



Songs from the Streets

Measuring Impact



2011

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1 Summary

Songs from the Streets grew out of extensive research with Liverpool's homeless community conducted by Collective Encounters over two years. The research involved 90 homeless and ex-homeless people and 18 support organisations and found that:

1. Service providers saw the potential of drama to build confidence, develop skills and increase the capacities of their client group; and perceived this as a significant enhancement of their Meaningful Occupations programmes.
2. Homeless and ex-homeless people welcomed participation in drama as a distraction from problems; respite from challenging circumstances; way of making new friends and of being creative.
3. Both groups saw it as a way of participants having their voices heard.
4. Homeless/ex-homeless people felt that high-impact, professional work could challenge stereotypes and prejudices held by the wider public.

Songs from the Streets responded to this. Its central aim was to

use theatre to explore and platform the experiences of Liverpool's homeless community and contribute towards positive social change

To achieve this aim, the project delivered a year-long programme of accredited weekly workshops for a core group of homeless and ex-homeless people; outreach workshops for the wider homeless community; peer-to-peer workshops led by our core participants; and a series of performances for both stakeholders and a wider public. It set out to achieve its social change objectives through personal and civic transformations by: enabling participants to loose the stigma of homelessness and develop the confidence to achieve their own personal transformations; by affecting the ways in which the public think about homeless people and promoting integration between communities; and by developing creative ways through which homeless/ex-homeless people could have their voices heard by those who can make a difference.

The project engaged more than 100 homeless people in creative activities and gave many of them the opportunity to have their voices heard by the people who deliver and shape homeless services for their city. It resulted in four new pieces of work which reached over 300 people and made 80% of audience members change the way they think about homeless people.

This report tells the story of the project, charts the impact of the work, and discusses the challenges faced along the way.

“Meeting Collective Encounters has turned my life round, it's made me realise that I've got a voice and people will listen to me.”

Emma Folan, Kabin Krew member.

2 Background and Context

Collective Encounters

Collective Encounters is a Liverpool based arts organisation using theatre to facilitate social change. We work with the most marginalised and excluded individuals and communities in and around the city, to tackle and combat the root causes of poverty and disadvantage. We do this through the provision of regular and sustainable, engaging and empowering, skills development workshops, events, projects and performances. Since 2008 we have been the only professional organisation using theatre with Liverpool's homeless community.

2008: Streetscape

In October 2008 Collective Encounters set out to engage with one of the most marginalised constituencies in Liverpool and to uncover the day-to-day realities of those who are homeless. Following conversations with Cardboard Citizens (the only UK theatre company specialising in theatre with and for homeless people) and extensive local scoping, we learned that no other arts organisation was working with the homeless community in Merseyside. Our initial work to see if there was interest, need and demand, and was funded by Liverpool Culture Company.

We ran a 3 month programme of one-off workshops, drop in sessions, interviews and creative interventions which enabled us to engage over 90 homeless people and support staff; as well as running an 8 session programme with a core group of 6 homeless people at north Liverpool's Whitechapel Centre. We engaged 18 local homeless support organisations and carried out desk research. These processes introduced Collective Encounters to the issues confronting homeless people; gave us a background understanding and insight into lived experience; enabled us to identify the potential for theatre for social change to address some of these issues; and ascertain interest, need and demand within the homeless community.

In January 2009 we published *Streetscape: A Research Report and Project Evaluation*¹, which contains an analysis of the processes we used as well as factual and anecdotal evidence, creative responses and recommendations.



"It's a way of expressing how you feel about your life – it helps you deal with issues. It's the first time in ages I've not felt angry."

Dave
Streetscape participant

¹ Available for download at www.collective-encounters.org.uk/researchreports.php

2009: Dreams and Aspirations

Following the success of the short programme, staff at The Whitechapel Centre wanted us to continue and secured funding for a 10 week project in Summer 2009. Five of the same core members attended, as well as new members: we had 18 participants for most of the programme. A small group of them devised and performed a new piece, *Dreams and Aspirations*, to an invited audience at the end of the project. This time, as well as inviting peers and service providers, we invited members of our third age group and youth theatre, and facilitated a post-performance workshop which succeeded in breaking down many stereotypes and prejudices.

There was a strong desire on the part of participants to continue working in this positive, creative way. Their feedback was key to informing the future direction of our work.

