

# Create Room 2025 Project Evaluation

## Organisations history and purpose

The St Ives School of Painting was established in 1938 by artists Borlase Smart and Leonard Fuller, fulfilling a vow to create an art school in St Ives if they survived the horrors of the First World War. It provided a vital space for artists to learn and practice, and was housed in the iconic Porthmeor Studios, where it remains to this day. In the 1950s St Ives artists gained national prominence in the Festival of Britain and international recognition through touring exhibitions and links with New York.

Since then, the School has flourished, becoming a registered charity in 2000. We offer a varied course programme which attracts budding and professional artists from all over the world. Our studios are transformative spaces steeped in history. Our purpose is to enrich people's lives by nurturing and enabling their creative spirit.



Our youth programme started in 2017 to give these same opportunities to children from the age of 7 through to adulthood.

Since then, the programme has split into two areas – open access and inclusion. In our inclusion work, we seek to reach out beyond the studio walls. We welcome those who would otherwise be unable to access visual arts and culture for various reasons to engage with us for free. Young people gain skills, confidence, resilience and improved aspirations from working with us and having new experiences in the arts. For some groups, they also achieve a Nationally recognised qualification: a Bronze Arts Award which is equivalent to half a GCSE in Art.

These inclusion projects vary from arts and culture projects, to working onsite at secondary schools, or working in partnership with local organisations to bring groups into the studio. We value the Youth Programme and the impact it is having in the lives of children, young people and families across Cornwall.



*Porthmeor Studios (the brown building) houses the St Ives School of Painting.*

## Project Context

- An Arts Inclusion project called *Create Room* for young people living in poverty who attend Pool Academy, secondary school in Cornwall.
- This project took place in Summer Term 2025.
- Young people are identified as Pupil Premium because they live in poverty in low income families, but they also have other challenges -
  - Anxiety disorders
  - ADHD
  - Autism
  - Special Education Needs
  - Bereavements
  - Very low self esteem
  - English as an Additional Language
- The project consisted of 12 young people from year 9.
- This project was accredited with Arts Award, Bronze. I mentored Natalie Ellie Art teacher to be the Advisor on this project after she had completed her Bronze Arts Award training day with Trinity College.
- Create Room was funded by Taylor Money, a local firm who sponsors the St Ives School of Painting Youth programme.
- The Arts Award moderation of this project was funded by Pool Academy.



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 [porthmeor\\_youngartists](https://www.instagram.com/porthmeor_youngartists)

 [schoolofpainting.co.uk/young-artists](https://www.schoolofpainting.co.uk/young-artists)

Project supported by:

