

CASE STUDY: Underdog Crew Studios



Cultural Organisation Group:

Underdog Crew

Sector: Film Making and photography

Key groups targeted by this project:

Teenagers and young adults

Author: Culture team, Essex County Council

Delivery period of project:

Spring 2022 – Spring 2023

Underdog Crew Studios

Introduction

Dominic Morgan, professionally known DB Morgan, is the founder of Underdog Crew. He is a multi-award-winning film screenwriter, director and producer, and has won over thirty awards and accolades on the international film festival circuit for his debut movie, Blood Highway. He recently completed his third feature film, Morris Men, which was filmed entirely along the coast from Walton-on-the-Naze to Jaywick, with the premiere hosted in the same region and supported by Tendring District Council.

The story of the Underdog Crew

Over the course of his career, Dominic has produced and self-funded three short and three feature films, two music videos and numerous other projects. A self-described autistic and mental health survivor living with PTSD, filmmaking is Dom's passion.

Dominic said: "It's about providing positivity and opportunity for young adults like myself who would otherwise not get the chance. Since I began professional film making in 2009 it has always been my intention to include marginalised teenagers in all my film making projects, focusing especially on those on the autistic spectrum and with mental health issues."

The "Challenge" or "Opportunity"

The challenge comprises mainly of the lack of creative opportunities in the immediate area of the target group, namely Tendring District.

The project addresses this challenge by taking the skills and expertise of a professional film maker and a high caliber of associated professionals to the area and providing opportunities for the teenagers and young adults to engage and experience something that is not usually available to them.

Why the practitioner chose to partner with Essex County Council (ECC)

Dominic said: "As a Colchester resident, with close ties to our educational and filming work in the Clacton-on-Sea area, it was and is vital that we can work with local teenagers first and foremost.

"We chose ECC as we wished to continue to strengthen our links with both ECC and Tendring District Council. This provides easy access to finding teenagers who will benefit most from our training environment and by working with the council it enhances and strengthens our abilities to help those who need it most."

How the ECC culture team responded

Underdog Studios application to the Arts and Cultural Fund clearly outlined the Essex residents it aimed to engage with via a programme of film and media as a fun and engaging way to benefit project participants.

The ECC culture team has supported the project via regular meetings and offering assistance wherever needed in terms of marketing, PR and general project advise.



The Results

Dominic commented: "To date, we have inspired over fifty young adults to pursue careers in the creative industry by bringing them into our own filmmaking projects and showing them a world driven by creative energy and passion."

- One of our early interns is now team photographer for Ipswich Town football club.
- Another is a flourishing young filmmaker at the top of his college class.
- Our original 'Underdog' has just produced and directed his first music video.

Every intern who has spent time with the Underdog Crew has come away invigorated and inspired to ignore personal limitations and strive for their goals. The Underdog Crew aims to:

- Build confidence through teamwork.
- Provide a nurturing space to develop new creative ideas.
- Encourage, guide and signpost into further learning.
- Promote self-sufficiency and responsibility through simple activities like group projects and cooking a daily rota'd lunch.
- Encourage taking ownership of choices based around positive actions.

LATEST PRESS: <https://pressat.co.uk/releases/lucky-underdog-teenagers-work-on-big-budget-zombie-pirate-music-video-5141ad63f66b3fe0f3074f77e8fb5ebf/>

Testimonials:

Jamie Wright, a 19-year-old founding Underdog Crew member, said: "When I was younger, I never really believed in myself, I never really had confidence in many things due to issues from my childhood.

"My parents suffer from mental illness, and it is really tough. I always felt like I couldn't achieve anything, and I have nothing to show to the world. I had a dark stage in my life dealing with a lot of suicidal thoughts, but I overcame it. After dealing with a lot of stuff - and gradually picking myself up - I've found that this team has given me a sense of purpose and this experience has given me faith."

Joseph Allison, a 25-year-old founding Underdog Crew member, added: "I have a disease called Ankylosing Spondylitis which is an inflammatory arthritis which affects my eyes and caused me to lose my sight in one eye.

"This resulted in a mental breakdown and multiple mental health issues that really affected my quality of life and wellbeing. It was around this time that I discovered DB Morgan and his Underdog Crew, we worked on a film called 'Faith' which has gone on to win awards all around the world.

"During my time on 'Faith' I explored my skill set and different roles on set. The Underdog Crew has been a fantastic experience because it takes people of all backgrounds and abilities and nurtures their skills and at the end of it you have new friends, a new potential career path and a film to be proud of.

"As an Underdog Crew film maker, DB Morgan took me on knowing nothing about me or what I was capable of but gave me a chance when I felt my most broken. Since then, we have gone on to make three feature films together and I've made some fantastic friends and connections along the way."

Esme Appleyard, a student at Thomas Lord Audley school, added: "I absolutely loved going to St. Osyth to the set of a large barge to take part in the filming of an exciting new music video for 'Forest of Fools'.

"The director talked me through how to use all the cameras and the lenses, which allowed me to learn about several parts of the camera and how to use it. Working behind the scenes helped to clarify my positive views about the film industry. Yesterday I filmed scenes for the actual video. Today I also very much enjoyed learning a lot about how prosthetics are painted and how they are put on people. I got to mix the solutions that create brilliant cuts and wounds. I was surprised how quickly it dried so they had to use it really fast.

"I do take a lot of interest in SFX make-up all the time anyway, as I find it amazing how they can make something so fake look so real. I have some stuff at home to practice with and I've created scars with it before too, but it's so much harder than how the amazing make-up artists made it look. I really like that I got to see the inner workings of how things are done, and this will help me a great deal in the future with my own filmmaking.

"Thank you so much for this experience. I will really treasure it for the rest of my life and will remember all the new things I have learned throughout my time on set in the future."



GETTING INVOLVED

Here at Essex County Council, we are passionate about arts and culture and keen to support projects across the county. If you have an idea you would like to share with us, take a look at the Arts and Cultural Fund page on the Explore Essex website: www.explore-essex.com/culture/arts-culture-fund and get in touch via email: culture@essex.gov.uk
