



CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Summary 2010 - 2017

"I was truly impressed by the commitment and talent shown by the young people who took part.

During the intense writing week I was involved in supporting the process, I worked with individual young people to help them craft their pieces and everyday attended the group sharing. Seeing the development of work on a day by day basis, the dramatic improvements, hearing their voices emerge gain in confidence was incredible".

Denise Kennedy, writer and guest facilitator, Changing Words

NHS



Collective Encounters

Collective Encounters is a Liverpool based arts organisation specialising in using theatre as a tool for social change. Collective Encounters is fundamentally committed to creating opportunities for all people to enjoy, experience and be involved in the arts, believing that this can not only enhance quality of life, but also lead to personal and social transformations. We use theatre as a tool for social change with a view to tackling the root causes of poverty, inequality and social breakdown. In essence we seek to empower local people and consequently improve the lives of our participants and society more widely.

We deliver participatory programmes for local people, which develop their skills base, provide them with accreditation and enable them to explore and articulate the issues that most impact on their lives. These participatory programmes work with young and older people who would otherwise have no access to arts activities, and no way to articulate their concerns and have their voices heard by a wider public. We are offering them the unique opportunity to make work, which is fully resourced by professional artists, and accredited by nationally recognised bodies. We are addressing some of the core concerns of our time and are genuinely engaging those on the margins of our society. We are involving our participants in the management of our projects and building capacity within the communities of north Liverpool.

We also produce professional productions, which grow directly out of research into the needs, concerns, anxieties and aspirations of local people. These productions are played in non-traditional spaces (derelict streets, disused buildings etc.) for non-traditional audiences. The productions seek to stimulate debate around the key issues whilst providing an entertaining, exciting and very high quality evening of live performance.

Collective Encounters is based in Liverpool and we deliver our work with children and young people in areas that fall in the most deprived 1% nationally (Dept. for Communities and Local Government, 2011). 73% of children in north Liverpool are living in poverty. Educational attainment is only half as good as the national average, and illiteracy rates are up to 36%. The NEET figures for Liverpool are in the highest 20% in the country. Levels of ill health are high and life expectancy is low (Liverpool City Council, 2011a & 2011c).

Poverty, high illiteracy levels and families with no living memory of employment are common amongst the children and young people we work with. A high number of children experience food and transport poverty. Many start experiencing mental health problems at a young age and are accessing services such as CAMHS, Children's/Social Services, voluntary services. We have also found there is a marked increase in children and young people misusing substances. Many report an increase in violence in their neighbourhoods. Some are living with disabilities, have or are experiencing homelessness and/or on the edge of care.

"I like the social change. It means there's a reason behind the drama and not just a bit of fun"

15 year old youth theatre participant

"That was amazing! Gave me a different way of thinking about life and how we are trapped like this, really appreciated this performance. Thank you – you guys smashed it."



Theatre for Social Change

Children & Young People

Collective Encounters' youth theatre and youth outreach programme is evaluated annually against the following aims.

Improve the skills and capacities of vulnerable, disadvantaged and looked after young people

Theatre for Social Change enables young people to develop arts specific and life skills. Performance, creative development, research and production skills are accredited through nationally recognised Arts Awards. Our approach has been to develop skills incrementally, tailoring experiences to individuals' specific needs. In addition to our Youth Theatre Director's input we bring in specialists to deliver master-classes, and when working with particularly vulnerable groups we employ a second artist to co-facilitate. We take them on theatre trips and residencies, which we analyse with participants, to extend and deepen their understanding. Participation in a production takes the skills to a different level, and enables young people to see what they have achieved and feel pride in their accomplishments.

In terms of life skills, participants are supported to develop their capacity for teamwork, communication, listening and empathy -- working together, playing games, sharing ideas, creating work as part of a team. The drama exercises have enabled the young people to explore problems or challenges, to rehearse alternative ways of dealing with them, and develop new ways of operating in the world, so enhancing their capacity for living well and their skills to navigate often complex lives.

