



# Live and Learn

Theatre for Social Change with  
Older Adults in Liverpool



## A summary report

drawing on evaluations from an evolving programme over ten years

Summer 2017



# Collective Encounters

Collective Encounters specialises in using theatre as a tool for change. Established in 2004, we work with people on the margins of society to explore the pressing social and political concerns of our times. We make new work for new audiences in new spaces; bringing dynamic twenty-first century theatre to those who do not usually engage with the arts.

Reaching accross Merseyside, our team of professional artists works closely with community, voluntary and statutory sector partners to ensure a direct and strategic impact. We work collaboratively with groups affected by poverty and inequality, including looked after children, homeless people, carers, those with experience of addiction or poor mental health and isolated and vulnerable older people within the local community and in care homes. Our values-led approach to meaningful collaboration ensures that we have a real understanding of the interests, needs and priorities of the communities we engage, and our participants are integral to our planning processes.

We create opportunities for personal change by increasing the confidence, self-esteem and skills of those who participate in our workshops and performances. We contribute to social change by challenging stereotypes, raising awareness of the experiences of our participants amongst the local community and the general public and increasing civic engagement. We work for radical political change by opening up dialogue with decision makers to expose the real impact of contemporary economic systems and local and national policies on those with direct experience of poverty.

While our community-based practice is local to the North West of England, Collective Encounters began life as practice-as-research initiative, and retains a strong commitment to contributing new thinking to the sector nationally and internationally. We are regularly invited to tour our work, share our experiences and present research at conferences, festivals and events. We are proud to have an excellent reputation locally, nationally and internationally as a leader in our field.



Photo by Ged Fleming

# Commitment to Excellence

Collective Encounters is committed to honest, meaningful and ethical evaluation. We engage participants, stakeholders and audiences in assessing the quality, impact and value of our initiatives in order to continually improve our practice, extend our reach and enhance our programme.

We have a Quality and Evaluation Framework which sets out indicators by which we can measure the quality of both the creative process and theatrical product. This document along with our diverse funder requirements inform the development of annual evaluation plans with clear timelines, process and methodologies to underpin the delivery of our projects.

For us, a high quality process is:

**Inclusive:** participants are treated equally and fairly; their contributions are valued and their differences respected; the environment is safe.

**Creative:** the process involves artistic and creative development for all involved; it is exciting, fun, enriching and increases understanding and appreciation of theatre and the arts.

**Challenging:** participants are encouraged to question and explore ideas that they might not otherwise have done, and to try out new ways of tackling old situations.

**Empowering:** participants are supported to make sense of their place in the world, to think in different ways, to break down barriers and challenge received wisdom.

**Responsive:** to the needs of individuals and the group; as far as possible, the process and subject matter are guided by participants and there is a strong sense of ownership.

**Developmental:** the process offers opportunities for progression, the chance to develop new skills and affects or changes participants in a way that they deem positive.

A high quality product is:

**Exciting:** in its theatricality, invention, ambition and communication of ideas; reinforcing the value and distinctiveness of live performance.

**Provocative:** in stimulating its audience to think in new ways, ask questions they might otherwise not have asked, offering new insights to old problems, and challenging the status quo.

**Technically accomplished:** demonstrates an appropriate level of technical expertise, sound production values and seamless delivery.

**Important:** in helping us to make sense of our place in the world, lifting the audience out of the day to day, offering something beyond entertainment; and holding the possibility of change.





“ Collective Encounters work is, in my view, a model for the ways in which arts activities can be used to reinforce civil society and, ultimately, democracy itself...I cannot say enough about how important I think the work of Collective Encounters is.”

Prof. Catherine Graham  
McMaster University, Ontario, Canada

“ Collective Encounters’ long commitment to creative work with older people has produced outstanding results. The series of new theatre pieces that have been developed through careful research and in close partnership form a valuable body of artistic work. The participants have gained much from their experiences.”

Francois Matarasso  
Community Arts Specialist & Consultant

“ This work is an excellent example of how an organisation can focus on issues which profoundly affect a community and work creatively to bring these to a wider audience.”

Xenia Horne  
Arts Council England Quality Assessor

“ The potential of their work is huge... raw and moving, completely accessible and of exceptional quality.”

Clare McColgan MBE  
Director of Culture Liverpool, Liverpool City Council



# Older Adults in Merseyside

The areas of Merseyside where we work contain some of the most disadvantaged wards in the country and rank in the top 10 in both the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index. Poor health, early mortality, high levels of poverty and poor literacy are endemic here.

