

## They are amazed



*Flourish*, backed by Newham Children and Young People's Services, was originally a one-off exhibition for over 25 young artists, who were all 'looked after' in some way. It has now run annual exhibitions of work from looked-after children and young people from around the UK. Young artists have to apply formally, and their work

is featured in a catalogue and hung professionally, in whatever manner the artists choose. They are also invited to get involved with running further exhibitions and to contribute to the whole *Flourish* programme.

'The impact of getting their work displayed is astounding,' says Beatty Hallas, who runs the programme. 'They're amazed that people want to see their work. Many are coming to London for the first time, and have never been in a gallery before – they don't think it's for them and many of them are surprised that people can just walk in the door and move around freely. And then here they are, with their own work on the walls and adults standing around admiring it.'

Many *Flourish* artists have sold their work through the exhibition and some have held further shows on their own. Others have volunteered at galleries and some have gone on to study art. ●

[www.flourish-art.org](http://www.flourish-art.org)

“Most people in care have an expressive, creative side to unleash”

## KAVEH RAHIMI – I USED TO BE ANGRY



**Kaveh Rahimi has just finished a film degree, after spending nine years in care.**

'I did a small video project at college, when I was 17, but we could only use the college cameras for that project, and we could only have them for a short time. If I'd had more access, it would have encouraged me to make a lot more.'

'After I left school I got involved in directing a film, *As One Dream Ends*, which was a creative bid for funding for a youth centre in Islington – we won £3.5 million to build a world-class youth centre. Then I heard about *Flourish* and submitted *As One Dream Ends* and another film, which documented creative work by young people in care.'

'Art is very therapeutic as well as expressive, and that is very important to young people in the care system. I used to be a very angry person, and got into a lot of fights at school, but I calmed down about 14 because I had found an outlet to channel my energies – at that time piano, but any creative outlet is important.'

'Most people in care have an expressive, creative side to unleash because being in care makes you extremely strong and wise. It changes your perspective; you're not around your family, you're not around things that make you secure. Things can be harsh. You have to adapt, and that gives you a lot of emotional depth – a larger palette, if you like.'



A STILL FROM ONE OF RAHIMI'S FILMS

## AMANDA MURPHY – IN A GALLERY

**'I have never made any direct reference to care in my art work, but art as an outlet has been very important to me,' says Amanda Murphy, who was first taken into care at 13.**

'It is an activity you can do on your own or with other people. I could escape into my whole little world of doing drawings or paintings. But after A-level, I thought it wasn't an option for me.'

Amanda insisted on staying at the school she had been at before entering care, and did well there. Initially she planned to go out of her local authority area to study illustration or animation. But she was told that if she stayed, she

would continue to receive some support – so she switched courses, and gave up on the idea of drawing and painting for anyone except herself. Then, in 2006, she was told about the *Flourish* programme.

'I'd never thought I would have my work exhibited outside my room, let alone in a gallery. It is very strange, because you are seeing something that is very personal that is suddenly in public view, but it also helps your confidence,' she says. She got involved with the programme, and has helped out with selecting works for exhibition, and setting them up

'That's giving me an insight into

the whole curating side, which is a part of arts administration that I always thought was quite small and closed off. It's been a really good opportunity.'

In fact, Amanda says, there is a professionalism about the programme that gives young artists a lot of opportunities.

'When you apply, you have to fill in a form – and that means you have to prepare, and talk about your work and what it means to you, which is very useful if you want to take your art further.'

She is now exploring the possibility of becoming an art therapist.