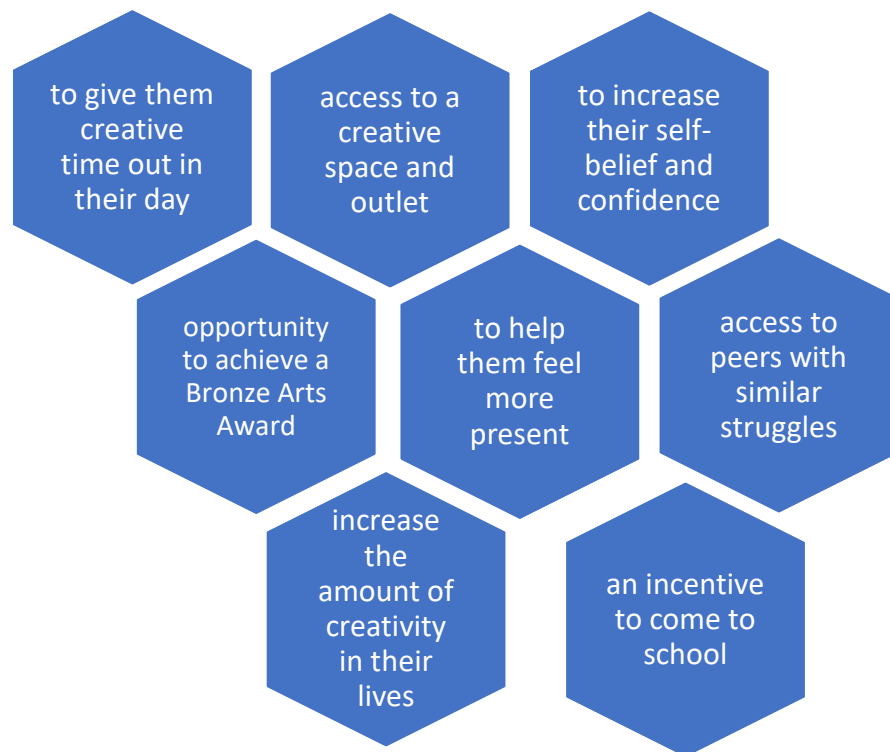
**Taylor  
Money.**  
Wealth Management

The project aim was to help young people create room in their days, minds and lives for creativity (aims overleaf). This is specifically for young people living in poverty. Young people are identified as Pupil Premium or have other indicators of need which gives teachers a cause for concern. To be inclusive, this project happened during the school day. Consent was given by parents to take them out of curriculum sessions for this project which was 2 hours with an artist every other week, and one hour of Arts Award in the weeks between.

The idea of *Create Room* is to remove access issues of getting to St Ives by School of Painting by us going to them, acting as a mindful art session during the school day. To launch the 8 session project and introduce them to the School, young people visited St Ives for the day brought to us by school mini bus. They

visited Tate St Ives and then engaged in an arts workshop with us in Porthmeor Studios. The lead artist was Kitty Hillier, an artist based in Penryn. She has an BA in Painting from Bath Spa and is currently studying an MA in counselling. Laura Kent was the art technician; she is also a practicing artist and has a PGCE.

## Create Room Aims



## Engagement and Barriers

We found that the self-esteem of the young people was incredibly low in this group. Numerous studies and psychological theories support the strong link between low self-esteem and young people growing up in poverty.

- They make social comparisons, feeling 'less than' which often leads to social withdrawal from feelings of inferiority.
- Stigma and judgment of societies negative stereotypes around poverty can lead to feeling looked down on. This eats away at self-worth.
- Limited opportunities like lack of access to extracurricular activities and safe housing contribute to feelings that they can't keep up academically and are not good enough.
- Family stress due to financial pressures of parents working on minimum wage or being under or unemployed can lead young people to feel like a burden in the family, adding to the adults financial problems.
- The young person's mental health suffers due to living with chronic stress and anxiety, leading to depression. Traumatic experiences also play into this as young carers, moving frequently and a lack of stability compounds their problems.
- In the recent [Kings College study](#), it shows that growing up in poverty has a lasting effect on mental health throughout life.

# Arts Activities

## Tate Gallery visit and Make like an artist

In the first session young people had a St Ives experience day. We helped them engage with art collections at Tate St Ives which they really enjoyed. They did a materials treasure hunt, then drawing and collage activities inspired by the artworks.



Young people then came back to work in Porthmeor studios. We did a Q&A with Kitty Hillier about her art career and young people got to make artwork using her mark-making techniques with natural forms.

This was a nice and bonding first meeting with the students. Getting to know them in a casual setting like Tate and talking about the artwork they were seeing was a good social smoother.

## Learn a technique, then share it

The young people learned one of two art techniques; Monoprinting from photographs or making ink and wax resist images. They then shared their technique with someone from the other group during Arts Award Advisor sessions and coached them to make a their own piece.

This encouraged young people to articulate their thoughts and coaching someone brought out young people's nurturing sides.



## Making a collage painting

Young people worked with Kitty Hillier and Laura Kent onsite at Pool Academy for the rest of the sessions. They learnt how to use collage techniques by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham and then turned these into



*Painting by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham*

mixed media paintings. They got to explore ideas around chance and how this creates automatic compositions that they can then build on.