These areas have suffered from decades of economic decline and sustained depopulation leading to the fragmentation of communities. Children have had to move away to find work, friends have dispersed or passed away and familiar support structures and networks have destabilized or collapsed all together.

Community leaders report high levels of mistrust between older and younger residents in some of these communities, and older people talk about feeling fearful and anxious in places they used to feel a sense of belonging and community.

Not only have these changes led to isolation, anxiety and sadness for local older people, but they have also created a vacuum in relation to their informal care needs previously provided by family and neighbours. Demand for health and social care packages for older people has spiralled in the last five years, but at the same time funding for health and social care is less than half what it was.

Older people in these areas also face significant barriers to making new friends and building new support networks within their communities. They tell us that after experiencing years of isolation they lack the confidence to go out, try new things and meet new people. As well as overcoming

these emotional barriers there are many logistical barriers, including poor transport, lack of access to appropriate information and very limited funds. Physical limitations can also be an issue. And the final barrier is opportunity: Local Authority budget cuts have meant that many local services have had to slash activity programmes or stop provision all together, leading to a very considerable reduction in meaningful community-based activity.

We have often been told by older people living in these communities that they feel vulnerable, invisible and forgotten. Despite having decades of invaluable life experience to share, and perspectives informed by the passage of time and by having lived through phenomenal changes in our technical, social and political environments, their voices are rarely heard. They often have no mechanism through which to share their skills, expertise and ideas; and no opportunity to discuss new ideas and learn new things. As is the case nationally, older people are too often demonised for being a burden.

In short, poverty, isolation, loneliness, community fragmentation and a lack of opportunity to engage in meaningful and appropriate recreational activities are all having a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the older people we engage.

In addition to these challenges the number of people living with or caring for a person with dementia is growing. With 80,000 people diagnosed in the North West and 5,000 in Liverpool city alone many more older people are becoming isolated and finding their quality of life diminished.



Photo by Andrew Abrahamson



Photo by Pete Carr



# Benefits of the Arts for Older People

Over the past ten years we have conducted substantial research (practical, sector-based and academic) into the benefits of using the arts for and with older adults. Here are some of the main benefits that have been evidenced.

**On a personal level** impacts relate to improved physical and mental wellbeing: including maintenance and improvement in physical health such as cardiovascular function, joint mobility, breath control; and absorption in creative processes can lead to an increase in levels of general daily activity. Engagement in participatory arts activity has been shown to increase confidence, self esteem, dignity, empowerment, pleasure and interest; to decrease depression and anxiety; to provide for continued learning, the creation of meaning, personal fulfilment and growth, the opportunity to embrace new and positive aspects of personal identity and life roles; to enhance feelings of accomplishment and raise expectations of what it possible.

**On a community and societal level:** evidenced benefits include opportunities for meaningful social contact, friendship and support, improved communication and relationships. Altruism and 'giving something back' to the community can have a positive impact on community beneficiaries

as well as on the arts participants and can enhance social cohesion and community integration; participatory arts projects can enable older people to address age discrimination by raising awareness and expectations, breaking down stereotypes and reducing stigmatising attitudes and behaviour.

Research also addresses the more specific **benefits of participation in the arts for people with dementia.** These include Improved alertness, happiness, positive emotional state and independence; improved quality of life and social interaction, collaboration, verbal and non-verbal communication; improved face-name recognition, long-term memory and ability to recall life events; increased physical movement, motor skills and ability to complete visual tasks; increased participation in spontaneous activity and routine tasks and increased expressions of pleasure. Decreased fear, anxiety and agitation; reduced 'wandering', physical agitation and 'disruptive behaviour'. Greater fellowship and an enhanced bond between patients and caregivers.

In short, participation in creative activity can significantly enhance quality of life and alleviate the impact of some of the problems caused by poverty and inequality.



# Live and Learn

Live and Learn is the umbrella for all our work with older adults. It has evolved over more than a decade of consultation, diverse grass-roots practice, reflection, evaluation, research and training. The programme is led by our Head of Participation working closely with our Artistic Director and with contributions from a broad range of other artists.

From protest performance on the streets of Liverpool to arts and dementia workshops and masterclasses; from creative coffee mornings to theatre skills training; from health and wellbeing activities to cross-community events, Live and Learn is a wide-ranging programme with a core aim to continually explore new and exciting ways of engaging older people in Theatre for Social Change.