2009: Songs for Silenced Voices

As part of a three year Arts Council grant, Collective Encounters had funding to develop a 'scratch' work: through which we would experiment with theatrical form, work with new artists and make work that grew out of community research: we focused one of these pieces on our work with the homeless community. We commissioned a professional creative team to develop a 10-minute opera to grow directly out of the Streetscape research and offer a 'short, sharp, shock' to challenge peoples' prejudices and preconceptions about the homeless community. While it was a risk, we thought that the 'high art' form of opera would work well with some of the most tragic and under-represented stories of our time: that opera would lend a lyrical and elevating beauty to the gritty stories we'd heard. So in 2009 we performed *Songs for Silenced Voices: A ten-minute tragic opera* in the busy St John's Shopping Centre in Liverpool in the run up to Christmas. The piece had a timeless, epic quality, telling the story of a man returned from war. Unable to readjust to civilian life after participating in such atrocity he's forced onto the street. Finally he can take no more and ends his life. The opera shows his dying moments as he seeks comfort in the arms of a street woman.

The piece was a huge success. 500 people stopped in their tracks to watch it: 97% had rarely or never seen opera before; 73% said it made them think differently about homelessness; and 100% of respondents said they would like to see something like this again. There was also a very positive response from the homeless/ex-homeless community who felt that the piece was truthful, powerful and should be developed.



"It's been good having a laugh and a joke. It's fun, it brings you out of yourself and gives you lots and lots of confidence. It helps you express how you feel, when you go home you feel like a different person"

Mary, Streetscape participant

3 Songs from the Streets

Rationale behind the work

Our work and research throughout 2008/09 demonstrated a genuine interest, need and demand both from the homeless/ex-homeless community and from public, private and voluntary sector agencies that support them, to offer longer-term provision. The idea for *Songs for Silenced Voices* was that it would enable us to respond directly to articulated need by providing the only programme of performance opportunities for homeless people in the North West. It would offer a programme of 'meaningful activities' which tied into the government's Rough Sleeping agenda and the activity programme of the Whitechapel Centre; and offer long-term provision for a very vulnerable group which included opportunities for progression, accreditation and peer education. It would provide a series of collective encounters aimed to foster relationships between disparate groups including homeless and non-homeless, professional and non-professional and people of diverse ages and cultural backgrounds. It would enable us to produce exciting new theatre work; explore new collaborations; and develop an innovative model of theatre for social change to be disseminated throughout the sector. We secured funding through Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts lottery funding programme, and Liverpool City Council's ACIP programme to deliver *Songs for Silenced Voices* over a 12 month period, and from PH Holt Charitable Trust to support the development of a professional performance.

Partners

Collective Encounters worked closely with Liverpool's Whitechapel Centre, an organisation that has supported homeless people for more than 30 years. Our main contact there was Pauline Bayson, Meaningful Occupations Manager for Liverpool, who helped to identify the people who would be part of our core group and helped us to support them through the project. Whitechapel also hosted peer-to-peer workshops delivered by our core participants

We worked closely with Anne Doyle, Liverpool City Council's Homelessness Strategy Manager. Anne had seen *Songs for Silenced Voices*, and was keen for us to share our work with the Homelessness Stakeholder group she convenes. In addition to performing at the Stakeholders day, we also supported homeless participants to facilitate a service users day.

We delivered a programme of outreach workshops in collaboration with two other homeless support organisations: Liverpool's YMCA, and Geneva Road Women's Hostel.



"The quality of the project is great. The client group were desperate to do it again. It has a huge impact on clients. It makes them feel really good about themselves. People are very low and this gives them confidence."

Pauline Bayson,

Meaningful Occupations Manager for Liverpool

Objectives and Outputs

Drama process:

- provide a high quality, accredited drama process for a core group of homeless and ex-homeless participants developing skills in devising, performance and facilitation
- provide high quality drama workshops for a wider group of homeless/ex-homeless participants unlocking creativity and enabling them to explore their ideas and concerns

Theatrical product:

- develop our professional scratch piece *Songs for Silenced Voices: A ten-minute tragic opera*, to extend the subject matter and reach a wider audience
- produce a new performance by our core participant group to sit both as a companion piece to the opera and as a stand alone piece

Social Change (impact on individuals):

- affect the ways in which audiences think about homeless people
- promote integration between homeless/ex-homeless people and the wider community
- provide opportunities for a core group of homeless/ex-homeless people to lose the stigma of homelessness and develop the confidence and capacity to move forward

Social Change (wider impact):

- develop creative ways of enabling homeless/ex-homeless people to have their voices heard by service providers and policy/decision makers
- explore and identify ways that future work may be able to engage directly with decision makers and have a more direct affect on social change

Company:

- extend our reach beyond Liverpool, developing our profile regionally and nationally
- build relationships with relevant arts organisations nationally
- develop and disseminate an innovative model of theatre for social change

Outputs:

