

Knowing Me...



Knowing You

Knowing Me Knowing You

Funded by Young Roots Heritage Lottery, BCC and Hengrove Community Arts College

An arts and cultural collaboration between Hengrove Arts College students and young people from Bristol Muslim Cultural Society, lead by project artist Toni Robinson, and supported by Hengrove Arts College Manager Rebecca Fitzgerald and staff from various cultural organisations. By using research, recording, and creative skills, young people from different cultural, religious, and social backgrounds learnt more about their own and each others heritage and traditions and discovered their similarities and differences.

Participants researched archives on language, religion, family trees and the arts at the Record Office, the Museum, libraries, and internet. They also worked with expert staff to research and develop ideas and created works of art that reflected aspects of the project they found interesting. The project culminated in an exhibition of their written and creative work that was curated and organised by the young people, held at the Art Gym gallery in Hengrove.

Partners

Bristol City Council Cultural services, Libraries, Bristol Muslim Cultural Society, Hengrove Community Arts College, Bristol Record office, City Museum

"The Knowing, Me Knowing You Project was an innovative approach to bringing together young people through art to explore issues of identity and faith. The use of libraries as a place for social interaction enhanced the participants' feelings of belonging through shared cultural spaces.

The excellent quality of the artwork produced by young people from both Hengrove Community College and Bristol Muslim Cultural Society provided testimony to the outstanding creative talents of the participants and the practitioners.

The Knowing Me, Knowing You project was used as an example of best practice in a presentation made to cultural leaders representing 50 cities from across Europe at an intercultural dialogue conference in Liverpool in May 2008” .

Asif Khan, Community Engagement Manager, Bristol Libraries



**“This picture shows us together on the steps of the Central Library with our portraits. We had spent quite a lot of time together by this point, we had worked really hard together to finish the pieces, I think both the group and the artworks we had created at that point were amazing!”
Gabby Rhodes, Hengrove School.**

Knowing Me...

Toni Robinson Artist and Project Manager

This project was launched with many new partners coming together (Hengrove Community School, BMCS and the staff supporting KMKY) to find a starting point for something that had the potential to be a very exciting and valuable experience for all involved.

Relationships were made easily due to our common ground, a passion for what could be achieved, and a genuine desire to get the best from the project.

Progress was slow at first, due to the numerous different commitments the young people had with their schools and busy social lives, however once the young people were achieving successful paintings and sculpture they became enthusiastic and committed to the project.

The arts are a great tool of communication and provide young people with the opportunity to shine through achievement. The participants made good working relationships with the artists and other participants and we became a team where we all encouraged each other and looked forward to the sessions, and the time we spent together.

Initially, we were apprehensive about taking reasonably sized groups of young people into the galleries and particularly to the research library, however the Bristol City Council staff

supported us and made the young people feel very welcome and important, which encouraged them to enjoy the experience. Their staff understood the young people and discussed the art and the project with them, which made them feel valued and proud of their work. I have written to the Library and Bristol City Museum and Gallery to thank them for their significant contribution.

Our discussion days were very lively ending with the young people asking for more, once they realised how much they had to say relating to culture, colour and race. They were very honest with each other and went on to discuss other marginalized groups, different kinds of bullying and the best way forward when experiencing this kind of behaviour.

The exhibition at The Art Gym was a huge success, allowing the young people to exhibit their work in such an exciting space and to show off to their families and friends while introducing new friends to their families and wider community.

The project ended with the young people wishing they had more time together and Ideas of their own that they wanted to develop to enrich the project further.

BMCS and Rebecca Fitzgerald of Hengrove Community Arts College are now looking to take the work forward with myself in Bristol

and other regions in the South West. I felt privileged that many of the young people took the trouble to attend my own exhibition in Swindon.

The young people from Hengrove previously had few relationships with Asian people and found the experience enlightening. The young people from BMCS were a little older and worldlier; however they also gained a better understanding of the diversity of local culture and sub cultures.

The discussions gave us all the opportunity to look at ourselves and others and the young people came to the conclusion that it comes down to who you are as an individual, and what you bring to the world and each other that creates bonds and understanding.

I would like to thank the all the partners and participants, with a special thank you to Rebecca Fitzgerald, Denis Wise and Suneya Azad for committing so much extra time freely to the project. I hope this is just the beginning of our partnership.

I would like to add a **big** thank you to the Heritage Lottery for allowing this to happen and supporting such fantastic work across the country.