Older people have been at the heart of decision making as well as practice throughout Live and Learn. Participants' feedback and evaluations shape the development and delivery of all aspects of our work. Participants sit on steering groups working alongside stakeholders from strategic

agencies to guide research and delivery. They have performed and presented at conferences and festivals nationally, become involved in civic campaigns, volunteered in other aspects of Collective Encounters' work, trained as facilitators, undertaken research and created an exceptional body of work.

Some of the most successful models of practice that we have employed are:

**Theatre For Social Change workshops** use drama as a tool to explore the ideas and issues that are relevant to participants, and to develop new skills whilst having fun. They are both an end in themselves, and a means to create new theatre that enables participants to have a public voice: using theatre to air their concerns; or to make work that responds to a particular topic.

**Creative Coffee Mornings** take place in diverse community settings. They engage participants in creative activity and stimulating conversation over coffee and cake, and involve elements of performance by our core Third Age Theatre company.



Photo by Andrew Abrahamson



**Skills development and masterclasses** for our core participants sometimes leading to accreditation. From theatre specific techniques to workshop facilitation skills, to working creatively with people with dementia they enable older participants to deepen their knowledge base and learn new skills.

**Third Age Theatre performances** grow directly out of research at grass roots and the experiences of participants, tackle pressing social and political concerns, are resourced by a team of professional artists and are performed in theatre and non-traditional and spaces locally and nationally.

**Arts and Dementia workshops for people with dementia and their family carers** offer a rare opportunity for participants to have fun together whilst meeting new people, and learn creative techniques that improve quality of life and can be used in everyday living.

**Arts and Dementia workshops / performances in care homes** engage residents with and without dementia, building a sense of camaraderie and fun, involving singing, dancing and drama games, underpinned by our Arts & Dementia report for

care home managers into the benefits of arts for people with dementia.

**Toolkit Workshops** introduce creative caring practice to those in residential care settings and seek to increase the value carers place on creative activity. With a two-session approach the first introduces the ideas and provides training, the second takes place some weeks later to gather feedback and provide follow up support. All participants are given a copy of our Pocket Guide as a resource.

**Arts and Dementia Masterclasses** are intensive day-long sessions that train artists in working ethically and adopting best practice in this growing field of work. Participants are given extensive resources to take away and are invited to join an on-line community for on-going support.

**Cultural Visits** to theatres, exhibitions and arts events have buddied up older people with participants from other aspects of our programme.

**House of Memories** is a programme developed by National Museums Liverpool to train professional carers in dementia care best practice and using objects as a stimulus for creative caring. We developed the day-long drama based training in partnership with NML and deliver this twice a year.

“ this has given me a new purpose in life...I wasn't expecting to laugh so much...I loved every minute of it...it was lovely to hear my poem read out - I couldn't believe I'd written it...I liked that everyone could join in...Very enjoyable, made us happy...I never knew theatre could be so therapeutic...I feel marvellous!...You get listened to...The atmosphere was so friendly and exciting...Great to see everyone come alive...It was the most important and the hardest thing I've ever done.”

### Some comments from participants





# A Decade of Achievements

- 400 Theatre for Social Change workshops were delivered for older people in Merseyside.
- 350 older participants created performances, poetry, podcasts; played games, had fun and joined in stimulating conversation.
- Older people were successfully involved in planning and management processes, and as volunteers supporting the delivery of events, workshops and our international conference.
- The Third Act has created four major touring productions playing in theatre and community spaces locally and nationally; and made performance interventions in GP surgeries, libraries, outdoor spaces, hospitals, care homes, at conferences and festivals.
- 11,000 audience members saw our work tackling health inequality, the NHS, dementia, the dismantling of the Welfare State, loneliness and the negative stereotyping of older people.
- Older participants attended more than 60 regional and national arts and cultural events.
- We created seven inter-generational and cross-community performances.
- Partnerships were forged with more than 30 local voluntary, community and statutory organisations.
- Meaningful collaborations took place with a range of national and international experts in the field of arts and dementia.
- 79 family carers and 154 professional carers trained in using the arts and creativity in dementia care.
- 42 artists trained in arts and dementia practice.
- 10,000 professional carers trained in reminiscence techniques and best practice dementia care through our input into National Museum of Liverpool's House of Memories.
- 500 professionals engaged in stakeholder events.
- Two reports on the benefits of creativity in ageing, three major evaluation reports, and one Toolkit for Carers published.
- Research was presented internationally in Slovenia, Canada, Estonia and the Netherlands; and nationally in Bristol, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool.
- Case studies were included in publications by Baring Foundation and Arts Council England, as well as on national and international Arts and Older people data websites.
- More than £80,000 was raised for arts projects with older people from non-statutory sources.