Natalie Ellis Art Teacher worked with young people to capture the process and look at learning points in her Advisor sessions with the young people fortnightly.

## Exploring mark making

In the last session of the project, young people explored mark making to make multi-layered paintings. They referred to their sketchbooks and works they had made in the project to inspire them.

Natalie and I did one to ones with young people to ensure their Arts Award evidence for Bronze was complete and this was a good opportunity to reflect on the project with them individually.



## Achievement and Progression

On the last day of the project, the young people were each given a School of Painting certificate to acknowledge their achievement. To continue being creative and making art at home, each participant was given a drawing hamper as a project legacy. This included new drawing materials and sketchbooks, ensuring the project benefits to their wellbeing can continue.

The young people were invited to progress onto free scholarships at St Ives School of Painting. This is to join our monthly Sunday art sessions for local young people, aged 11 to 16 called [Porthmeor Art Collective](#). These scholarships are kept for them and are funded places, so free of charge to the young people.

This project was accredited with Bronze Arts Award which was split into four parts: Make, See, Find, Share. Having an extra hour with art teacher Natalie Ellis between the artistic activity weeks worked well to gather evidence for each part. The young people collected everything they learnt in a sketchbook for the project. A few of them cited how much they enjoyed using a sketchbook in their feedback comments. They all did well and passed their Bronze Arts Award accreditation which gave them another boost in confidence.

At the beginning of the project, young people plotted themselves on a 'Star'. This gave them 8 statements and they made a mark on the scale between 1 and 10 to plot how they feel. At the close of the project, the young person revisited their star, therefore giving me their distance travelled on the project where I can track improvements and change. They also filled in a comments slip with general feedback. The findings are below.

## Student profile

All young people on the project live in poverty. They also have other needs:

1. Young person 1 - ADHD, ASD traits, has high levels of Anxiety and Sensory Processing Needs
2. Young person 2 - Hates school, is a non-attender. Gets anxious easily and has very low self-esteem. Goes to counselling service in school
3. Young person 3 - Anxiety Disorder. Really good friends with Harrison Palmer (boy who was killed crossing the road by school 2 years ago)
4. Young person 4 - SEN needs and has a Learning Difficulty. Low school attendance, struggles with reading and writing
5. Young person 5 - Low confidence, joined Pool Academy part way through the year
6. Young person 6 - Was the girlfriend of Harrison Palmer. Is struggling with peer relationships
7. Young person 7 - ADHD. Has been known to bully other students
8. Young person 8 - English as an Additional Language student, has suffered from bullying
9. Young person 9 - Very quiet and shy girl, introverted and low self-esteem
10. Young person 10 - SEN needs, Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Has a Physical Disability
11. Young person 11 - English as an Additional Language student, behaviour in school has been poor. Has Physical Disability.

