



WacArts chosen to run a Free School!



In recognition of 15 years of work to re-engage young people through creative activities, we are extremely proud and excited to announce that our application to open a new alternative provision Free School has been accepted. There were over 300 applications put forward nationwide and only 102 were approved. 16 of these were for alternative provision. This means that the Wac Arts Free School will become a centre of excellence, delivering cutting edge performing arts and media provision to young people who are failing to thrive in mainstream education.

The establishment of the new Wac Arts Free School will secure government funded programmes for 14-19 year olds for the next 5 years, for both Camden residents as well as those from the other boroughs.

The Wac Arts Free School will be based at the Wac Arts building in Belsize Park and will not only enhance but build on some of the existing work that we have been doing for nearly 35 years. This will allow us to share good practice, develop our social inclusion work and continue to deliver high quality performing arts and media programmes, which will encourage and support young people into further education, training and employment.

“It’s fantastic! With long term appropriate funding we can meet the needs of 14 – 19 year olds who fail in school but have huge creative potential.”

Celia Greenwood – Wac Arts CEO

There is a lot of work to be done but with the support and expertise from the Department for Education we will be recruiting from January 2014 and fully operational from September 2014. We would like to thank all of the Wac Arts students, parents, alumni, local schools and the wider community for their continued support and encouragement.

For further details please see our website at www.WacArts.co.uk/College or email Camille.Curtis@WacArts.co.uk

New free school for excluded pupils to open in Belsize Park



The WAC free school will be based in Hampstead Town Hall. Picture: Nigel Sutton.

[by Tim Lamden](#) Tuesday, May 28, 2013. 8:00 AM

Plans for a brand new Camden free school for children excluded from mainstream schools have been approved. Education secretary Michael Gove has given the go-ahead for the Weekend Arts College (WAC) Free School to open next year.

WAC Arts, a college which currently provides training in the arts for children and young people up to the age of 25, hopes to open the free school in their Hampstead Town Hall base in September 2014.

It was one of 102 free school applications approved nationwide by Mr Gove last week.

The school for 14 to 19-year-olds is set to open to 60 pupils who have been excluded or are at threat of exclusion from mainstream schools next September.

WAC Arts plans to modify its space in the town hall, in Haverstock Hill, Belsize Park, to accommodate four year groups ultimately.

Ken Shoults, chief operations officer for WAC Arts, said: "This free school is all about working with children who are not in mainstream education or are not working properly in mainstream education.

"Schools may refer them to us, councils may refer them or in some cases there maybe self-referral."

Camden New Journal

Letters to the Editor
Your views on the latest news

Ms Dynamite leads celebrations at Weekend Arts College as talent school marks 35th birthday



Performers take to the stage at the Weekend Arts College for its 35th birthday celebrations and, below, Ms Dynamite recalls her time at the talent school in Belsize Park.



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By OSCAR DONOVAN

MOBO and Mercury Prize winner Ms Dynamite was on hand to celebrate 35 years of fun, talent and success thanks to Hampstead's charitable talent school WAC Arts on Sunday evening.

Ms Dynamite, whose real name is Niomi Mclean Daley, described how WAC Arts was "one of two constants" for her during a "tough" childhood, cited in her 2002 hit single *Di-Na-Mi-Tee*.

Looking back on her teen years living alone in Queen's Crescent, she told the *New Journal* that she was "lonely, isolated and just angry", but took solace and strength from WAC's weekend classes.

"They were like a second family, and they didn't judge me," Ms Dynamite said. "First they helped me find my confidence, and then they gave me the taste of the magic in performing."

This is the same case for many of the 1,200 children aged 5 to 25, an overwhelming proportion of whom have disabilities or come from underprivileged backgrounds, that can now take part in the array of classes organised by WAC every week. These range from music, dance and theatrical classes for youngsters, to degree equivalent professional arts training.

Actress Marianne Jean-Baptiste – who joined WAC aged 15 before studying at RADA – sent a video message of congratulations from Hollywood which opened the show.

On the night, 120 children and young adults from these classes and courses performed in an eclectic 90-minute revue.

Saxophonist Kinkaid Malik-White said WAC Arts means: "seeing my friends, progressing, having fun and doing what we want to."

The original "Class of '78" also enjoyed a reunion watching the current students perform, and had the honour of cutting the birthday cake.

Perry Douglin had come to WAC with a passion for dance and went on to perform on the West End before setting up his own events company. He's baffled by the cuts to the art sector in times of austerity.

"A lot of people don't feel it's relevant, but it is. Organisations like WAC generate the passion and the talent without which we wouldn't have the entertainment that is enjoyed every day on television and elsewhere," he said.

His thoughts were echoed by WAC chief executive Celia Greenwood, who had taught Perry drama at school before setting up WAC Arts in 1978 with the help of co-founder and fellow teacher Teresa Noble. Although Ms Greenwood insisted that the party was "a celebration, not a fundraiser," she quite rightly couldn't resist the opportunity to highlight why organisations such as WAC Arts must persevere despite a harsh economic climate that saw the Arts Council withdraw its grant three years ago.

"I'm certain, that at least in my lifetime we will not be able to rely on government funding again," she said. "Without the continuing support of the likes of the Andrew Lloyd Webber foundation we couldn't continue to make amazing things happen."

But it would be another ex-WAC student, Camden-based actor, playwright, director and teacher Ché Walker, who would champion the organisation and others like it in the most impressive and unequivocal terms during his video speech.

He remembered WAC as "a volcano of talent and inspiration" and rejected "this obscene ideology that tells us we have to choose between a kidney dialysis machine and drama classes". For him, it is an imperative: "We can either invest in young people, or we can invest in prisons."