Empower young people to become more active citizens

Theatre for Social Change uses drama to explore the concerns of participants. Collective Encounters begins with an exploratory process, looking at all the issues and concerns that arise in a group. The young people then choose the topic that they agree is the most pressing, and focus on this specific area. Throughout the process they engage in debate and discussion around the topic/s. They undertake research. They begin to see their own perspective as one of many, and see their own experience contextualised within a bigger national/global picture. This move from personal to political (though never party political) enables them to see themselves as not alone, and as potential agents of change. Concurrently we introduce ideas of democracy and change; ways in which individuals have made a difference. The process aims to combat the disaffection, disengagement and disenfranchisement that the young people we work with often feel when they first come to us; and helps them to develop a sense of citizenship. Their shows enable them to share their new ways of thinking, ideas and concerns with their peers and with decision makers, so enabling them to become more directly active citizens.

Increase the well-being of vulnerable, disadvantaged and looked after young people

Participation in a Theatre for Social Change process often leads to a feeling of self-empowerment for young people. For many, it is the first time they have been listened to and taken seriously -- all contributions are respected and valued in the workshop room. They develop new skills and capacities for which they feel pride. They have a new sense of themselves as having a stake and agency in the world. They, often for the first time, develop the ability to communicate effectively, to work as part of a team, to get along with others who are different from themselves. This new found confidence and empowerment greatly increases the well-being of participating young people.

The workshops are also, and most importantly, a great deal of fun. Participants laugh, joke, play and enjoy themselves. For many this is a release and escape from very challenging lives outside the workshop room: a temporary respite that feeds and lifts them. They develop new coping strategies, and have the opportunity to 'rehearse change', which can have a very positive impact on their ability to manage their challenging situations in their daily lives.

"I attended two sessions and the work that I heard was fascinating; some of it was of a very high standard (and occasionally very funny) and all of it was socially engaged and the young people evidently felt complete ownership over the work. This appears to be a really well run youth theatre – it inspires great loyalty from the participants, who are vocal and passionate. The company has evidently done a great job of recruiting and maintaining relationships with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who now speak with great conviction both about politics but also about the power of theatre."

Arts Council England Artistic and Quality Assessment, 2016



YOUTH THEATRE

Collective Encounters has run a youth theatre for 13 - 19 year olds in Liverpool since 2010. The youth theatre builds confidence, skills and engages participants in local community issues, and wider social and political issues. Since 2010 our free weekly Theatre for Social Change youth theatre has involved over 188 participants.

The young people are the driving force behind the work, identifying the subject matter for exploration, helping to shape the programme and its aims and identifying what audiences they want to speak to and what changes they want to promote, and what new skills they would like to learn.

Each year the youth theatre creates one new production about a social/political theme. Themes have included human trafficking, poverty and inequality, the NHS, wage stagnation, education, family breakdown and the education system. Venues have included The Zone (Burnley), Z - Arts (Manchester), Theatre Factory (Barrow-in-Furness), The Shewsey Youth Centre (Everton), Action Transport Theatre (Ellesmere Port), The Everyman (Liverpool). Often productions link in with wider lobbying and campaigns groups such as the UK Youth Parliament, Stop the Traffick, Save the Children and the Living Wage.

We coordinate masterclasses for the youth theatre annually enabling them to work with artists and practitioners considered to be the best in their field. These have included physical theatre with Scott Graham from Frantic Assembly, theatre of the oppressed with Mind the Gap, poetry and spoken word from Luke Wright, political theatre writing and making from Anders Lustgarten, Rommi Smith and Lizzie Nunnery, voice techniques from Frankie Armstrong, improvisation from Remy Bertrand.

Highlights from youth theatre productions and projects include:

Transparent Truth exposed the lives of individuals who had direct experience of human trafficking, and in partnership with Stop the Traffik it toured to arts and community venues in the North West in 2011, and 2012 to a total audience of 650. 85% of audience said the piece was of high quality and the subject matter well-handled.

The Centre was an inventive, powerful and unnerving immersive show explored austerity, corporate greed, surveillance and celebrity. It animated the Merseyside Play Action Council building in Liverpool City Centre in 2015. The Centre created a world in which those in society who had been affected by the abolition of local authority and government funding could go and join a resilient alternative, a place where the people mattered and everything you needed was at your fingertips.

