

planetdivoc91.com



Evaluation Report
Planet DIVOC-91

Produced by

VOCAL Bringing people &
research together

WOWBAGGER
PRODUCTIONS ©

In association with

 The **Academy of
Medical Sciences**



IndiaAlliance
DBT wellcome

INTERFER

Report by Laura Thomas, Ondata Research
Cover image by David Rubin

May 2021

Executive Summary

About Planet DIVOC-91

Planet DIVOC-91 is a participatory arts and science engagement project co-created with young adults from India, South Africa and the UK, multidisciplinary researchers and experts, renowned comic writers and artists. The project began in March 2020 as a response to the lack of young adult voices in the public discussions about the pandemic and grew out of conversations between Sara Kenney of Wowbagger Productions and Bella Starling of Vocal (Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust). One of the key aims of the project was to bring together diverse perspectives and experiences of the pandemic and to enable young adults to be heard by those involved in research and policy.

Initially UK-based, the project was produced by Wowbagger Productions and Vocal in association with the UK Academic of Medical Sciences (AMS). The project was able to extend in the summer of 2020 as a result of Wellcome funding to include project teams working directly in India, South Africa and the UK. In India the project was led by Sarah Iqbal (DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance) and in South Africa by Nabeel Petersen (Interfer). Anita Shervington (BLAST Fest) led on the *Power, Influence and Change* workstream.

The project team supported a core group of 45 young adults between March 2020 and May 2021. The young adults participated in a range of activities. This included interviewing over thirty scientists from countries around the world, representing diverse disciplines. There were also workshops and meetings with artists and media creatives. By the end of the project period, a nine chapter [webcomic](#) had been produced and had involved twenty three writers and comic artists along with Music Mixes from 9 musicians. Young adults informed the development of the storylines throughout the course of the project via workshops with writers and artists. One of the comic chapters was written by one of the young adults and the young adults also created their own articles, films and artwork in order to share their experiences of the pandemic.

The project was a creative response to the experiences of a pandemic and infodemic¹. The creative approach allowed the young adults to both explore and make sense of what was happening around them and to create original content for wider audiences.

At the start of the project, most of the young adults had limited experience of being included in conversations about science or activism. Over a period of 14 months, the project supported the young adults to have their voices heard by scientists, researchers and policy makers and to develop their own skills and confidence in telling their own stories. This was made possible through a proactive and supportive approach throughout which responded to the needs of young people and also provided opportunities that they would not have thought possible at the start of the project

“As someone who is new to speaking up and bringing opinions to a big platform, being a part of this group has made it a lot more easier and given me experience to go on to do things I didn’t think I’d be able to do!” UK young adult

The activities the young adults undertook included:

- interviewing high profile scientists, researchers and policy makers.
- participating in comic story development workshops with creative practitioners, comic writers and artists.
- learning new skills through masterclasses on areas such as science journalism, filmmaking and producing podcasts.
- exploring new ways to tell their own stories about themselves and what was important to them. ²
- participating in a mentorship programme, which is ongoing.
- chairing project Steering Group meetings.

Funding for the project came from a range of organisations:

- The Academy of Medical Sciences.
- NIHR Manchester Biomedical Research Centre, and NIHR Manchester Clinical Research Facility.
- The Science and Technology Facilities Council.

¹ World Health Organisation (2021) Infodemic Available: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1.

² Anita Shervington and Sara Kenney worked with the young adults using Marshall Ganz’s ‘Public Narrative’ methodology.

- Royal Society of Chemistry.
- The University of Manchester through the Wellcome Institutional Strategic Support Fund award.
- Wowbagger Productions through in-kind support for 7 out of 15 months of production.
- The global reach of the project has been possible by funding from Wellcome.

Evaluation Methodology

Throughout the course of the project a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data has been collected via a range of methods in a Mixed Methods approach. The combination of these two types of data can provide an understanding of impact but can also provide insight into why the impact has occurred.³ Qualitative methods were particularly important in order to explore the experiences of a variety of stakeholders and participants. The methods and how they were used are summarised below.

The project team worked in collaboration with the evaluator throughout the project to provide access participants and stakeholders. This approach was facilitated by regular discussions with the project team (evaluation was a regular feature of the weekly project team meetings) and as a result they undertook reflection on any observations or interim results from the evaluation and used the information to iterate and improve over the course of the project.

Overall, the evaluation methodology aimed to address the project outcomes:

1. Effectively engage young adults in the development and delivery of Planet DIVOC-91.
2. Successful production of high-quality output that engages the target audience.
3. Ensuring Planet DIVOC-91 reflects a broad diversity of experience.
4. Successful research partnerships and influence.
5. Learning from Planet DIVOC-91.

³ Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018) Research Methods in Education. 8th Edition. Abingdon: Routledge.

Findings

This “*innovative*”, “*creative*” and “*exciting*” project has exceeded expectations of the project team and by listening and responding to the young adults, the project team has met their needs. They have felt “*informed*”, “*heard*” and “*supported*”. The young adults have been provided with opportunities to share their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic with researchers and policy-makers. They have developed their knowledge, skills and professional networks, with a particular focus on leadership skills.

In terms of the key success measures relating to each of the project outcomes, the project has met those for project outcomes 1 to 4, with the work in relation to outcome 5 carrying on beyond the period covered by the evaluation report but there is every expectation this will also be successfully achieved.