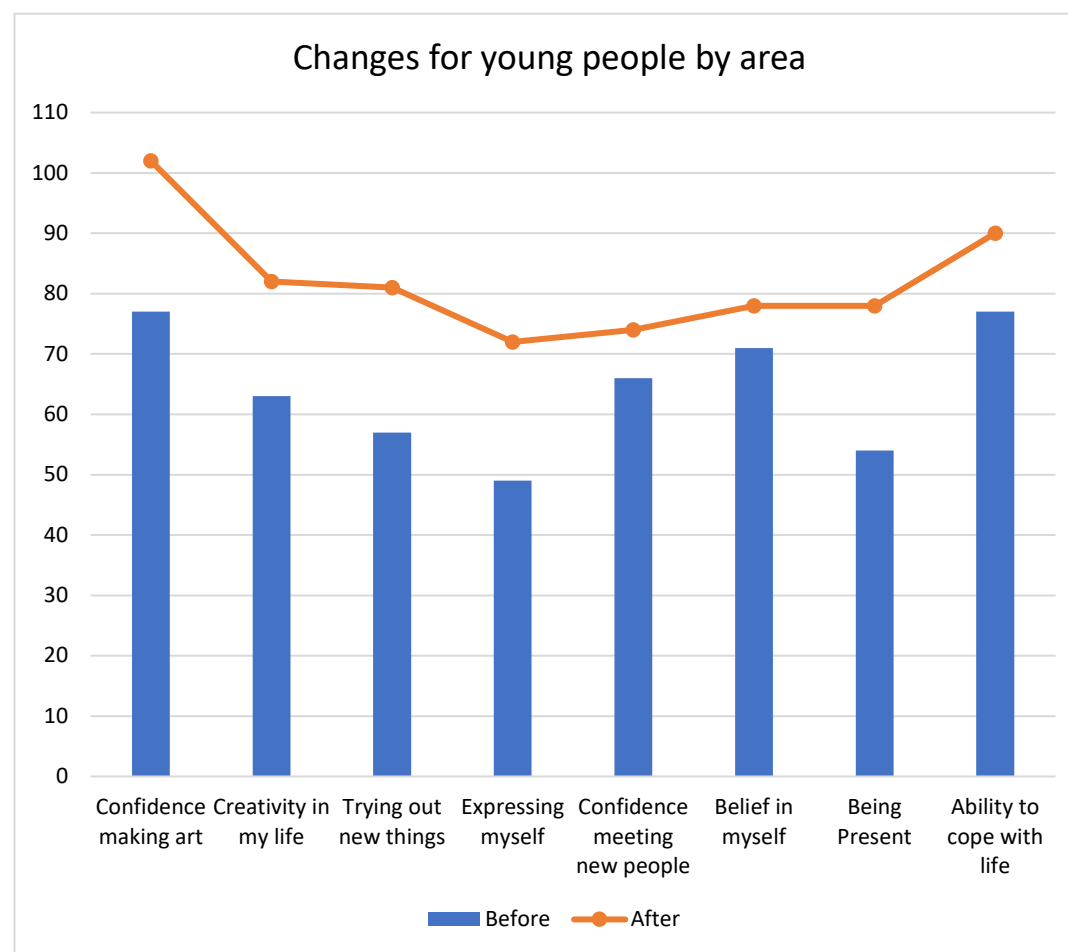
12. Young person 12 - Finds social situations challenging, struggles following instructions.

## Create Room Impact – by area

We track the young people’s individual progress while on the project to get a sense of their journey and how they have changed. This is against 8 statements about creativity and wellbeing. We analyse the scores the young people report, before and after in each area. We compare them by area as a group, and individually.

### Key findings:

- As a group, the biggest change for young people was in **‘Expressing myself’** at a **47% increase**, see chart. This is a great outcome for these young people with a variety of struggles as it helps them to build confidence, process emotions, and feel valued.
  - Expressing their thoughts and emotions through making art and in their sketchbook helped them to learn that their feelings matter. This validation is a core component of self-worth and also builds self-awareness and develops their communication skills.
- The second biggest change was in **‘Being present’** at a **44% increase**. This leap in mindfulness in turn supports the young people’s mental, emotional and physical well-being.
  - Living in a low-income family is strongly associated with higher levels of stress for children and young people, often significantly more. This stress can impact many aspects of their development and wellbeing - emotional and psychological stress like anxiety and depression, feelings of domestic instability, lack of access for learning resources at school and frequency of moving house due to instable housing and/ or renting. They also tend to take on adult roles early in life as young carers which in some cases can lead to burnout.



