

## **6. DCDP Case Study: Dundee Comics Creative Space (DCCS)**

DCCS Coordinator, Damon Herd started in post in October 2015. At this point, premises had been secured in the Vision Building on Greenmarket, and the governance structure had been finalised. We began the process of setting up the Space to hold workshops. This took a few months, but we were able to set up the artists' studio immediately, with three artists moving in. The artists help to facilitate our workshops. We set up a website, Facebook page and Twitter account. Comics Laureate, Dave Gibbons was announced as Patron of DCCS in November 2015.

DCCS hosted one-off events and workshops during Dundee Literary Festival in 2015, and again in 2016. We hosted eight events with industry professionals as guests, and connected with local comics creators.

We also ran comics workshops during Dundee Science Festival, reaching around 800 young people. The first comic produced by artists in the studio was *Mary Shelley's Dundee or Frankenstein Begins*, which was launched as part of the Being Human Festival in November 2015.

In February 2016, we hosted an Open Day, and by the end of that month DCCS was fully kitted out with an adaptable workshop space and a projection area for talks, presentations, and performances. There were now six comics creators using the incubator studio and facilitating our comics workshops.

We started our regular after school Comics Clubs in March, and these initially ran three times a week from 4.30-6.30pm. Tuesday evenings are for 10-13 year olds and Wednesdays are for 14-17 year olds. Thursdays were for the whole age range.

The workshops focus on different aspects of making comics including character design and storytelling. We have around 15-25 regular attendees on each evening. We aim to reach children within the lowest 40% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, but all young people are welcome.

We are working to increase awareness of our project and boost attendance further. We have contacted all secondary schools in Dundee to remind them of our workshops and services. We have also hosted outreach workshops in the community and local schools, including Baldragon, Grove, and St Paul's Academies. We have also visited schools in Angus, such as Woodlands Primary in Carnoustie, and Monifieth High.

As our Rank funding supports young people in Dundee, workshops outside Dundee are a potential income generator for DCCS. We also participated in Dundee Council's Cultural Marketplace, which enabled us to reach out to teachers and schools.

We have worked with a wide range of Rank-funded organisations, including Advocating Together, Police Scotland Youth Volunteers, V&A Dundee, Link Up Whitfield, and Food Train Dundee. Activities included hosting comics workshops during holiday feeding programmes.

Other local organisations we have worked with include Dundee Science Centre, Dundee International Design Festival, Dundee Contemporary Arts, and the Archie Foundation. We have hosted workshops with the University of Dundee, including with renowned American comics artist Lynda Barry, as part of the Graphic Medicine international conference at the University in July.

At the start of June, we decided to suspend the Thursday evening workshops, as attendance was too low. We are now using the Thursday slot for specific projects, the first of which is the creation of a disability hate crime comic produced with Advocating Together. This is a collaboration with the DCCS Comics Clubbers, our artists/facilitators, and the Advocators.

We have produced several outputs with our Comics Club attendees. In June, we digitally published the first collected volume of their comic strips, *Tales from Dundee and Beyond*. A printed version was published in October and launched at Ex Libris Book Fair at the Dundee Literary Festival. Our Comics Clubbers also produced their own zine-style comic books to sell, and spent time at the fair selling their comics. This is helping build skills, confidence and entrepreneurship.

In July, we released a newspaper-style digital comic. We are currently running an exhibition in DCCS showcasing comics production in Dundee, and this includes work by our Comics Clubbers. They also designed a mini Oor Wullie for the Oor Wullie Bucket Trail. 'Oor Elvis' was a great success and spent the summer in Central Library with the occasional trips around Dundee on the mobile library.

In August, we hosted a Rank Community Action Placement. Caitlin Mitchell was an excellent addition to our team, helping to increase awareness of DCCS through social media and blogging. She has decided to stay on as our social media volunteer, which will also count towards her Duke of Edinburgh award.

In September, it was announced that DCCS were runners up in the Converge Challenge. This is a Scotland-wide entrepreneur development programme for staff and students of Scottish Universities. We won £3,000 and the chance to proceed to greater funding next year.

In a recent review, we received the following feedback from the after school Comics Club attendees:

“I can share my passion and I feel at home”

“It’s a good place to draw because at my house I would keep getting distracted by stuff”

“I really like making my own comic and making new friends”

We have found that the act of creating comics, beyond simply telling stories, involves the young people in team working and collaboration. Once the comics are created the young people then need to think about the marketing and selling of that work.

The young people we have worked with have often come from underprivileged backgrounds and have never seen themselves as creative or entrepreneurial, and often have trouble socialising with others. We have found that these users have benefited enormously from the work we have done with them. Regardless of whether they pursue comics as a career or hobby in the future, the skills and experiences we give them has a tremendously positive impact.

**Chris Murray & Damon Herd**  
**December 2016**