Toni Robinson 2008

Knowing You...

Rebecca Fitzgerald
Arts College Manager, Hengrove Community Arts College

When Hengrove Arts College pupils and the young people from Bristol Muslim Cultural Society met for the first time at the Central library, I think all involved were slightly nervous. But after a few ice breaking activities, it became clear that the group, supported by all involved, had the potential to make the Knowing Me Knowing You initiative a really successful and valuable project, not just for the participants but also the local communities.

The young people from Hengrove, coming from a predominantly white area, had very little contact with people from varied backgrounds, both in school and in their local community. In fact, many of our students have little knowledge of other areas in Bristol other than Hengrove and the immediate small communities.

On meeting the young people from BMCS, it was also clear that none of them had visited South Bristol, and that they also had preconceptions about what the Hengrove students would be like.

The BMCS participants were very keen to get to know everyone involved in the project, while the Hengrove group were somewhat more timid, perhaps due to the fact they were slightly younger. However, over time, we began to see everyone

pushing past the initial barriers that seemed to be between them.

Art is a fantastic vehicle for engaging people of all ages and abilities, and after the first few sessions, the members of the group were beginning to emerge as confident and supportive young people. Rapidly, they discovered how much they had in common, and all remarked on the fact that they knew very little about each other's communities, even though they were extremely similar, just different sides of the city.

Knowing Me Knowing You has brought knowledge to all the participants involved, and knowledge is what can help change negative patterns in young people.

Many of the participants had very little geographical awareness of the city and the resources and facilities that were accessible to them, so even on this level alone the young people were educated with regards to their lifestyle options.

Hopefully, they will now do more with their free time, taking advantage of the cultural provision available in their city.

The project was a real eye opener for the Hengrove students, who I truly believe now

realise the benefit of making an effort to be curious about things they have no knowledge of, rather than assuming they know about it because of the media or through second hand information.

Many young people have an anxiety about mixing with people from outside of their immediate community or comfort zones, particularly our students, as Hengrove and the surrounding area is very insular and territorial.

I think both groups involved in the project had an awareness of stereotypical views of their communities, which can often lead to reluctance to integrate or lowered levels of confidence in new situations. The project really served to help them see that pushing their boundaries in life opens up new life chances and life choices.

I hope that the young people have learnt that by taking the opportunities that are available in life and doing things they may be hesitant or afraid to do, regardless of the perceived barriers, or lack of knowledge of new things, their horizons can be broadened and they can enrich their lives further.

Rebecca Fitzgerald 2008



“Here we are at our Sunday meeting room! We had just met at the City Museum for the first time, so we were a little quiet at first but after a few games and some clay work everyone started to get along. Through a little talking whilst participating in a small art project, you can break down the barrier between people” **Arsalaan Azad (Sid), BMCS**



“One of the first activities we all did to properly launch the project was sculpture. We made Giacometti style figures to represent ourselves and each other and the general culture of teenagers today.

It gave us the opportunity to discuss what it is like to be a teenager, and talk about our own experiences of life in general. We started to find out more about each other and places we hadn’t visited before.”

Ryan Wilcox, Hengrove Community Arts College





“I think giving knowledge about Islam and Muslims to small groups of people could spread and have a positive effect on many others....”

Sid (middle) BMCS

“It is really not that hard to interact with people you hardly know as long as they are willing to interact with you as well. Throughout the project we all pulled together and helped each other out so much”

Zaidia Hussain (front right) BMCS



“Here are some of us working at the Central Library – on another Sunday!! Most of us didn’t mind giving up our weekends to the project.

I liked doing something different with a really nice group – It was fun to go into town and visit places I wouldn’t normally go to in my spare time.”

Karen Lewis, Hengrove Community Arts College



The participants document their work so far on camera – Nabil, Courtney, Chelsea and Sharuk give a friendly critique of each other’s work!



The other side of the camera.....

“Other than the skills we learnt and improved in art, doing painting and sculpture, we also had the chance to do photography and film, documenting. I loved using the video camera – something we don’t get the chance to do at school because there aren’t enough resources....”