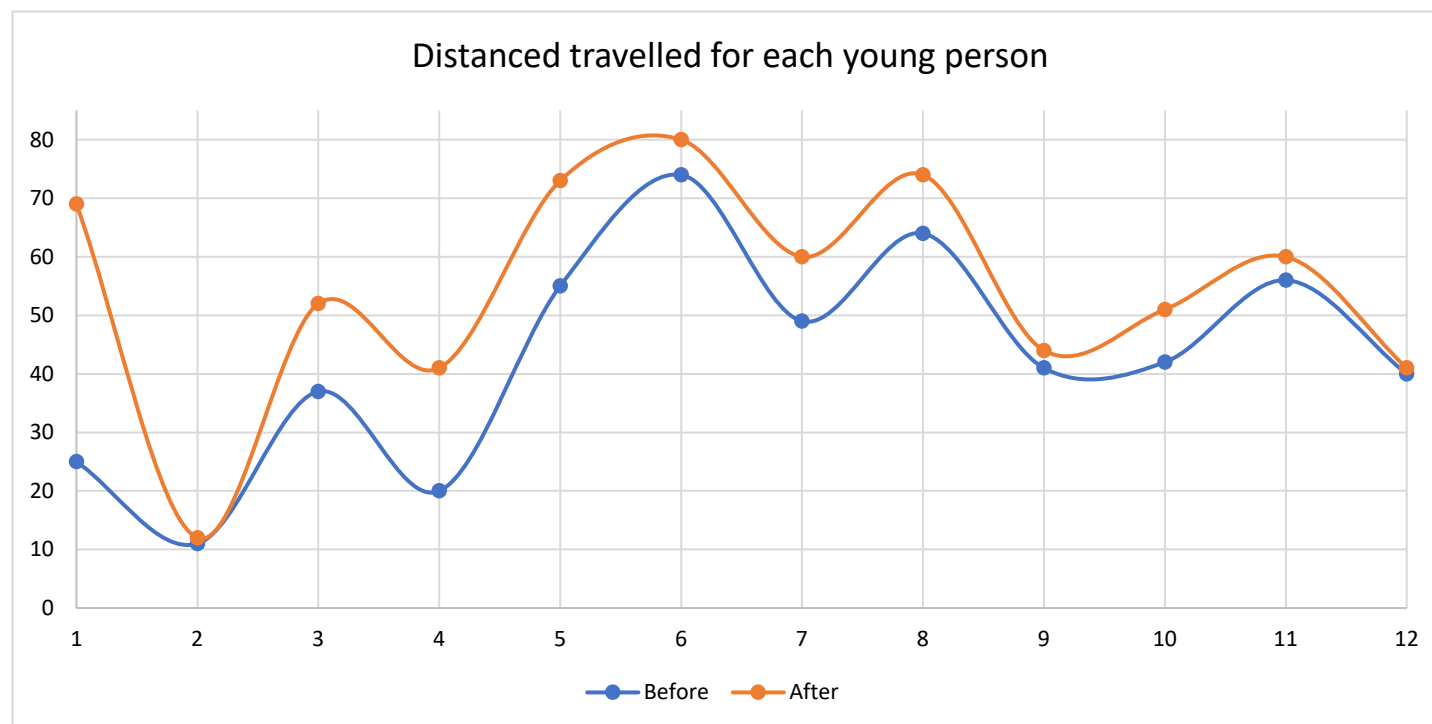
- Many children from low income families show incredible resilience to these challenges when they have support from dependable adults, strong school support, opportunities to express themselves and hopes for their future.
- The increase in mindfulness from this project will help them be mentally more present, helping them enjoy the here and now, while also improving their concentration at school, helping them feel less distracted by other thoughts.

## Create Room Individual Impact

This chart shows the distance travelled for each young person. It shows a variety of personal impact, from only 3% change to 176% change.

- In this chart, **Young Person 1** shows the largest distanced travelled at a change of **176%**. This is because in every category, he more than doubled his score by the end of the project. His beginning scores were incredibly low in the areas of confidence, creativity, trying things out, and being present.

At the end of the project, being present and trying things out for the first time grew from 1 to 10, while his confidence grew from 2 to 8. His ability to cope well with life doubled as did his ability to express himself. This young person has ADHD, ASD traits, High levels of Anxiety, Sensory Processing Needs.