- 46 x accredited workshops for a core group of 5 participants over a year
- 28 x outreach workshops for a further 90 homeless/ex-homeless participants, with at least 10 of these led by the core group in a peer-to-peer process
- 6 x theatre trips for our core group participants
- 10 x creative cross-community/community cohesion events
- 1 x 20 minute professional opera + 1 x 10 minute non-professional companion piece
- 4 performances of the opera in empty shops in Liverpool and Manchester; 1 perf. of the opera + companion piece in a mainstream theatre; 1 perf. of the companion piece in London + 1 perf. to local stakeholders (total audience of 600)
- 1 paper about the project in an international conference setting; 1 article published subsequent to the project

4 Project Delivery

The Core Group

We had planned to recruit five participants from the Whitechapel group we'd worked with previously, and had had many expressions of interest, but due to the inherently complex lives of this participant group not all our previous participants were available. Consequently we had three participants who had worked with us before, and we worked with Whitechapel to identify a further two. This led to the recruitment of one new long-term participant and several other members joining the group for shorter periods of time.

The group called themselves The Kabin Krew, after the portacabin they met in. We delivered once-weekly drama workshops with them for a year. Between April – November 2010 workshops were led by Abi Horsfield who had delivered our previous work with the homeless community. The workshops aimed to develop several skills sets including interpersonal skills, drama/theatre skills and facilitation skills; and were accredited through Open College Network. Three of the participants achieved two Level One credits from the Personal Development and Activities Toolbag; with two members overcoming significant literacy challenges to succeed.

Abi facilitated two members of the group to devise a short piece which dramatised their personal journeys and was performed to service providers at Liverpool City Council's Homelessness Stakeholder's Day. The piece was supported by the composer, writer and designer from our professional opera. Abi also supported participants to deliver a programme of peer-to-peer workshops through the Meaningful Activities sessions at Whitechapel and Geneva Road.

In October Denise Kennedy, an actress/facilitator and part of our professional opera team, joined the group and towards the end of the month took over from Abi, who left to have a baby. Denise supported the group for two months to develop and direct *Moving On*. This involved four of the core participants devising and performing a fictional piece which told the story of one woman making the transition from street to hostel to home. Again, it was supported by the professional creative team; and throughout December the Kabin Krew participated in rehearsals and workshops with the professional actors in the development of the opera.



“The performance at our Homelessness Stakeholder event received exceptional feedback from partner organisations.”

Anne Doyle, Homelessness Strategy Manager (Liverpool City Council)

Moving On was performed as a companion piece to the opera at Liverpool Hope's Cornerstone Festival and in Blackburn as part of an empty shop residency. On both occasions it was followed by a Question and Answer session led by one of the participants and the company's Artistic Director. From January to March Denise supported the group to further develop and extend the piece in advance of a performance in London at the National Theatre's John Lyons Studio.

In addition to the weekly workshops the group participated in theatre trips which exposed them to a wider cultural offer and more diverse way of thinking about the processes and impact of theatre. They also participated joint workshops with participants from other parts of our programme; and in the making of a film about Collective Encounters' work. They had a residential trip to London, where they met with participants and professional artists working with Cardboard Citizens and Streetwise Opera, internationally respected arts organisations working with the homeless community; as well as attending a performance at The National Theatre and performing/giving a workshop.

The Outreach Workshops

We delivered 15 outreach workshops engaging 98 participants between April – October 2010. The purpose was to offer a taster to theatre for social change; provide some respite/diversion and creative fun; and provide an opportunity for participants to explore the issues that matter to them and share their experiences. 10 workshops were led by Kabin Krew participants following their facilitation skills training; 8 of these were supported by Abi and the final 2 were delivered by participants on their own. These peer-to-peer workshops took place both in the relative security of the familiar Whitechapel Centre, and further afield at Geneva Road.

Following the successful performance at the Stakeholders Day we were invited to support an LCC organised Service Users day. Members of the Kabin Krew worked with Abi to train a wider group of homeless people to facilitate table discussions with a view to enabling the homeless community to feedback their experiences of service provision and the things they'd like to see change. Abi led five workshops at YMCA which resulted in participants performing a short piece about their own experiences at the Service Users day to stimulate discussion and debate.



"I've never done anything like this before. I didn't think I could."

participant at YMCA workshop

4.3 The Opera

With the same core professional team as in 2009, we worked throughout the year to explore how we might extend and develop the opera. We returned to the research and reviewed feedback from previous performances. We had three creative development days with the team, then the writer and composer collaborated to develop a new scene and new character. This enabled us to explore the situation confronting homeless immigrants from Eastern Europe; and the particular challenges facing women on the streets. This extended the opera from 10 to 20 minutes and gave a clear blueprint of how we would progress to develop a full-scale full-length opera in the future.

We gave 11 performances of the opera in 3 different venues: one as part of Liverpool Hope's annual Cornerstone Festival in the Cornerstone Theatre; a run of 9 shows in an empty shop in Liverpool and one performance in an empty shop in Blackburn as part of a wider residency in Theatre for Social Change. Unfortunately two performances in Blackburn planned to close the run had to be cancelled due to heavy snow. The opera reached 200 people.



