Deepening our understanding of youth theatre provision for young people experiencing additional barriers to participation

Commissioned by: Liverpool City Region Theatre Network

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Introduction

The information contained in this report is part of a scoping project commissioned by the Liverpool City Region Theatre Network (LCRTN) made possible by funding from Arts Council England's Reset & Innovation programme. The stated ambition of the funding given to the Liverpool City Region Theatre Network is to shift youth theatre provision in the Liverpool City Region towards a 'sustainable business model in the region'.

To explore this theme two distinct investigations were undertaken: phase 1 took place in Summer/Autumn 2022 and started to map youth theatre provision and participation across the Liverpool City Region (LCR). It identified a total of 43 youth theatre providers in LCR and collected data from 19. It resulted in a detailed report that began the process of mapping youth theatre provision, *Moving Towards an Understanding of Youth Theatre Provision in the Liverpool City Region* published in January 2023.

Phase 2 of the research took place in Summer 2023 and based on the recommendation from phase 1 it took a deep dive into inclusive youth theatre practices - what it means and why it is important. The information in this report is the result of phase 2.

Both stages of the research were led by Collective Encounters, a small arts organisations specialising in using theatre as a tool for social change.

This report focuses on phase 2 of the research and looks to deepen the Liverpool City Region Theatre Network's understanding of youth theatre provision for young people experiencing additional barriers to participation.

Definition: for the purposes of this research youth theatre is defined as narrative based live performance created by, with and for young people and so extends to spoken word/performance poetry, hip hop, capoeira, carnival etc. The research recognises that narrow definitions of theatre are euro-centric and therefore potentially exclude people and communities from different ethnic backgrounds. This is in line with the commitments Liverpool organisations have made within the LARC/COoL Race Equality Manifesto.

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Deepening our understanding of youth theatre provision for young people experiencing additional barriers to participation

Background to phase 2

Summary findings from phase 1 underpinned the research agenda for this second investigation, in particular, that,

1. Only a small percentage of young people are engaging in youth theatre provision in the Liverpool City Region when compared to census data. Further research is needed to identify the factors contributing to this.
2. Inclusive practice was not found across the board: there are many organisations that work proactively with specific communities of interest and some organisations that work inclusively. However, there is no strategic approach for delivering inclusive practice across the region.
3. When collecting and storing data the use of digital interfaces and technology was rarely or never mentioned and further research is needed to identify how and where digital interfaces and technology are being embedded into youth theatre practice.
4. There is a lack of specialist provision for some young people experiencing challenges: activities that engage refugees and asylum seekers; disabled/neurodivergent young people and 'looked after' young people are only being delivered by a very small number of organisations and mostly with short term projects.
5. Collecting accurate and comparable data: if demographic data on young people was collected in a form that better aligned with the Census more meaningful insights could be gained.

Phase 2 also examined the efficacy and relevance of using the data collection and communication application *Spond* for managing youth theatre provision.

Research plan for phase 2

The aim of phase 2 was to understand in more depth approaches to inclusive practice, specialist provision for young people experiencing additional challenges to participation, and different approaches to enabling long term sustainable engagement, and specifically to find out:

1. What is 'inclusive practice', and how is this enacted?
2. How do young people experiencing additional challenges to participation define 'inclusivity'?
3. What makes long term sustainable creative engagement more likely?

Case studies

Two case studies for young people experiencing additional barriers to participation were collected. These were Collective Encounters' *Summer Arts Adventure* with cared for children from across the region, and 20 Stories High's new pilot project *High Times and Dirty Monsters* in Knowsley for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent young people. One further case study from the Liverpool Royal Court's youth theatre provision was also collected in order to investigate 1/ inclusive practices in youth theatre provision connected to a theatre building and 2/ the efficacy of *Spond* in coordinating youth theatre provision.

