



SCOTCH WHISKY  
ACTION FUND

MANAGED BY



PAISLEY  
YMCA



@ScotchWhiskySWA

Organisation: Paisley YMCA  
Date of Award: 2019  
Amount Awarded: £11,741  
Project Name: TouchCast



Paisley YMCA is a digital youth work organisation creating opportunities to access STEM-based activities and digital skills development in a safe, supportive, inclusive way supporting 'stealth' learning: non-traditional learning methods to introduce skills-based learning in fun and engaging ways. Sessions are focused on empowerment, building confidence, developing relationships, learning new skills and peer support while addressing barriers around math-anxiety and financial and digital literacy issues by creating accessible, engaging, and enjoyable opportunities to learn through activity.

## Funded Project: TouchCast and Virtual Reality House Party

In October 2019, Paisley YMCA received a grant of £11,741 for one year from the Scotch Whisky Action Fund (SWAF) to cover the cost of delivering workshops for young people to use TouchCast and Virtual reality technology to produce interactive videos to explore three key questions:

1. At what age did you start drinking and why?
2. What situations have you found yourself in because of alcohol consumption good or bad?
3. Do you feel peer pressure to drink, or do you enjoy the experience with friends and family?

The grant specifically paid for the training in using TouchCast and the virtual reality technology, youth worker costs, venue hire of the local digital Maker Space, production and editing, and expenses for the young people attending.

Paisley YMCA used these immersive technologies to allow young people to have deeper discussions about their attitudes towards alcohol by enabling young people to take full ownership of the design, delivery, and evaluation of the funded project. Through digital workshops, young people have created a series of virtual reality scenarios allowing users to explore issues such as peer pressure, underage drinking, and risk-taking.



Darran Gillan, Youth and Programme Development Manager at YMCA Paisley, said:

“Meaningful conversations about alcohol can be difficult to initiate, and virtual reality provides a great starting point for those discussions. Young people are talking about things they would not otherwise share in a youth club setting.

The immersive scenarios allow young people to see the dilemmas and challenges that others have experienced before them – in that sense, it’s a very effective preventative tool.

Having a completely youth-led project means the scenarios come from young people’s lived experiences – that’s what makes this project impactful.”

The project was designed to deliver the following outcomes:

1. Young people will have been integral to the design, delivery, and evaluation of the TouchCast and VR film content and workshop activities in schools and youth clubs.
2. Young people will learn about and improve their understanding of the impact of alcohol in our community; and become more resilient to peer pressure to go along with the crowd at social gatherings.

### **Project Delivery: First 6 Months**

The project officially launched in January 2020 when they started to engage with young people in discussions on the impact of youth culture and its relationship with alcohol. For the first nine weeks young people undertook web-based research and developed a peer lead questionnaire asking other young people the following questions:

- At what age did you start drinking and why?
- What situations have you found yourself in because of alcohol consumption, good/bad?
- Do you feel peer pressure to drink, or do you enjoy the experience with friends and family?

The content creation and analysis undertaken by young people was delivered face to face and online, and during this period they started to formalise ideas as to the content and awareness raising elements of the virtual reality film.

At this stage young people and youth workers had been delivering and creating content, research, and early stages of VR film work. However, on the evening of Monday the 16th March an announcement from the Prime Minister was received in the middle of a meeting with young people on progress made so far, and next stages of the project, when staff had to close the premises for the rest of the week as part of a national lockdown.

The first week of the lockdown staff and young people deliberated online as how to best progress the project now there was no access to equipment, space to operate from and the challenge of accessing young people. It was agreed to hold a series of Zoom meetings and from there, for the next eight weeks, they continued to develop the project milestones as best they could.

This arrangement worked well initially but after eight weeks with young people using video based platforms for school work, connecting with friends and family on top of the virtual reality project commitments there was a drop in engagement due to zoom fatigue and/or some young people accessing Zoom via shared family laptop or mobile phone. At this point they took a break from project activity and just meet socially online for four weeks and by that time lockdown had eased a little, allowing young people to meet with each other outside again.

Over the summer the young people who co-developed all the content, research, and initial test samples of virtual reality recordings, as part of the project outcomes, concluded that some amendments as to how the VR film would be created and incorporated into the Touchcast had to be made.

Young people who were part of the VR film production team discovered a new platform called Spatial VR, which is a co-production virtual space. This invigorated all the young people involved. Using the VR equipment and amending the training budget as part of the application to purchase more VR headsets, staff and young people started to develop the project again without the use of Zoom. Throughout summer until young people started back for the next school term much of the work of the project was develop via the Spatial VR platform.

Then, as of October 2020, the project opened back up and the project could start again.