*"I had no idea
things like this exist
in the UK."*

Niroshini Glanarighe,
audience member



*"Thought provoking,
beautiful and
moving."*

Julie Kellington, audience
member

5 Analysing Impact

Impact on the core group

Recruitment was a challenge. We had two participants who'd worked with us at every opportunity since 2008 and they were very ready for this level of commitment. They have both been re-housed and are working hard to get their lives back on track and move on from the challenges they've faced in the past. They have found the frequency of the sessions and the opportunity they give to break down isolation key: *"The most important thing is getting out of the flat and doing something positive"* (Bernadette). They have found that the drama process has offered respite from on-going challenges and problems: *"When I'm doing drama and I'm having a bad time I'm able to step out of that situation for a while"* (Emma); but also helped to tackle some of the problems head on: *"I've developed skills to help me deal with my frustration and lack of concentration."* (Emma). They have very much welcomed a creative approach: *"I like using my imagination. Your mind can take you anywhere"*. (Bernadette)

Both participants have responded well to new challenges and are proud of their achievements: Emma tells how she feels that for the first time she has been able to loose the stigma of being labelled 'special education' and both feel that the project has enabled them to challenge the perceptions held about them by others because of the 'homeless' label. Both considered accreditation to be *"very important"*: Emma plans to show her certificate to social services to show how her life's back on track, and Bernie's certificate has pride of place on her wall.

Both women have spoken about how important it has been to perform to service providers and decision makers: *"It's given me a voice to speak"* (Emma) to challenge perception and in particular to tackle the label 'intentionally homeless'.

They enjoyed the challenge of leading workshops, finding this *"interesting and exciting"* (Bernadette). While it took a while for them to build confidence and develop the necessary skills, they both said they felt very supported in the process by Abi: that it had was important to be part of a team and feel that they were not being rushed or pushed. There was no pressure if they got it 'wrong' and no negative judgement, which had helped them to flourish.



"The day after I got my certificate it was on the wall in my front room...I've shown everyone who's come in. The lad downstairs has broken his leg and can't come up so I took it down to show him."

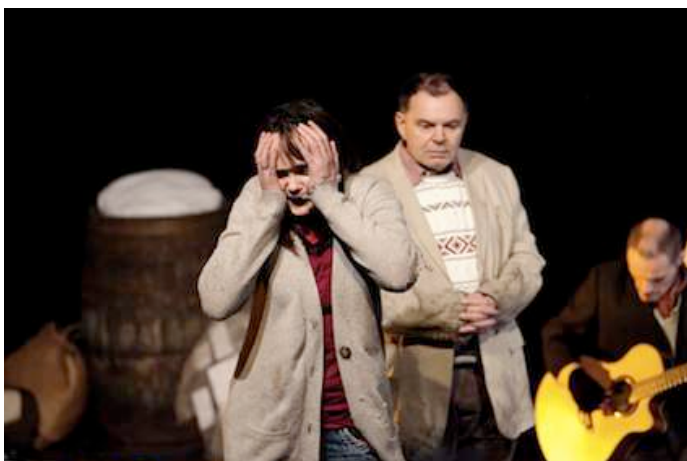
Bernadette Atherton, Kabin Krew member

Both said that they had enjoyed bringing laughter and fun to other people through their workshop delivery; and were proud to help other people tell their stories and have their voices heard. Both are keen to pursue this further: Emma would like to work with young people to look at the root causes of homelessness; and Bernie would like to work with adults. Both are keen to embark upon volunteering opportunities with a view to paid work in the future.

Emma and Bernadette spoke very positively about the experience of working with the professional team and performing alongside them: it was “**exciting and very rewarding**” (Emma) and felt like “**a reward for all the hard work we’ve done on the courses in the past**” (Bernadette). They recognised the development in their theatre making: from telling their own stories to creating and performing fictional characters that told a wider story; from devising to scripting; from small-scale sharing to performing in front of bigger audiences. Both are now keen to make work about wider issues than homelessness and want to become part of a more integrated group. They have responded very well to all opportunities for integration throughout this project, enjoying workshops and theatre trips with our Third Age Theatre group and Youth Theatre; and responding positively to being part of the film about our work.

The only negative feedback that Emma and Bernadette have given was in response the commitment of other group members and the need for ground rules and boundaries. As they have been so committed they’ve found it difficult to accept that other participants may still be in a less stable place and less able to commit: as they are ready to move on they feel the need for stability and to trust other participants to be less chaotic. This is a challenge when working with this particular client group, and has led to careful planning around group make up for the future.