In addition to these new case studies qualitative information on inclusive practice captured during the first phase of this research have also been included in the thematic analysis. As with the case studies carried out for phase 2, these are identified by the person and organisation that gave the interview.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were carried out with seven practitioners who were all core or associate team members delivering the youth theatre activities outlined in the case studies. Interviews were semi-structured narrative interviews exploring the key research questions outlined above. Please note that the interviews are as far as possible verbatim in order to preserve the rhythm and cadence of the interviewee, except where an edit has been made to make the sense clear.

Data collected from young people

Young people attending Collective Encounters' *Summer Arts Adventure* provided information through artwork and text generated by the young people in response to the following prompts:

- Ground rules, agreements, and manifestos within sessions: what are they, how are they formed with young people, how are they reviewed?
- How are the ground rules changing over the lifetime of the project? Are the young people amending them or adding to them?
- What does the term 'inclusive' mean to young people? Young people's responses to this term were captured through word lists and drawings.
- Daily reflections shared by young people.
- Demographic data from registers/monitoring forms/Spond
- What one thing would enable young people to participate in arts and cultural activities?

Planned data collection from young people attending *High Times and Dirty Monsters* was not available.

Review of project monitoring data collected

Collective Encounters also collected data in the form of an 'End of Day Report' from youth theatre practitioners as part of a standardised daily reflection exercise which includes,

  - What worked well
  - What didn't work well
  - Whether all the young people took part in all of the activities
  - Observations from the performance
  - Any other reflections or observations

For the purposes of this research Collective Encounters also included the following questions/reflections

  - What kinds of participation occurred? Were there instances of legitimate peripheral participation and what form did this take?
  - If young people did not fully participate, why do you think this was?
  - Are there any strategies or resources that might enable greater participation?

Planned data collection from youth theatre practitioners delivering *High Times and Dirty Monsters* was not available for analysis.

Focus group with parents and carers

A focus group was held at the culmination of the *Summer Arts Adventures* course with parents and carers of the young people. This session asked parents and carers to reflect on,

- Young people's responses to activities
- Any changes within the young people that might have happened as a result of the activity
- What next for the young people
- What are, if any, the barriers to sustained participation e.g. financial, logistical, systemic, psychological.

Literature review

A literature review helped to establish 1/ key themes with regard to inclusion, and 2/ current understandings of the use of smartphones with hard to reach groups in the context of audience data collection.

Summary of Case Studies

High Times and Dirty Monsters (Knowsley Outreach)

Who, how and why?

High Times and Dirty Monsters is a young people's touring show co-produced by 20 Stories High, Graeae, Liverpool Everyman & Playhouse and Leeds 2023.

The young people's outreach/youth theatre activity in Knowsley, that forms this case study, was funded by Liverpool's Royal Court through Arts Council England's Reset and Innovation funding.

During phase 1 of this research Knowsley had been identified as a geographical area with limited youth theatre provision. The Knowsley outreach activity hoped to develop local relationships to support creative interventions for young people in Knowsley in the future.

The funded activity aimed to link D/deaf and disabled young people in Knowsley with the national tour of *High Times and Dirty Monster*s.

What happened?

The Knowsley outreach activity was delivered in partnership with two facilitators from regionally based, *RAWD* Theatre and *Endorphins*, a regional based youth work agency working with young people who are disabled, neurodiverse, or experience other barriers to participation who were to promote the opportunity through their network . 20 Stories High provided a producer and pastoral youth workers.

Who attended?

Six sessions were planned with *Endorphins* and were delivered by *RAWD*. Participation by young people was inconsistent, attendance fluctuated considerably from approximately 10 to 3 and there were no young people who came to more than one session.

Summer Arts Adventure (Collective Encounters)

Who, how and why?

Collective Encounters has a long history of delivering creative participation activities for children and young people in the care system in LCR, and the case study data was taken from their summer 2023 course which takes place over 4 weeks. Collective Encounters is the only arts organisation in LCR delivering bespoke creative programmes for cared-for young people.

Summer Arts Adventure was funded by BBC Children in Need (CiN), and Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts and the Black-E provided studio space in-kind, and the Children in Care Councils in Liverpool, Knowsley, and Sefton provided strategic support.

