



Creative Theatre Hubs

Evaluation Report



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

LOTTERY FUNDED



**St. Helens
Council**



'It has helped me focus on me as an individual artist as it has taken me out of work and challenged me to think as an individual and create a piece of work that doesn't depend on funding targets.'

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Executive Summary

“ It has given me valuable networking and access to training and shows, also links to organisations”

Overview

St. Helens Arts Service was awarded an Arts Council England (ACE) award as part of the Arts in Libraries Scheme to develop Creative Theatre Hubs in libraries for new and emerging artists within the borough. One of the long-term objectives cited within the ACE proposal was to provide greater career opportunities for students from theatre degree courses at St.Helens College. St.Helens Arts Service was looking to develop the capacity of emerging local theatre makers to deliver high-quality theatre work outside of theatre buildings and, in particular, in libraries. They approached Collective Encounters since the company had successfully delivered three long-term capacity building projects in the region. Responses from previous participants and the wider arts sector had been extremely positive and the CTHDP offered Collective Encounters an opportunity to develop the capacity of the arts sector in St.Helens in a new and deeper way.

The project offered bespoke training for individual artists of 100 hours over the course of a year. There was a core offer for each trainee of:

- Four Action Learning Set days
- One-to-one mentor support
- Observations of Collective Encounters facilitators
- Day long placements with a recognised high quality Theatre Company in the region
- Access to Collective Encounters' Master Classes
- A budget to access external training
- A budget to see high quality theatre pieces

In addition we offered unique tailored opportunities to specific trainees in keeping with their individual development plans, such as observing Collective Encounters' Artistic Director in rehearsal, or supporting a participant group during final production process.

The intended outcomes of the programme were that trainees would have developed:

- An increased knowledge of the sector
- An increased knowledge of the theatre making process
- An increased knowledge of participatory and professional practice
- Enhanced specific individual skills
- A body of new site-specific work to be performed in St.Helen's Libraries.

Evaluation Methodologies

We employed three main approaches to evaluating the success of the programme:

1. A Training Activity Form was designed to be completed by trainees after every activity, in order to gauge how successful the various interventions were.
2. Audience Feedback Forms and filmed interviews were gathered at the final performances to gauge their quality and how they were viewed by audiences.
3. The amount of contact hours we offered the trainees and how many hours they undertook during the programme were calculated.

Project Timeline

'The whole process had refreshed my own practice. As a freelance artist it is easy to feel isolated but attending the Action Learning Sets has re-focused my thinking and given me new ideas for my own practice both in terms of project management and practical delivery.'

Deadline	Milestone	Lead
October/November 2013	Recruitment	CE/St.Helens Arts Service
December 2013	Training Needs Analysis	CE
January 2014	Mentoring Guidelines developed and mentoring relationships established	CE
January - November 2014	Mentoring between Collective Encounters' staff members and trainees	CE
January, April, July, October 2014	Action Learning Sets	CE
January - October 2014	Observations	CE
January - November 2014	Placements	CE
October - November 2014	Production Development	CE/St.Helens Arts Service
November 2014	Performances take place	CE/St.Helens Arts Service
December 2014 - February 2015	Evaluation Written	CE

Recruitment

We recruited for the initiative over a two-month period in partnership with St. Helens Arts Service. We did through the St. Helens mailing list, through their mailing list and Collective Encounters' e-newsletter. We specifically publicised the programme at St. Helens College and ran a taster workshop there. As a consequence we received seven applications.

Trainees then went through a selection process. This involved interviews with representatives from St. Helens Arts Service and Collective Encounters. Interviewees were encouraged to talk about the type of art - genre, discipline, artist that they found particularly powerful or engaging. and who they were inspired by. Interviewees were also where they saw their career trajectory aiming towards over the next few years. Priority places were given to candidates who had little opportunity to access the professional arts sector and those who lived in the St. Helens area. Three places were awarded to graduates of the theatre and dance degree programme at St. Helens College.

