town and gown' divide is not what is needed within the city and its surrounding areas. The focus instead has to be placed on acknowledging this gap, understanding the experiences of those who feel the worst effects of it, and looking at

how we can support those individuals in a way that does not compromise the fundamental needs of the local community that they are a core part of.

Though my time at the Junction has sadly come to a close, I look forward to continuing a relationship with the organisation as I return as a volunteer support worker at Total Arts Mini Bytes from October.