Project outcome 1: Effectively engage young adults in the development and delivery of Planet DIVOC-91

Effective engagement with the young adults was sustained by the project team throughout the course of the project and they were constantly reflecting and responding to the young adults: “*We were responding to, not just the pandemic, but the experiences of the young people and as we went along, thinking how we can work more effectively.*”

Key themes:

- Relationship-building and trust: The project team effectively engaged the young adults and successfully built a level of trust enabling them to share personal experiences.
- Successful international collaboration: The project team have established a successful international collaboration and have laid a foundation for continued work together.
- Giving young adults a purpose: The project provided young adults with a chance to “do something” during the COVID-19 pandemic when there was disruption to their work, learning and home life. The young adults have been provided with mental health support and have felt less isolated being part of the project. Via the connections they have made with each other and the

interactions in the international sessions, the young adults have an awareness of the impact of the pandemic on people around the world.

- Personal and professional development: There have been a range of professional development opportunities for the young adults. Through meeting and talking to a range of researchers, the young adults have become better informed about COVID-19. They have had the opportunity to develop skills they will be able to use in their professional careers such as interviewing, writing, presenting and film-making along with organisational skills, teamwork and collaboration. They have also developed their professional networks and connections, not just in their home countries but internationally, and have had the opportunity to take part in a mentoring scheme.

Project outcomes 2 and 3: Successful production of high-quality output that engages the target audience and Ensuring Planet DIVOC-91 reflects a broad diversity of experience

Key themes:

- Enabling young adults to be heard: The webcomic, articles, films and artworks produced by the young adults have given them an opportunity to share their experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Engaging the target audience and comic book reach: The Planet DIVOC-91 project ran from March 2020 to May 2021 with 45 young adults engaged in this period. The young adults have produced over 50 articles, films and artworks which have been published on Webtoons and a dedicated Planet DIVOC-91 website. As of the end of May 2021, there have been over 20,900 views of the webcomic on Webtoons. This exceeds the minimum target the project set of 10,000. Young adults who did not participate in the project shared their impressions of the webcomic via a focus group. The participants were engaged by the content due to the *“insightful”* storylines and *“amazing artwork”*. The themes (misinformation, equity & stigma, mental health) were relatable to young adults, regardless of where they were from. The webcomic and the project were promoted using a range of social media channels with hundreds of thousands of people being reached with the planet DIVOC-91 content.

Around 100 news articles from the comics and entertainment industry have been written on the project, reaching a broad audience and diverse readership. The project was internationally-minded and diverse in all aspects: the project team, the young adults, the researchers and policy-makers engaged with. The topics of the articles and the storylines of the comic reflected the different experiences of the young adults. For example, one chapter of the webcomic was authored by one of the South African young adults who was able to bring *“different viewpoints and artistic ideas”*.

Project outcome 4: Successful research partnerships and influence

Being listened to by different organisations and people has been an extremely positive experience for the young adults: *“It was amazing hearing about the research that is going on and having our voice heard”*.

Key themes:

- Influence: The young adults have been able to share their own experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic with a range of people and organisations. The voices of the young adults and their experiences of the pandemic have been heard by researchers and policy-makers.
- Setting the agenda: In addition to identifying opportunities for the young adults to engage in existing meetings and activities, the young adults were able to participate in and ultimately determine the agenda of the project’s steering group. During the course of the project the steering group met monthly and the latter meetings were chaired by the young adults, with each country team taking a turn. By taking on this role, the young adults demonstrated how their confidence has built over the course of the project. This opportunity was an example of the project providing the young adults with access to organisations they wouldn’t necessarily get to interact with.

Project outcome 5: Learning from Planet DIVOC-91

When reflecting on their experiences, the general feeling across the project team was that they would like to see a longer-term investment in community and grassroots

organisations who facilitate these kinds of collaborative projects, rather than necessarily funding on a project-by-project basis. The project team are looking at ways to embed the successes from PD-91 in the way they work more generally but there is a desire to continue working with these same young adults in an ongoing way, as “*a long-term relationship is more authentic and rewarding for everyone involved*”.

Key themes:

- Challenges: Whilst the project has been successful, that’s not to say the work undertaken by the project team was not without its challenges. This included adapting to a virtual or online mode of delivery, issues with the administration of payments to project partners and more time needing to be spent on aspects such relationship development with the young adults.
- Reflecting on the project model: As part of the reflection undertaken by the project team towards the end of the project period they considered what could have been done differently. Overall, there were no major changes to the project model, which was felt to many participants and stakeholders to be “*innovative*”. Proposed changes focus on increasing the effectiveness of the approach. Possible changes included spending more time working directly with the young adults, supporting the development of relationships between the young adults in different countries at an earlier stage, more involvement of policy professionals and researchers on the theme of how to effectively engaging young people in their fields and shifting the power to the young adults earlier in the project lifecycle. One of the project team members sums up their experience: “*I am really proud of what we achieved. [...] we have created something that has made a real difference in the lives [of] some of the young people we have worked with. To me that matters the most.*”

Conclusion

The project team have successfully delivered a multi-layered and multi-dimensional project for young adults during a global pandemic. The experience has had a profound impact on the young adults and they will take this experience forward into their future lives and careers.

The webcomic, articles, artwork, films and podcasts produced by the young adults provide an insight into their experiences. These are summed up in the three areas of concern from their manifesto: (i) mental health, (ii) equity and stigma and (iii) misinformation.

The relationships between the project team, the young adults and the project partners and stakeholders are well established. Stakeholders have been able to reach new audiences. Researchers and policy makers have been affected by the personal stories of the young adults. The impact on the project team, young adults, stakeholders, researchers and policy makers will continue beyond the end of the funded period of the project.

Everyone can influence research for a better, healthier future

Supported by



FUNDED BY

NIHR

National Institute
for Health Research



ROYAL SOCIETY
OF CHEMISTRY



Science and
Technology
Facilities Council

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

NHS

Manchester University
NHS Foundation Trust