Gabby Rhodes (centre) Hengrove Community Arts College

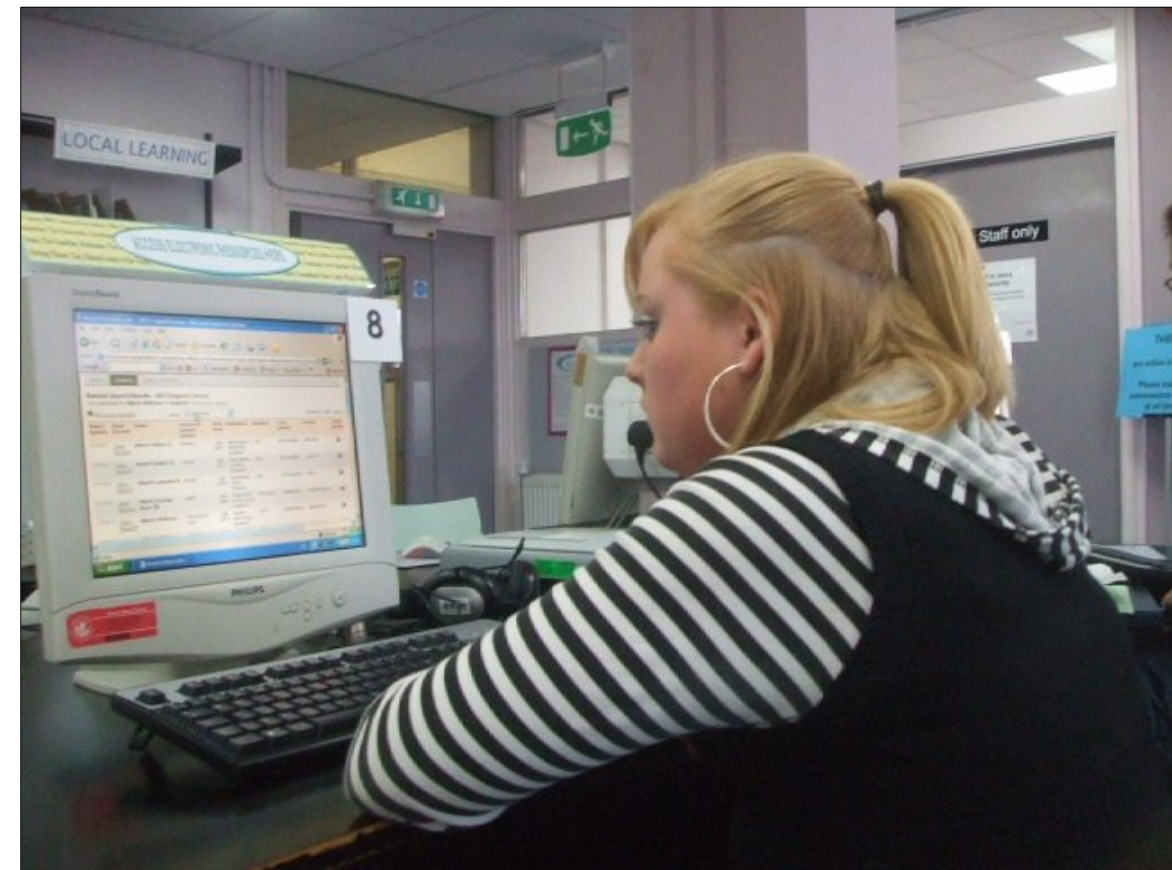




“Here we are at the library and records offices researching things about our lives. I looked at my family tree.

I thought the library was going to be really boring, but I actually enjoyed myself, it started the project off really well for me, as I wanted to find out more straight away. It was good to go home and talk to my Mum about the things I had found out.”

Lauren Milkins (below), Hengrove Community Arts College





“A lot of people have never visited the whole of Bristol, even though they have lived here all their lives. The Hengrove students had never visited BMCS, and we had never been to Hengrove gallery.

I think it was good how the project ran smoothly and we all mixed and shared interests, although the Hengrove students took a little longer to open up and relax...”

Nabil Osman (far right), BMCS



“The day we met the media!! One evening at BMCS, some of us got together to meet with the BBC towards the end of the project. The reporter filmed us a lot and interviewed Sid and Gabby. We were all really nervous (except Sid obviously!!) but I’m glad we did it. It was great to watch it on TV and show our friends and family.

We also did the radio during the exhibition and once the project had ended. By then we were used to the attention and found it much easier to chat with the press!”

Jemma Mullin, Hengrove Community Arts College



“I learnt how to do proper graffiti and will definitely do it again if I ever got the chance. We acquired a lot of skills throughout the project, both artistic and personal.”