Once the selection process was completed the candidates were then supported in developing an Individual Learning Plan. Collective Encounters' Creative Producer held one-to-one Individual Training Needs Analysis interviews with trainees in which their expectations and aspirations were discussed and each trainee was supported to complete a Training Needs Analysis Form. She subsequently used the analysis forms to identify the subjects that would be covered in the four Action Learning Sets, drawing the common training needs from across all six trainees. The meetings enabled the Creative Producer to match each trainee to the most appropriate Collective Encounters' staff member for mentoring and observation opportunities.

'Working with other artists and Collective Encounters staff and as a company has also refreshed my thinking, generated discussion, and opened network opportunities.'



The Training

“It has given me a fantastic placement on House of Memories that has influenced the way I work.”

Each trainee was offered a mix of development opportunities to suit their needs these included

- **observation** of workshop practice with Collective Encounters’ facilitators and other artists
- **reading** and access to Collective Encounters’ extensive library
- **theatre trips**
- visits to art galleries
- attendance at full day **masterclasses**
- observation of rehearsals of a new play by Collective Encounters’ Artistic Director
- 4 x **Action Learning Sets** exploring different areas of arts management practice
- **ITC Training Courses**
- observation of company planning meetings and meetings with partners and arts and culture providers
- the **preparation of a performance**, support by Collective Encounters but written and performed by the trainees themselves.
- regular **mentoring meetings** with the appropriate Collective Encounters mentor.

Action Learning Sets

There were four agreed Action Learning Set days, which were scheduled in January for the year. Based on requests for a mix of Arts Management training and an interest in gaining a greater knowledge of arts practice, we decided to break each day into three parts, Arts Management in the morning, peer learning at lunch time and a practical session in the afternoon.

- January 27th: An introduction to project management; peer learning; an introduction to Trisha Brown
- April 29th: Marketing your project; peer learning; an introduction to Augusto Boal
- July 21st: An introduction to budgeting and financial planning; peer learning; an introduction to Merce Cunningham
- October 20th: Preparing for your production; peer learning; an introduction to using text participatory workshops, and all observed at least one session.

Placements, Theatre Trips & Observations

Opportunities were created for all trainees to observe Collective Encounters’ participatory workshops, and all observed at least one session. Two trainees took up longer-term opportunities in supporting Collective Encounters’ **Looked After Children Project** and the St.Helen’s based initiative **Other Ways of Telling**, a project for people with experience of using mental health services. Four out of the six trainees observed more than three sessions. All session observations included an introduction meeting and post session analysis. Trainees also took part in a **Frantic Assembly** workshop at LIPA.

Two trainees observed rehearsals for Collective Encounters’ House of Memories, a professional piece developed in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool. Through this they were immersed in a fully professional production process, coming into contact with designer, sound designer, voice/accent coach and stage manager.

Several trainees, who were particularly interested in participatory theatre practice took up work placement opportunities with external theatre companies including:

- **Twenty Stories High** (Liverpool)
- **TIPP** (Theatre in Prisons and Probation, Manchester)
- **The Suitcase Ensemble** (Liverpool)
- **Travelled Companions** (Liverpool)

Trainees also went to see professional theatre work including

- **Graeae’s Threepenny Opera**
- **Cardboard Citizen’s Glasshouse**
- **Frantic Assembly’s Othello.**

The Training

Formal Training

Five trainees took part in a one day training course with the **Independent Theatre Council** in February 2013 called Starting Your Own Theatre Company. A further three trainees attended masterclasses organised by Collective Encounters and delivered by **Mind the Gap, Remy Bertrand and Bobby Fisher**. One trainee opted to do a **sword combat course** in Dartington .

Mentoring

Each trainee was allocated a Collective Encounters mentor. Guidance was provided to mentors and mentees as to the nature of the relationship and activities that should be undertaken during meetings. Mentor meetings took place periodically throughout the programme. During these meetings suitable additional learning opportunities were identified and reflected on. Mentees were encouraged to read around their professional development areas such as

- Arts Council England: Great Art for Everyone
- Arts Council England: Public Value and the Arts
- Baring Foundation: Ageing Artfully

Production

The training culminated in the preparation of a new production within a site specific settings. Each trainee was given a production budget. Trainees were supported by Collective Encounters' Creative Producer & Administrator as well as St. Helens Arts Service in the preparation of these pieces. Each performance needed to be

- suitable for a day time audience made up of members of the general public (including children and young people)
- no more than twenty minutes in length
- realisable with the support of one stage manager/technician and within one week's rehearsal period

"I have been able to look at more academic learning and reading as I haven't studied performing arts or drama before."