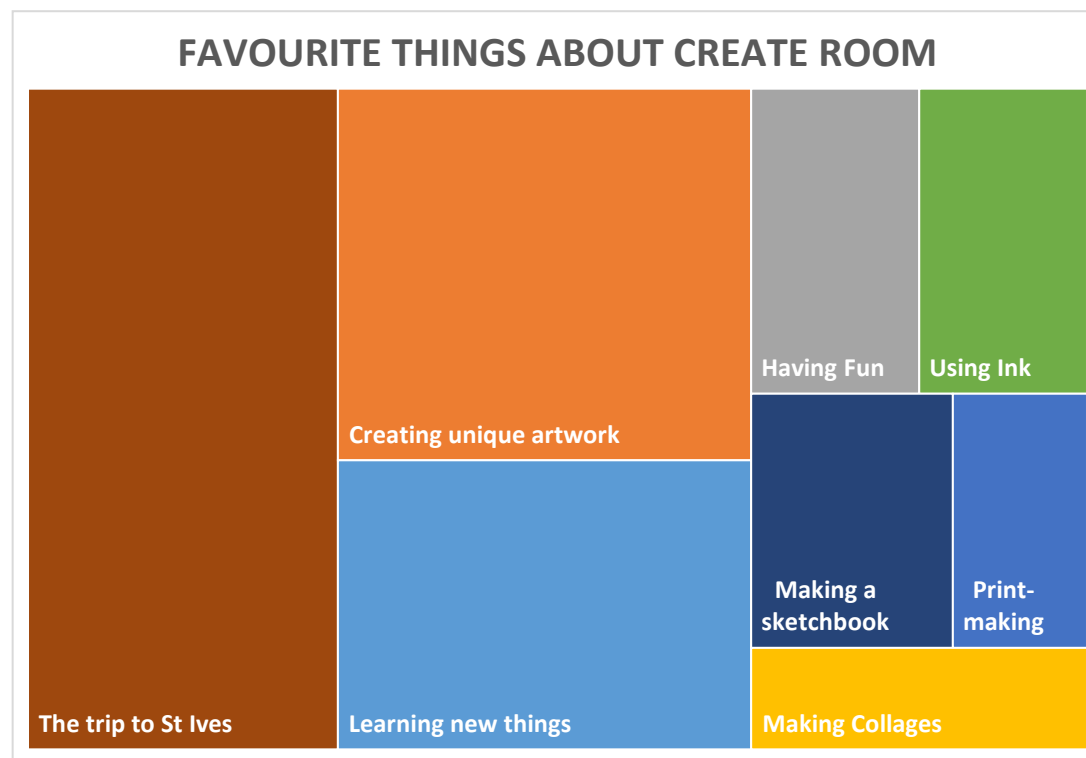
Vertical Axis: Total sum of each individuals score, ranging from 0-10 in each area

- **Young Person 4** shows the next biggest change at **105%**. Another male student, he has Special Education Needs and struggles with reading and writing. He has low attendance at school. On the project his largest distance travelled was in the area of confidence which grew from 2 to 10, and in creativity from 1 to 5. His ability to feel present also doubled on the project.
- The least amount of change was shown in **Young Person 2** with only a 3% change. They kept to their original scores for the project and didn't report any major changes in how they felt. Small changes were seen in her ability to express herself, accounting for this 3%.

## General Project Feedback

### Key findings:

- This chart shows the feedback young people gave about their favourite aspects of the project.
- The most meaningful parts of the project for them were:
  - **The day trip to St Ives**
  - **Creating unique artwork**
  - **Learning new things**
  - **Having fun**
  - **Making a sketchbook**
- Ink was the most popular art material, followed by printmaking and collage
- Their sketchbook was a source of pride for the majority of young people and a few mentioned this is my one to ones with them at the end of the project.



## Have you surprised yourself in Create Room?

I've surprised myself as I did better than I expected!

Yes, I feel inspired now.

Yes, I have surprised myself because I didn't think I would do as well as I did. I did a lot better! And I did lots of new things I have never done before. This is huge for me.

I feel more independent now.

Yes, I never knew that I could be very creative!