We had hoped to have five participants at the same stage as Bernadette and Emma, but this proved problematic. We had one additional participant who had worked with us on several previous projects and was keen to be involved. He participated in the workshops leading up to the performance of *Moving On* and gave positive feedback throughout. Despite significant literacy difficulties he achieved accreditation and despite finding it a real challenge, he worked hard to develop some basic facilitation skills. At the final dress rehearsal of *Moving On*, however, he slipped out of the theatre leaving his costume in a pile by the door and disappeared. While we have been in touch with him since he is not ready to re-join the group and following conversations with both him and his support worker at The Whitechapel Centre, it seems that this reflects wider issues going on in his life. This participant was not in a stable home



“The way Denise and Abi both work is to make us not frightened of making a fool of ourselves; not afraid of making a mistake – it helps you laugh at yourself and have other people laugh with you, not at you..”

Bernadette, Kabin Krew member

environment, his life had become increasingly chaotic and he has withdrawn from all service provision at present. We have followed the same procedures as Whitechapel in contacting him and discussing his options for future involvement.

In addition to these three participants we opened the door wider and worked with Whitechapel to identify new members for the core group in the first few months. This was a challenge to the facilitator as there were very different levels of experience and interest in the group and the process reinforced our understanding that it is better for a small core group for an intensive training programme to grow out of a prior initiative. Part of the problem here is the chaotic nature of the client group; but part was also the gap between the *Dreams and Aspirations* finishing and this project beginning (six months): homeless/ex-homeless people's lives can change radically in six months, and people who had been ready to move forward and participate in an intensive initiative immediately after a short-to-medium term project finishes may not be in the same place six months later. The gap was due to funding and clearly illustrated the need for a longer-term approach and on-going provision.

Out of this process, however, we recruited Gerry through Whitechapel's Rough Sleeper's group. Although Gerry's life was in no way straightforward he found the capacity to commit and began to attend the weekly sessions. Gerry explained that his life is very turbulent at the moment and that the regular drama sessions have given him "some stability and something to look forward to." While he was nervous at first, his confidence soon grew and he began to enjoy himself. He felt that the drama was helping him to cope with his new and challenging circumstances: "It helped me to learn to concentrate again – I didn't have much focus and it helped me with that.". As the group started to develop *Moving On* he found himself taking a greater interest: "the idea of having a voice is an evolving thing for me" and drama is helping with this. Gerry was happy to spend time alone in the evenings learning lines and thinking the piece through and enjoyed working with the professional team. Although he doesn't feel ready to engage in the accreditation process yet, he is hoping that the drama workshops will help him to get his life back on track as he looks for a job and a permanent home.

Pauline Bayson, the Meaningful Occupations Manager for Liverpool and long-term staff member at The Whitechapel Centre has recognised a real development in the core group participants and given very positive feedback on the impact of the work:

"The group has been so wonderful, the confidence and commitment from the participants was amazing. I was so proud of them when they performed at the stakeholders event and the service users' day... Collective Encounters has made a huge difference to their lives, they are shining...It's the best thing that has happened to them."

Impact on the wider participant group

There was a very positive response to the outreach workshops by both service users and service providers. Participants' responses fell largely into three categories which highlight the essence of theatre for social change. The first response was "drama is fun": many of the people we engaged through this project have very little opportunity for fun and play in their lives, and welcomed the opportunity for diversion and laughter inherent in a high quality drama workshop. The second is that "you treat us like equals and listen to what we have to say": many of our participants comment that our workshops are the first time they feel that anyone has listened, taken them seriously, or been interested in what they have to say. And finally, "I didn't think I had it in me": for many participants the process gave them the opportunity to surprise themselves, learn new things about themselves and discover new capacities. These three features are at the heart of a high quality drama process which, for Collective Encounters, must be: inclusive, creative, challenging, empowering, responsive and developmental².

Service providers also responded well to the work. The performance at the Stakeholders' and Service Users days received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Many service providers commented on the "confidence and bravery of the performers to share their stories". Some knew the performers and recognised their work as a "huge leap forward" for their clients. Our research with service providers shows that 72% feel that service users respond well to arts and cultural activities but 78% are unaware of sufficient interesting, creative activities for homeless people to engage with. Anne Doyle, Liverpool Homelessness Strategy Manager said:

"We recognise that moving away from a rough sleeping / homelessness lifestyle is not just a matter of getting accommodation and that activities such as this project can give homeless people something positive to do with the aim of building their self esteem, developing their skills and building social networks away from the streets. Service users confirmed this in a consultation event we held with them in September 2010."

