

## Castlemilk Youth Complex

An influx of young refugees and asylum seekers into local schools was the impetus for Castlemilk Youth Complex to develop a vibrant programme of dance, music and drama activities that has generated some inspiring new local talent.

Castlemilk is an estate in South East of Glasgow's suburbs, the product of a 1960s housing programme to resettle families from Glasgow's infamous Gorbals. The Youth Complex, with a small theatre and multimedia facilities, specialises in working with marginalised young people aged 12-25 years old. It has become one of Scotland's best known youth arts organisations, funded through government regeneration support, local councils and the Scottish Arts Council.

The resettlement of 46 refugee families and the allocation of places in local schools to their children stimulated the youth centre to set up a programme of workshops designed to support their integration into the host community.

Castlemilk Youth Complex's programme runs with about 40 young refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and 200 other 'indigenous' young people and includes three strands involving refugees and asylum seekers: *Integrate me* – a Hip Hop and music recording programme; *Chill me* – a week night social programme serving as a drop-in providing games, new technology, cooking and social nights; and *Groove me* – a social enterprise project running a nightclub which enables around 12-15 young people to gain skills in planning, managing and marketing activities.

Within the *Integrate me* strand of work Castlemilk has seen the genesis of some exciting arts projects including the *A Boyz*, a 35-strong hip hop music outfit of young African and Asian boys; and *One Blood*, a street dance group which has spun out of the Hip Hop project. Both groups now perform and contribute to other areas of the Castlemilk programme including its music production and recording activities, and the *Groove me* nightclub.

It has also produced some remarkable new artistic talent. Rudi Mbumza, a young Somalian dancer, started out with the *One Blood* and after being trained by dance professionals at Castlemilk classes, started teaching others in the group and is now studying professional dance at a Glasgow college, while also serving as a volunteer teacher on the *Integrate me* programme.

Another success story is Gurjas Makkar, a Turkish Kurd exile, who arrived at Castlemilk in his early teens with few formal artistic skills but great interest and enthusiasm for Hip Hop. Over five years he has become a key member of the *A Boyz*, and one of a new generation of young leaders emerging from the centre.

Still only in his late teens, he moved on to studying music technology in Glasgow and was recruited onto the board of Directors of Castlemilk Youth

Complex, volunteering in the management of the complex, and directing service provision for their arts activities.

“The key to what we do is enabling young people to find common ground,” says Castlemilk Youth Complex manager, Fraser Howat. “Through our arts programme we can take them from issues about skin colour and difference into a shared interest in dance, drama and music. There is huge kudos for young people in being performers and the process of performing is really enabling people to gain respect – people really appreciate the skills they have.”

The project has had some other unexpected benefits for the youth centre – though once only able to focus on its immediate community it has found, as refugee families are re-housed in other areas, a need to work more widely afield in other communities, in order to enable its existing members to remain a part of ‘the Castlemilk family,’ at the same time as supporting activities and bringing in new members from other neighbouring estates.

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