Yes, the sessions helped me to feel confident about my artwork and my skills.

Yes, we did quite a lot of interesting things.

## Ways Forward

- 1 | We changed the programme to 2 hour sessions based on feedback from the pilot project. This was much better for all.
- 2 | As Pool were keen to accredit the project with Arts Award we extended the project from 6 sessions to 8 sessions.
- 3 | Having extra time to gather young people's thoughts and feedback in a separate Arts Award session was good. This helped young people have longer in artistic sessions to explore art mediums and skills and feel relaxed. Next time leave 2 weeks for Part D, 'Share' as this was a much busier session.

4 After pilot feedback, we ran the project later in the day. The previous start time was at the very beginning of the school day. This 2025 project started at 11:20am and had better attendance for that. It also gave the artist and technician more time to set up.

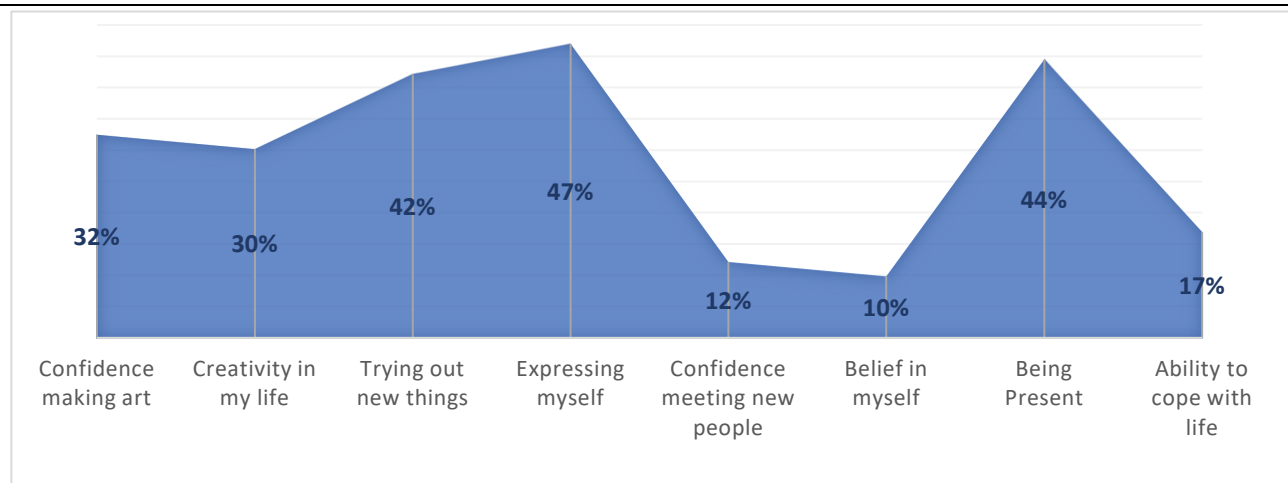
5 In the pilot project we ran out of time to do a St Ives trip at the end of term. This time we started the project with a trip to the Tate gallery and a workshop in our art studios. This worked nicely as a launch to the project. It gave young people context as to what the School of Painting is and helped them understand what we were bringing to them.

6 This project was funded by the Taylor Money contributions to the School of Painting youth programme. The budget was £1,550 and included St Ives trip, artist fees, technician fees, travel for both to and from Pool Academy, drawing hampers and art materials.

7 This wellbeing and arts model during the school day shows these group changes in the 8 measured areas.

The project needs to retain the time for young people to explore art mediums and express themselves, try things out without judgement and make unique work.

The 44% improvement in young people 'Being Present' come from these activities.



8 While we have sponsorship from Taylor Money, we can continue to work with Pool Academy to support their students.

9 For St Ives School of Painting to look at opportunities and funding to work in partnership with other secondary schools to benefit their vulnerable students living in poverty.

Catherine Lee  
Youth Arts Manager

**St Ives School of Painting**

Report published September 2025