The main challenge of outreach workshops is setting them up: our experience over the past few years was borne out again with *Songs from the Streets*: often it takes two or three meetings to set up one taster workshop. Often something may happen in a setting immediately prior to a session that means the session is cancelled at the last minute and needs to be rescheduled. It takes time to build trusting relationships with service providers and service users, and as services in Liverpool are not centrally controlled it is important to build relationships with each individual setting. Again, this highlights the need for long-term, on-going initiatives that can keep running and not have to stop and start with six or twelve months gaps.

² Collective Encounters sets out quality indicators for drama process, theatre product and project management in its Evaluation Policy. The quality indicators are available on line at www.collective-encounters.org.uk/projectevaluations.php

Impact on the wider community

The two ways in which the project sought to have an impact on the wider community were through performances to raise awareness of the key issues and challenge commonly held perceptions about the homeless community; and through integrated events which would contribute to community cohesion.

We gave thirteen performances of four new pieces of work which reached a total of 377 people. Of these 35% completed audience feedback forms and so we are able to analyse the very positive impact the work had on our audiences.

78% of audiences across the board said that the piece they had seen had made them think, feel or understand homelessness differently; and 84% sympathised with the characters portrayed. 100% felt that the subject matter had been well handled. The work held the interest of 99% of audiences; and 99% felt that the work had been of a high quality. Peers supported this analysis of quality when we asked them to test the professional opera against Collective Encounters' quality indicators. They agreed that the opera was: exciting, provocative, technically accomplished and important. Some oft-repeated elements of feedback included: **Powerful performances. Arresting, tough, urgent.** (John Quinn); **"I didn't expect to be crying – the show was very powerful"** (Ken Phillips); **"Thought the show was brilliant. I felt hope."** (Robert Airey); **"With such a delicate subject and such diverse views, it was handled with sensitivity and grace"** (Christopher Rae); **"I was on the streets for 5 years – that's the way it is"** (Tommy Allman). Feedback from each different show indicated a very powerful impact on audiences.

The work reached diverse audiences in very different settings and had distinct impacts relating to context. The impact on service providers will be discussed in the section below and here we concentrate on public audience.

Collective Encounters sets out to reach non-traditional audiences and usually around 74% of our audiences rarely or never go to the theatre. Our overall statistics for this project, however, suggest that only 44% of these audiences attend rarely or never. The percentage may have been higher had we surveyed the 80+ audience members at the Service Users performance. But it is also partly to do with the challenges we faced in our shop location (see below). We also achieved a much smaller audience for the opera than we had hoped: we had aimed for an



"This is a growing issue especially in the current economic climate. A must see opera."

Cllr. Ian Francis (audience member)

audience of 450 and in fact reached only half that number. This meant that we had less of an impact than we had hoped. There were two main reasons for this: one was the very heavy snow throughout early to mid December. Our performance at The Cornerstone Festival had a very low turn out, but this was mirrored by almost all the other performances and the Festival organisers sited the snow as the major problem. In addition, we had to cancel what were set to be our two busies Blackburn shows as we were unable to get the company safely to Blackburn in a very serious snow-storm with ice on the roads and rail network.

The other problem was the site of our shop. In 2009 we reached 500 people in the St John's Centre. This was an ideal location: we performed in the doorway so people didn't have to cross the threshold; people could stop in comfort – the shopping centre is covered and warm; the shop was situated by an exit and close to the food hall so there was a very heavy foot fall; we had announcements on the tannoy system before every show started and the actors were able to walk around the centre in costume prior to performance without threat to their voices posed by snow and cold outdoors; once the opera had started, more people were attracted because of the sound. This time, however, there were no available spaces in the St John's Centre, or any other shopping centre in Liverpool City Centre. In fact after a great deal of work with the local authority, property developers and agents, business and retail associations, we took the only shop available to us: an old hardware shop on Renshaw Street. While this is a central location, it has very low foot fall. While it had recently been used by Biennial, it is not a well known venue. As the opera was now 20 minutes, and given the shop layout and location, we needed people to cross the threshold and come into the space. As a performance space the site worked well and the people who came responded well to the site and setting. But it was far from ideal. On reconnoitres of the city centre and this was our least preferred site. This highlights the challenges of working in empty shops. It is not possible to secure a shop space more than a couple of months in advance, as people hope to get a permanent let, so it's last minute and risky.

We addressed the challenge by increasing the number of performances we gave in the shop so as to provide as many opportunities as possible to see the opera; and by increasing our marketing activity. At least 2,000 people opened e-flyers about Songs for Silenced Voices, and on the days the e-flyers were sent out website traffic increased significantly, with at least 10% of our usual monthly hits taking place in one day.



“The opera gave the subject a metaphysical quality that made me shiver. Profoundly affecting.”