Sharuk Osman, BMCS

“I think this was my favourite day, even though it was the last Art activity we did. The graffiti artist we worked with was amazing. It was a brilliant way to end the project.”

Chelsea Watts, (below far left) Hengrove Community Arts College

“We incorporated as much as we could into our final piece – flags to represent our heritage, music, people and fashion – as these were our favourite things!”

Courtney Coombe, Hengrove Community Arts College





“My final piece represented the two most important things to everyone in the group. Even those of us that liked different types of music or had different interests, I realised above everything we all loved our friends and family - something surely everyone in the world must have in common...!”

Courtney Coombe, Hengrove Community Arts College

The Exhibition





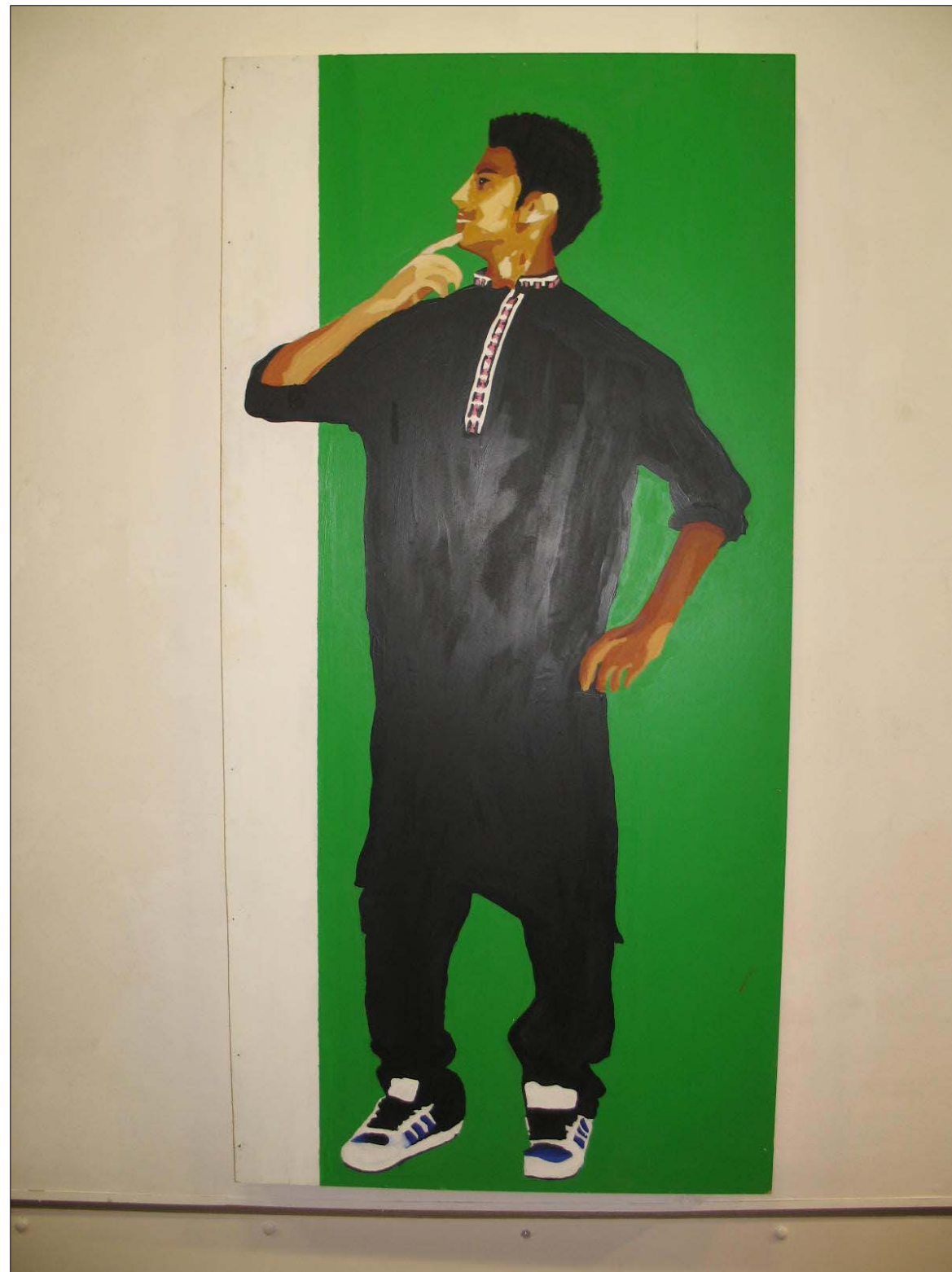
“I feel that I have learnt how to relax and concentrate on my work and take time over it. The staff were also very helpful at teaching us how to take time over our work and how to be patient. I do feel that we would have benefited from more one to one time with staff and artists. More staff or a longer project would have been helpful”.