# Measuring Impact

Over the last decade we have evaluated all aspects of our work with older people capturing both qualitative and quantitative data.

- For one off taster workshops and short-term interventions we use creative techniques to gather feedback that informs the on-going development of our work.
- For longer term programmes we have used a range of methods including structured creative evaluations at the beginning, middle and end-points of projects; WEMWEBS, an internationally recognised measure of wellbeing; interviews with participants and case studies.
- To evaluate the impact of performances we host vox-pops and distribute audience feedback questionnaires.
- For training sessions we use detailed evaluation forms.

Detailed evaluation reports are available on our website. Here are some of the headlines.

**Regular attendees:** highly valued the coming together to share ideas and companionship. They felt the sessions helped them to maintain active minds and facilitated them to talk about issues they would not normally engage in, as well as stay physically active. Significant improvements were made in people's levels of relaxation and ability to deal with problems well.

- 100% of participants felt artistically challenged.
- 95% of all participants believed their ideas for future programming were incorporated.

**All participants:** Reported they found sessions good fun and enjoyed meeting and talking to new people. All participants reported an increased understanding of health and lifestyle issues affecting older people and said they enjoyed the chance to engage and expand their intellectual capacity - many stated this was quite a rare opportunity as usual activities were more passive.

- 90% of all participants reported an increase in confidence.
- 100% of all participants felt empowered.

**Audience members:** spoke about how refreshing it was to see older people performing confidently, bringing new ideas to the community and challenging pre-conceptions. Some spoke about how important it was to see their own experiences reflected back from the stage, others said it offered an alternative perspective they hadn't previously considered.

- 81% of the audience reported an increased understanding about the issues involved in performances.
- 90% considered the performances to be of a very high quality.

**Carers/Arts Professionals:** Those we trained spoke positively about the high quality of the training experience and supporting materials, and the breadth and depth of the training sessions.

- 100% felt that they had learned new and relevant things.
- 87.5% felt confident to put the training into practice.





“ A really brilliant, engaging, inspiring day. So worth travelling for. It has given me so much to reflect on and look into. Thank you.”

Arts & Dementia masterclass participant

“ The workshops that you have delivered have had a very positive impact on our service users... they really enjoyed the sessions and service users who are normally reticent in speaking out in a group suddenly found their voices and felt comfortable and confident enough to share their experiences.”

Joan Lightbody  
Leighton Dene Care Home Manager

“ It made me feel like there was a clear call to action...it is so important for older people to be making and sharing work that is about real issues that affect their lives and the lives of our communities.”

Alice Williams  
Project manager, Belgrade Theatre,

“ I loved the sessions. At first I was very anxious as to what to expect about the group. After the first session I was very excited to come again. I loved how we were pushed to use our own imaginations.”

Third Age Theatre participant



# Looking Forward

Working with older adults is a core part of our programme. We are deeply embedded in this work both in the grass-roots communities we engage and in the Arts and Older People's sector nationally and internationally. We are committed to building on our experience and developing the work further in the future.

Older people will continue to be at the heart of Live and Learn both as active participants and in research, planning, leadership and volunteering roles. We will continue to offer a broad range of ways in which people can take part to suit their interests and needs in a diverse range of settings. Our work will continue to interweave theatre and change, with change objectives ranging from improving mental and physical wellbeing to creating platforms for older people to have a political voice. We will continue to build social connections, offer cross-community initiatives and have fun.

Over the next three years (2017-2020) we aim to:

**Extend our reach locally, nationally and internationally.** Locally we will begin working in other areas of Merseyside that suffer disadvantage, in particular Knowsley, St Helens and Sefton. We will engage those who are currently 'hard to reach', and will increase the diversity of participants. Nationally we aim to extend the touring schedule for our third age theatre company, The Third Act, enabling their excellent theatre performances to reach wider audiences geographically and make connections across cities. We'll offer workshops accompanying the tour and work collaboratively with peer organisations in order to deliver this, and so forge new national partnerships and enable an exchange in learning and practice. We will extend our reach

internationally through publication of research, our on-line presence, extending and making fuller use of our on-line networks and by research visits/ contributions to conferences and events.