Trainees were asked whether they wished to work collaboratively or individually. Each trainee opted to work individually.

During the final Action Learning Set trainees were taken through a pre-production questionnaire. The pre-production questionnaire was designed to concentrate trainees thinking on what they wanted to achieve with the performance. The questionnaire took the trainees through the different aspects of the production they would need to consider

- target audience
- message/audience reaction
- theme
- genre
- supporting players
- script development process
- technical requirements
- marketing requirements
- audience capacity
- preparation time & rehearsal schedule.
- Any co-direction/dramaturgy required

Artistic Products

My Pod

by Carmel Cleary

This piece told a story of a man who became addicted to his 'My Pod'. The 'My Pod' was a complete physical pod in which the operator/user sits inside it at a desk and interacts with a computerised personality. The 'My Pod' can send messages, set up meetings, make calls, research your friends on Facebook, find out their personal preferences on amazon etc. The central character became increasingly dependant, started working from home, not going out with friends, not visiting family, interacting with the outside world only through his 'my Pod'. Ultimately, he becomes aware of his addiction, shuts down the computer, but whilst he sleeps it automatically re-boots and takes over.





Keeping Between The Lines

by Sophie Tickle

A physical piece of theatre with looped sound, music and voice. It explored the character's journey from childhood to adulthood, viewing each new aspect of life, each new opportunity as a present. Consequently, the set is littered with wrapped boxes and parcels, so prior to undertaking any task or action, she first opens a present to find out what it contains. Presents may contain dressing gowns and tooth brushes, trainers, stilettos, childhood photographs or a baby gate. As adulthood takes hold, she rushes to keep up with all the advice, 'eat more spinach', 'drink cocktails', 'eat an apple a day', 'spend five minutes away from your desk every hour, relax, exercise, make a cake from scratch ... Eventually she breaks down, makes choices, decides what is really important. She finishes by unwrapping a step ladder, climbing it and reaching up, right up above her, to where there is yet another present.

Before I Am Forgotten

by Victoria Edgerton

This piece was an interactive reminiscence piece. The actress sat at a table placed in a corner of the library, wearing a 1940's vintage dress, with book cases behind her displaying World War II books. On the table a table cloth, plates of cakes and biscuits. The SM was also in costume dressed in a generic nurses tabard. As people arrived the actress greeted them as old friends, asked them to sit down, thanked them for coming to see her, offered them cakes. She told the story of her childhood, the places she used to play, her first job, the dances during the war, the American soldiers of her meeting her husband. All with direct geographical references to places in St.Helens, often asking people in the audience if they know where she means. She uses items from a memory box to introduce each story, and each is interspersed with snatches of Glen Miller music. She speaks in first person present, then becomes confused, wonders why people were telling her that the man she thinks is her husband is actually her son. Why there is a restaurant where the cinema used to be. Why everyone is telling her she's old, when she's only twenty three with a one year old baby, she doesn't understand. She says she's going to go and look for her husband, go and find him. She finishes by putting away her box, thanking people for coming and saying goodbye.



What the audience said

Audience feedback was very positive and there was a real appreciation for coming accross free and accessible performance taking pace in the library; as one audience member noted: *'Excellent use of library space - art should be accessible like this and free'*. There was some concern that this event could have been more widely publicised to increase audience awareness, whilst others enjoyed discovering this unexpectedly on a regular library visit.

58 audience members complete St.Helens Libraries' feedback questionnaires. 85% said they thought the performances were 'excellent' and 12% thought they were 'good'.

All three pieces recieved very encouraging comments:

Before I Am Forgotten was described by one audience member, as 'a beautiful piece of reminiscence theatre', that was 'well researched'. Many commented that it was 'engaging', 'authentic' and 'powerful', and the audience sample clearly enjoyed Victoria's delivery noting an emotional connection with the character.