Nabil Osman (left picture), BMCS

“I had so much fun on the project; it was amazing to work with such different people and I now feel confident with people from backgrounds other than my own.”

Jessica Box, (right picture), Hengrove Arts College





“The project was SIK!! We caught soooo much joke it was unbelievable and the painting and graffiti was amazing.

From the bottom of my huge heart I thank everyone who came to the project. Toni, what a legend! Suneya, for waking me up in the morning (not like I didn’t want to). Rebecca, for bringing a wonderful group for us to get involved with, and all of the other artists and staff that helped with the project.

And I can’t forget the beautiful funders as they made it all happen”.

Sid (picture left), BMCS



“This project was really amazing and I’m so glad we took part. I have met some wonderful people who I now class as my friends for life, who I hope to stay in touch with in the future”.

Zaidia Hussain (second right in middle picture), BMCS



This project has been a wonderful experience and a great learning curve for as all. The young people have learnt through peer education and the input from library and museum staff has led to the young people feeling comfortable about using public spaces which they may otherwise not have visited. Everyone involved agreed that their new skills and learning will stay with them and impact on their friends and families.

Toni Robinson, Lead artist and Project Manager



At the final exhibition, to mark the end of the Knowing Me Knowing You Project, the young people sign the graffiti board they made with local artist Damian Gunning the week before.



“This was the best project I have ever been involved in. I wish we had more time to carry it on even longer. It’s quite sad it’s over!”

Karen Mullin, Hengrove Arts College

“I’m really happy that I was chosen to be involved in KMKY. Anyone who gets the chance to take part in something like this is really lucky. I really felt like I gained a lot from the project and all the staff that supported it.”

Verda Ahmed, BMCS



“When I first started the project I wasn’t too sure about giving up so much of my free time. But in the end, I’m so glad that I did. I’m really proud of the work I’ve created.”

Ryan Wilcox, Hengrove Arts College





Final words: Asif Khan, BCC

This has been a difficult and challenging project that could not have been brought to a conclusion without the energy of the Freelance worker and the staff of partner organizations, all of whom showed a willingness to commit themselves, sometimes to their own inconvenience, in order to ensure that the young people were given the best possible chance to maximize the opportunity.

There have been a number of issues that specifically and significantly contributed to the difficulties that presented, in particular the lack of a coordinator in the Local Authority for some 9 months after funding was agreed, and the absence of one of the employed freelance artists half way through the project meant that was a lack of drive and focus for the project in the initial stages.

Despite many stumbling blocks, the persistence and determination of key people involved in the project ensured that Knowing Me Knowing You was a success. The project has enabled young people from culturally

diverse backgrounds and areas of Bristol to explore and research issues of heritage and to reflect upon these as they impact upon their perceptions of themselves.

In exploring these themes the young participants have been able to engage with spaces of heritage that they may previously have considered unavailable to them. They have also been able to consider issues of culture and heritage not just as static points of difference to be understood and tolerated but also as dynamic and fluid areas where seemingly divergent backgrounds meet and where people can have more in common than usual notions of heritage and cultural differentiation allow.

This exploration has also given rise to lasting art works and records of their creation that have allowed the young people to represent this journey and how it has impacted upon them and their perception of their relationship to others and to themselves.

The young people involved have, after some initial problems, engaged with and enjoyed all aspects of the project. They have particularly responded to the joint meeting and working together, growing noticeably more confident and comfortable around each other and enjoying the surprise of encountering shared culture as well as cultural difference. They have been given the opportunity to explore culture and heritage as retained and displayed in both the Museum and Library as well as explore creatively their own responses to this as refracted through self-image and awareness. The resultant artworks and written records of their feelings and responses are impressive testimony to the engagement of the young people involved and their positive relationships with the project workers.

Huge thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund and all involved in the Knowing Me Knowing You Project.

Asif Khan 2008