Sue James-Peterson
(audience member)

Through hard work and much 'touting' prior to shows we were able to achieve 23% of audiences from passers by who hadn't intended to come; a further 19% of audience was achieved through our marketing; but by far the greatest number, 41%, came through word of mouth. These efforts paid off in that 81% of our audiences had never seen a Collective Encounters show before.

The two performances we gave of *Songs for Silenced Voices* and *Moving On* as companion pieces were particularly powerful and well received: "I thought showing both pieces together made this performance. Whilst the quality of the first piece was exceptional the second made the subject so real. Well done." (Nicole Patterson, Action Factory)

The process of bringing together the professional team with the Kabin Krew and of working together as equals was an important one. Kabin Krew members brought their direct understanding and experience of the subject matter which heightened the professional artists understanding and consequently their ability to communicate truthfully with an audience. The professional team shared their artistic experience and offered technical advice to the less experienced performers. Several of the professional artists sited this as the highlight of the project for them. The integration between professional and non-professional was an important feature of the project: serving to raise the aspirations for Kabin Krew members and as a valuable means of cohesion, introducing them to a community they had not had experience of before.

Both the companion performances were followed by Q&A sessions led by Sarah Thornton, Collective Encounters' Artistic Director and Emma Folan, one of the Kabin Krew actors. This was a significant step forward for Emma and highlighted the growth in her confidence: to be able to stand in front of an audience of people she didn't know, speak openly about the process and answer questions spontaneously was a very positive achievement. The Q&A sessions were also important opportunity for wider community integration: audiences at both these performances were diverse comprising professional artists, community workers and homelessness stakeholders; participants from Collective Encounters' wider programme and other local people; and passers-by who happened in on the performance. Post-show discussions were robust and interesting and feedback from audiences suggested increased respect for homeless people and appreciation of those telling their stories.

Similarly feedback from both Kabin Krew participants and our wider participant groups following integrated workshops, theatre trips and filming was very positive. It had been a "real eye-opener". The opportunity to connect on a human level, to have fun with people from such diverse backgrounds, to share a common goal/experience was very well received. These events



"The balance of showing both pieces together was very moving and powerful."

Kerry Tuhill (audience member)

broke down barriers between people of diverse ages, social backgrounds and housed/homeless status and participants' feedback suggested that they had led to an increased empathy and greater understanding.

Impact on policy and provision

We were able to create two concrete opportunities to influence policy and provision through *Songs from the Streets*: through the performance at the Stakeholders' Day and the facilitation of the Service Users Day.

The Stakeholders' Day is a bi-annual event at which approximately 90 representatives from all the services throughout Liverpool that work with the homeless community are represented: from the hostels to police, from health care to housing agencies. Our performance began the day and was extremely well received. 40% of all comments received by LCC organisers regarding presentations on the day were in praise of the performance: "*Songs from the Streets spoke to me more than any other presentation today*".

Through our audience feedback forms 96% of audience members said they enjoyed the show 'very much'; and 100% thought the subject matter was well handled: "*The play and song were excellent and a very good way to set the tone and understand the issue of being homeless and the rawness of it.*"

The over riding feedback from Stakeholders suggested that the performance realised four key achievements. First, it had challenged negative perceptions as to the root causes of homelessness: "*It took away all the usual prejudices around how and why some people are and become homeless*" and "*served as a reminder of how sad a life some of our clients have endured*". Second, it had, for many stakeholders, increased their understanding and empathy: "*the performance raised my empathy for individuals placed in these predicaments*". Third, it had raised the aspirations of stakeholders for their clients and highlighted potential: "*It made me realise that with good support and mentoring anything is possible*". And finally, it had highlighted for many "*the absolute importance of listening to service users and hearing what they have to say.*"

We have been invited to perform at the Stakeholders day again this year and plan to measure what (if any) longer term impact *Songs from the Streets* had on audience members. This will



"I felt very humble by being allowed to share such a personal journey. Very emotional and poignant."

Audience member at LCC's Homelessness Strategy Stakeholders Day

help us to understand what ways, if any, the work has influenced provision in relation to attitude or approach taken by service providers.

We have continued to work with stakeholders to ascertain long-term need and to explore how a theatre for social change approach might help to address this. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response. We interviewed 42 people who have worked within the homeless sector for over two years. 74% of them believe that homeless people find it difficult to become involved in the wider community and 81% believe that homeless people often lack the confidence to make a smooth transition from hostel to home. A further 69% feel that there are insufficient paths and services in Liverpool to facilitate homeless people to re-enter the job market. 72% of those we interviewed believe that homeless people respond well to arts and cultural activities and that such activities can help to support these challenging processes.

