

16 May 2011

Junk Beatz makes a little noise!

It's been over a year since Alan Metcalfe, Connect Housing's Community Youth Officer, created a junk percussion group as a way of engaging with children from deprived communities in East Leeds. Junk Beatz, as the kids decided to call it, provides a unique, hands-on musical experience which helps keep young people off the street. And people are starting to notice (as if the noise wasn't enough!): Connect Housing has now reached the shortlist for two regional National Housing Federation (NHF) What We Are Proud Of Awards for the success of Junk Beatz.

Junk Beatz came about because Alan was concerned at the hostility to other cultures he noticed in youth from east Leeds communities such as Seacroft and Osmondthorpe. Children would use racist language without truly understanding what they were saying, and they were wary of people from neighbouring communities.

With these issues in mind, Alan put together a club which was fun – what kid doesn't like building things and then making a racket? – and which would allow him to deliver a programme of interesting and challenging cultural encounters, including the chance to meet an African Jali (a travelling storyteller) and a Japanese Tyco drummer.

It was key that the club should draw from several different schools, so that the children's thinking and worldviews would be challenged as friendships developed across previous divides.

The kids have performed at events across West Yorkshire, including the Bradford Mela, Seacroft Gala and Expression Arts Festival. Originally slated to finish in September 2010, the project has been kept alive by the enthusiasm of the kids themselves, who have plans for a formal constitution and more ambitious performances, incorporating circus-style tricks and displays.

In the meantime, Alan and the Junk Beatz kids are looking forward to the NHF awards ceremony on 18 June, when the winners will be announced.

END

quotes to print

“The What We Are Proud Of Awards celebrate outstanding projects run by housing associations from across England. All the Yorkshire and Humberside entries this year were exceptional and highlight just how much individual lives can be transformed by housing associations’ ingenuity, innovation and hard work. Congratulations to Connect Housing for making it to the Yorkshire and Humberside finals with their fantastic scheme.”

Derek Long, National Housing Federation Head of North

For further information or an interview, please contact Alan Metcalfe at Connect Housing Association, 205 Roundhay Road, Leeds LS8 4HS.

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These and other hi-res photographs of Junk Beatz are available by request from David Troupes on 0113 235 0202 or david.troupe@connecthousing.org.uk

Notes for the Editor

- Connect Housing is a not-for-profit housing association with approximately 3,000 homes across West Yorkshire.
- Connect staff run a variety of activities for children of different ages, including an Arts Club and a Warhammer Games Club.
- Connect Housing was born in February 2006 following the merger of West Yorkshire Housing Association and The Ridings Housing Association.