## Case Study

David, aged 13, had never experienced virtual reality gaming or education through such a platform, his mind was blown away by this technology and was always asking to use it as part of his involvement in the project. David took it upon himself to form the VR production team that would be the tech support and delivery arm for the Touchcast.

Guided by the digital youth work staff David learned the basics of Unity, a VR software editing programme, and learned to code as a result. When the lockdown happened, they could no longer access the VR equipment. David expressed his frustration during Zoom calls as he was working very hard on developing aspects of the alcohol content and he wanted to use the finished programme that he and his team of friends had been working on as part of an online portfolio for a VR education competition that sadly he missed out on.

David like many of his friends was not sure as to his career goals in life and once he discovered the SWAF project he's now learning to programme and develop his code skills to build 3D assets. It was David that brought to staff's attention the Spatial VR platform and became a beta tester for the site to resolve social distancing while under lockdown.

David stated when he formed the VR production team for the alcohol project, "it was just an excuse to get hold of the VR equipment but the more I played with it and started to develop my own ideas is when I started to consider myself as a VR developer and that's what I want to do as a job when I leave school".

Like many in David's position during the lockdown period, David expressed his anxiety and concern about his future and this project provided a focus and a tangible goal to work towards and as result has alleviated some of that anxiety.

### Project Delivery: More Challenges to Overcome

The project continued from October to December 2020 but come January 2021, another period of lockdown started moving all activity online again. Then in February 2021 the premises was the victim of an arson attack and was destroyed along with its contents and all the equipment required to complete the Touchcast was lost.

As the summer approached, they secured new premises and restrictions started to lift again and they could continue delivery in person from July to end of September 2021.

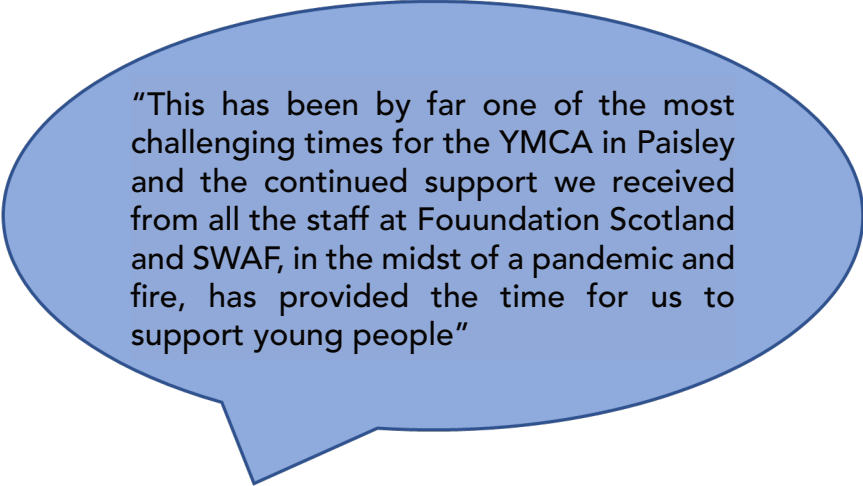
## Project Delivery: Final Summary

Throughout the funded period there was lots of disjointed work needing to be pulled together and although there weren't many volunteers, one young person constantly offered to help with the less exciting parts of the project requiring organising rather than creating. The young person just wanted to chat and be part of the group as they felt isolated stuck at home during lockdown and had finally got bored of online video games etc so was looking for an alternative distraction. Fortunately, this young person was a bit of a tech wiz and loved creating apps and needed a new project, and after looking at all the random items of data, research, photos, and other content, they organised all of it into one central location through a simple app they had built online. This saved a huge amount of time that was lost in the project due to all the disruption.

The original target was to benefit 700 school pupils/youth club attendees. However, with all the challenges throughout the period of a one year grant which effectively took two years to complete, 266 young people benefitted in total. The plan going forward to reach the original target is the use of Touchcast as a downloadable activity through Renfrewshire Council Glow Network schools platform. Staff time to cover this resource is being redirected as part of the Youthlink Youth Work Recovery Fund.

Shortly after the Scottish Whisky Action Fund learning event at the end of 2021, which brings together organisations funded by SWAF, Paisley YMCA were contacted by one of the other funded projects to work together on including their alcohol recourses to the current Touchcast to be delivered across more schools for the start of the academic year 2022.

Going forward Paisley YMCA plan to build a new Touchcast and green screen studio in its town centre premises once the insurance claim has been finalized following the fire.



"This has been by far one of the most challenging times for the YMCA in Paisley and the continued support we received from all the staff at Foundation Scotland and SWAF, in the midst of a pandemic and fire, has provided the time for us to support young people"