**Continue evolving our practice and provision.**

Through our contact with other practitioners (inter)nationally, our daily grass-roots delivery, our engagement with the sector, our reading, thinking and a myriad other creative influences we will push and play with our existing models and develop new ones in order to keep the practice alive and the quality exemplary. We're particularly interested to grow the potential of The Third Act, to develop Words of Wisdom - our creative coffee mornings, and to curate an exciting cross-programme Culture Club involving buddy and group trips to the theatre, exhibitions and events. We want to explore the potential of libraries as important cultural spaces and see what exciting Theatre for Social Change might happen there.

**Enhance our strategic impact.** Both locally and nationally we aim to increase the amount of policy and decision makers engaging with our work and hearing the voices of our participants. We will connect with relevant campaigns for change (inter)nationally through social media and a creative digital presence. We will use our work to challenge stereotypes and present older people as vitally important members of our community to increased audiences. We will work with national providers to influence creative training for carers and will work ever-more closely with voluntary and statutory sector partners to find ways of alleviating the negative impacts of poverty and inequality. We will continue to work for radical, systemic change by connecting more deeply with the international movement for equality and social justice.



Photos by Andrew Abrahamson





# For Collective Encounters

## Staff

Sarah Thornton, Artistic director  
Annette Burghes, Executive director  
Amanda Redvers Rowe, Head of Participation  
Harriet Warnock, General Manager  
Abi Horsfield, Transitions Director  
Ben Mellor, Youth Theatre Director  
Patrick Hughes, Administrator  
Matthew Elliot, Associate Artist  
Denise Kennedy, Associate Artist  
Aidan Jolly, Associate Artist  
Emma Hirons, PA to Head of Participation

## Board

**Graham Whitham** (Chair)  
Senior Policy Advisor on UK Poverty and Inequality, Oxfam  
**Mike Eccles** (Treasurer)  
Development Plans Manager, Liverpool City Council  
**Jim Johnson** (Vice-Chair)  
Artistic Director, Peshkar  
**Graham Boxer**  
Head of Museums, Merseyside Canal and River Trust  
**Rachael Hankin**  
Youth Theatre member  
**Anna Jones**  
Coordinator, Crisis Liverpool  
**Professor Eric Weitz**  
Trinity College Dublin  
**John Dermody**  
Transitions member and advisor to the trustees

## Current core 3AT members

Keith Barber, Alma Brown, Lynda Cash, June Hudson, Anne Gorton, Pat Kewn, Margaret Marriette, Joan Pinnington

## The wider membership

The work would not be possible without the invaluable contributions of all the participants in our activities, the freelance artists we employ, the volunteers, interns and people who undertake work placements with us, our peers who share generously of their knowledge and expertise, the representatives from all the community settings we work in and strategic organisations we engage with, our funders, our audiences, those who meet us digitally and those with whom we share a live collective encounter.

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## Patrons

### Prof. Bill Chambers

retired Provost of Liverpool Hope University and retired Chair of Collective Encounters (UK)

“It has been a real privilege to be Chair of Collective Encounters. Their work is vital, inspiring and important to both the arts sector as a whole and the communities it serves. I have many great memories of our productions, and am grateful for the years of enjoyment, satisfaction and insight I have experienced whilst chairing this wonderful organisation.”

### Prof. John Holloway

Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at the Autonomous University of Puebla (Mexico)

“To be associated with Collective Encounters is more than an honour, it's an excitement. The contact I have had with them has opened my mind, letting in a flood of ideas about political theory and action and theatre and music and fun.”

### Prof. Tim Prentki

Theatre for Development, University of Winchester (UK)

“I'm delighted to be associated with Collective Encounters' commitment to using theatre as a means of enabling communities to resist. At this time of growing inequality it is vital to support marginalised and underprivileged groups in transforming themselves from the objects into the subjects of their development.”

### Maria Hornsby OBE

Senior Youth Worker Rice Lane City Farm and retired Collective Encounters board member (UK)

**If you'd like to find out more about our work or how you might get involved we'd love to hear from you.**



**We are extremely grateful to all those who fund and support our work with older people. Their contributions enable us to provide the highest quality work free at the point of use.**