The success of our work at the Stakeholders Day and of our approach more widely led to LCC's Homelessness Strategy Manager inviting us to help facilitate a day for service users. The intention of the day was to find out what services were currently working, what were not working and what was lacking in the support of homeless and ex-homeless people; and was predicated on a belief that services and policies should be led by service users. Abi and our core team supported other homeless people to facilitate table discussions and solicit feedback that will directly inform Liverpool City Council's policies and services in relation to homelessness in the future. An immediate and direct result of the day was that, in response to needs identified by participants on the day, bi-annual events are to be held bringing service users and stakeholders together; and a regular newsletter/bulletin is to be produced letting both service users and stakeholders know the impact of services and activities. We plan to interview the Homelessness Strategy Manager six months after the day to ascertain what policy change, if any, came directly out of this event.

We had hoped that the work would have a national impact on the sector by performing at Capita's National Conference on Homelessness in London. Unfortunately as a conference organised by the private sector they wanted to charge us a significant fee to perform, and this was prohibitive. We have, however, been invited by Big Issue to headline The Big Sleepout in London in May 2011. This will be a large-scale national event which aims to raise awareness of issues surrounding homelessness, so we hope that this will offer a national platform.

“It's such an interesting project. It would be really beneficial to extend the work, particularly to include work with children and families who are homeless, and living in overcrowded temporary accommodation.”

Wanda Bentley, Women's' Direct Access Centre (Liverpool)

6 Transitions: Looking Forward

Findings

Songs from the Streets has clearly demonstrated that:

1. Theatre for Social Change can be of great benefit to the homeless community

- high quality performances changes peoples' minds and opinions and introduce them to new ways of thinking
- integrated, cross-community workshops and events break down barriers between people of diverse ages, social backgrounds and housed/homeless status
- creative interventions such as performances and integrated workshops lead to increased empathy, greater understanding and increased tolerance
- performances and workshops given by homeless and ex-homeless people raise the aspirations of their peers and the ambitions of service providers
- drama workshops within the homeless community offer skills development and capacity building that helps individuals make the transition from street to hostel to home

2. Creative opportunities are limited for homeless people in Liverpool

- Collective Encounters is still the only professional organisation using theatre with homeless people in Merseyside
- 78% of homeless stakeholders say that there are insufficient, or they are unaware of, creative activities for homeless people in Liverpool
- Liverpool's Meaningful Occupations Manager and Liverpool City Council's Homelessness Strategy Manager recognise a gap in provision and are very keen for this work to continue to develop and extend
- Provision in Wirral and Sefton is even more limited.

3. Projects need to be medium-to-long term and multi-faceted

- The chaotic lives and difficult circumstances of many homeless and ex-homeless people mean that they can fall through the gaps left by funding hiatus and are often unable to be re-engaged once the opportunity has been missed
- programmes should offer diverse levels of involvement reflecting the different stages homeless/ex-homeless participants are at
- there should be opportunities for immediate progression for those ready to move on
- programmes need to be individually tailored to suit specific needs and should incorporate group workshops, mentoring, peer education, accreditation and a range of progression options, to be of optimum benefit
- long-term and on-going relationships must be built and managed between arts providers and support organisations.

4. Creative work with the homeless community could be more effectively measured

- The 'outcomes star' model used by wider homelessness services could be adapted for use with core participants
- Unobtrusive but effective methods of creative evaluation should be devised for use with outreach participants
- Methods to measure the long-term impact of the work on policy and provision should be explored

Future Plans

We have worked with participants and stakeholders to develop a three year programme of work with and for the homeless community in Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral. This will involve:

- Regular accredited skills development creative workshops
- An annual peer-led mentoring scheme aimed at smoothing the transition from hostel to permanent accommodation
- Annual outreach workshops in hostels, temporary accommodation and homeless support agencies
- Work placements and volunteering opportunities for homeless people in creative and administrative roles
- A series of cross-community events and workshops aimed at challenging perceptions of homelessness and homeless people in the wider community.

We also plan to develop and extend *Songs for Silenced Voices*. We plan to create a full-scale opera which will be an integrated performance piece bringing together professional and ex-homeless actors. The piece will be performed en promenade in Liverpool City Centre as well as in a main-stream opera house.

For the outdoor performance we will aim to engage a non-traditional audience. We will learn from our experience and will not ask people to cross a threshold, and will perform in sites with heavy footfall. We will create an episodic piece that will travel around the city: enabling people to stop and watch one small section, or travel with the piece and see the whole thing. We will seek out sites that offer shelter where possible.

For the opera house production, we will aim to bring the stories of the dispossessed to a more traditional, mainstream audience who may be familiar with the opera form but not with the lives that will unfold.

We will seek collaborations with local and national arts and opera companies to help us to realise this ambition.

Our plans are funding pending, but we remain committed to develop and extend our work with the homeless community in and around Liverpool.



“Made me see homeless people in a new light. Inspirational.”

Terence McGlynn (audience member)

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