'The performance and delivery was superb'

'Loved it, loved it, loved it - made this old cynic cry'

'I loved the performance, it made me cry'





Keeping Between The Lines was described as 'outstanding' and 'a thought provoking account of 21st century life with personality and heart'. 'Beautiful' and 'engaging' were regularly used words in the feedback. Many audience members commented on the uniqueness of the piece and the good use of space within the library. Other samples included:

'A unique performance to challenge pressures'

'Made me reflect on my days'

'A very interesting theme, made it powerful and funny'

'Excellent, full of fun and lots more. Just another day in some people's lives'

My Pod left audience members thinking, with various people saying it was 'very interesting', 'engaging' and 'thought provoking'. Audience members acknowledged that it was technically challenged and said that this element was accomplished well. Many audience members commented on how much they enjoyed the performance, including:

'The performance was excellent and was enhanced by the open library environment'

'What a look into the future'

'Full of energy'

'Very powerful'

Audience feedback across the 6 performances noted the potential of the work.

Credits

Trainees

Carmel Cleary
Liz Blake
Lucy Cartledge
Sara Critchley
Sophie Tickle
Victoria Edgerton

Creative Team

Director Mentor - Amanda Redvers-Rowe
Director *My Pod* - Carmel Cleary
Director *Keeping Between The Lines* - Sophie Tickle
Director *Before I Am Forgotten* - Victoria Edgerton
Production Manager - Sonia Chapman

For Collective Encounters

Executive Director - Annette Burghes
Artistic Director - Sarah Thornton
Creative Producer - Amanda Redvers-Rowe
Youth Theatre Director - Matthew Elliott
Transitions Director - Abi Horsfield
Other Ways of Telling Lead Artist - Aidan Jolly
General Manager - Anna Rymer
Marketing Co-ordinator - Fiona Darling

For St.Helens Arts Service

Arts Development Manager - Cath Shea
Senior Arts in Libraries Officer - Owen Hutchings
Arts Development Officer - Gary Conley

Photographic Credits

Andrew Abrahamson

'I have gained a great deal from this programme. I have expanded my knowledge on the arts through masterclasses and group sessions. This course has helped me to work on myself and my company, they guided me with their own knowledge of the industry. Having a mentor as amazing as mine has been more than I could ever ask for. This course has inspired me as a performer, as a company and a person in society.'



Appendix: Training Needs Analysis

Name: Victoria Edgerton

Date of Analysis Interview: 10th December

What is it that you hope to achieve by taking part in the St.Helens Creative Theatre Hub Training Programme?

Gain more knowledge on different styles of acting and different ways of rehearsing, to be able to be a bit more creative and act more. Haven't directed in a while, would like the opportunity to direct again. Get St.Helens on the map for performing arts.

What are your short-term goals?

My confidence will have improved, I will have more skills and knowledge which I can share with others.

What are your medium term goals?

For Real (Victoria's company) going really well and having a regular platform to show work - diversifying the work I create, and to be an established actor with regular work.

What are your long-term goals?

Hope to be happy and comfortable. Other people would be running For Real so I can do other, which I enjoy. Be more of a facilitator - to point people in the right direction and support others to do what I have done.

What skills do you feel you already have?

Acting skills, organisational skills, listening skills, adapting skills, workshop skills, management skills, negotiation skills, strategic development, service delivery skills.

What skills do you feel you don't yet have?

Structural business skills, financial skills, contracting skills, organisational structure, could also develop acting and devising skills.

What areas of the Collective Encounters programme are you most interested in?

Possibility of seeing Adrian work at the Citadel?

Poets of Loss - Aidan

Transitions - Abi

Youth Theatre - Matty

What short term training courses are you most interested in?

Negotiations and contracts

Starting a performing arts company

Appendix: Showcase

PERFORMANCE SHOWCASE

Presenting original work from local artists:

Carmel Baines

Victoria Edgerton

Sophie Tickle



St.Helens Central Library
Saturday 29th November

Various time throughout the day
between 10am & 3.30pm.
Free entry, Just turn up!

Three performances of
new work made by
three artists who have
taken part in a year
long training
programme led by
North West based
theatre company,
Collective Encounters.