The youth theatre's most recent production, **Class Act** was a documentary about the privatisation of the schools, changes to the pupil funding formula and the impact these policy decisions have at a local level.

The **Vasterbottensteatern** exchange was an international collaboration with Sweden's number one storytelling theatre, which saw 38 young people from Liverpool and Sweden merge Theatre for Social practice and storytelling to create two powerful pieces of devised political theatre.

Changing Words was a 12 month long Clore Duffield funded project to develop the political theatre writing skills of 23 young people.

**CORE
YOUTH
THEATRE
2010 - 2017**



230

Number of disadvantaged young people attending youth theatre workshops



19

Number of different venues performed in by young people



1642

Number of hours of youth theatre workshops



94

Number of public performances by the youth theatre



11

Number of issues young people chose to explore and change



104

Number of Arts Award qualifications gained by youth theatre members



3008

Number of audiences reached through the youth programme

YOUTH OUTREACH

Collective Encounters' youth outreach programme enables young people experiencing particular disadvantages, challenges or difficulties to take part in 6, 10, or 12 week long courses within community settings that are familiar to them. The youth outreach programme is delivered in partnership with voluntary sector groups, organisations or children's services. Courses are tailored to meet the individual needs of participants and scheduled on a time and day convenient to them. All youth outreach courses are accredited through Trinity Arts Award at either at discover, explore or bronze level. All courses deliver skills, grow confidence and allow the young people to use creativity as a tool to explore social and political issues.

Since 2010 Collective Encounters has delivered 44 outreach courses with young people aged 8 - 18 coming from a range of different backgrounds. Partnership working is one of the cornerstones of our youth outreach programme. To date we have worked with groups who support

- looked after children and young people in Liverpool & Knowsley
- young people with experience of homelessness in Liverpool
- young people with experience of the criminal justice system in Liverpool
- young carers in Sefton
- young people who have been recently adopted in Liverpool
- young people with physical and sensory disabilities in Liverpool
- young people with learning challenges in Liverpool
- young people taking part in Cheshire Poverty Commission
- young people taking part in the Children in Care Council
- young people with experience of migration
- young people within the LGBTQT community
- young people with direct experience of gangs and gang violence
- young people excluded from mainstream education

Groups, organisations and services including Liverpool Children's Services, Knowsley Children's Services, Barnados, Action for Children, PSS, Activate, Local Solutions, Merseyside Youth Theatre Association, Merseyside Youth Theatre forum, Liverpool Cultural Education Partnership, Curious Minds, Resonate Music Hub, Sandfield Park, Youth Focus North West, After Adoption, Looked After Children Education Services, Whitewood & Fleming, The Shewsey, Liverpool Youth Council, Speke Venney, Liverpool Pride, Serco, Unitas.

"I just wanted to say thank you and give some feedback for the 10 week programme that Kian has just finished. Kian very much enjoyed the Saturday sessions and really looked forward to going every week. Kian's weekends can be very lonely due to so many changes of schools in the last few years and not being able to make friends easily, so these sessions have helped him work as a team with his peers and build relationships. He never really told me too much after the sessions other than it was fun but wow when the parents were invited to the 'performance' in the last week it was brilliant, and it was plain for all to see the hard work that had gone in by the children and staff, very entertaining and moving! "

Parent of participant of After Adoption Outreach Course

YOUTH OUTREACH PROGRAMME 2010 - 2017

640

Number of
disadvantaged young
people attending
outreach courses

43

Number of young
people who identify as
disabled

188

Number of young
people with
experience of the care
system

49

Number of young
people with
experience of
homelessness

31

Successful partnerships
with voluntary groups
and statutory services
on Merseyside

328

Number of Arts Award
qualifications gained
by youth theatre
members

"Many of the young people have really started to sit up and take notice of the worlds around them. One particular case is that of Aaron who was a very shy, quiet boy when he first joined the regular youth theatre about two years ago. In the summer the youth theatre went on quite a deep exploration of poverty and inequality and how this affected their views and their future. Following this exploration and associated performances Aaron went on to write, perform and record write a fantastic speech for live and digital audiences. He was incredibly passionate and it has been wonderful to observe this change."

Anna Jones, Youth Theatre Director (2010 - 2012)