What happened?

Activities are delivered by two of Collective Encounters' Co-Artistic Directors and a Youth Participation Producer (YPP), and three freelance artists and several guest artists with specialisms in songwriting, visual arts, dance and puppetry.

Participants played a role in selecting meal options and preparing lunch which would be eaten together as a group. This provided opportunities to build new skills and create a sense of community.

Over the four weeks the young people developed and rehearsed sketches, dances, songs and poems that would be showcased in the end of the programme sharing performance. This provided an opportunity for the participants to share the work they had developed with carers, parents and social workers. Not only did this allow them to demonstrate new skills and newfound levels of confidence and creativity but the participants were also able to directly address the *powers that be*, sharing some performances drawing on their insights on life in the care system.

Who attended?

A total of 16 young people attended the summer project. Weeks three and four, held at LIPA, were much more highly subscribed (an average of 13 participants per day) than the first two weeks carried out at the Black-E (an average of 7 participants per day).

Youth Theatre Provision (Liverpool's Royal Court)

The two case studies above examine projects specifically aimed at groups who experience additional barriers to participation. Liverpool's Royal Court youth theatre is aimed at all young people.

Their inclusive practice has evolved to meet needs identified as the provision has developed. Their youth theatre provision is from age 6 to 16. A Saturday morning group (10 -1pm) for 6 – 10 year olds offers three different types of sessions, movement, drama and music (singing and playing instruments). 11 to 13 year olds meet on Saturday afternoons, and are offered a drama session and a movement session. 14 to 16 year olds meet on Thursdays, with a two hour session that mixes movement and drama, devising, and physical theatre.

They create small showcases throughout the year which generally take place in the Royal Court Studio. These are compiled from sketches devised in the sessions, any new skills that the young people have learned, and anything developed since the previous showcase. Audiences usually consist of parents, grandparents, and other supportive people. The showcases are also used to create the main house show that takes place every summer.

The summer show in August 2023 (Dream Team) involved 56 young people. This was created over six weeks in the summer. The full age range participates in two weeks of summer school, five days a week, from 10 till 4. They focus on learning skills, and enjoyment. Arts and crafts and team building games are also used. A youth worker works alongside the creative practitioners. After the first two weeks, 11 year olds and up go on to develop the summer performance. They need capability and stamina enough for the full three week rehearsal, which is generally too demanding for the younger group, but some younger participants who have the interest and the availability will also take part. This performance is on for three days in the main house.

The whole provision is free to access, except for trips, which are kept to a low cost and planned in good time (so the cost can be spread). There are workers who form part of an engagement team whose remit is to provide pastoral support.

Recommendations

Sustainable Inclusive Practice can be fostered and made more consistent by interventions at three levels. Firstly, by implementing specific measures individual young people can be supported and barriers to participation removed. Secondly, workshops and projects can be made more inclusive through interventions aimed at developing the skills of facilitators and improving workshop practice. Thirdly, changes can be made at the organisational level such that structural praxis (combined practical learning and reflection, implemented through practice) is embedded within the organisation. It is clear that many organisations surveyed already carry out many of these processes. This section makes them explicit, but also suggests ways in which youth theatre practice in the region can become more consistent. It is also obvious that most of these practices have financial implications, and that many of the organisations in the region are under-staffed and under-funded. Attention should therefore be given to sharing resources and training, coordinating projects and funding bids, and building partnerships.

Supporting Marginalised Young People

- All costs that create barriers to participation should be met by delivery organisations, or their partners.
- Access riders or equivalent should be used as young people are recruited.
- Members of the delivery team should be dedicated to pastoral care.
- Each young person is part of a network of relationships, and these must be considered in the interaction with the young person.

Developing Workshop Practice

- Workshop venues should be assessed for their physical and emotional accessibility before being used. This may require discussion and briefing for venue staff on the needs of young people that will be present. It should also include local awareness of travel modes and options.
- A diverse range of facilitators should be employed, including where feasible, short term ‘guest artists’.
- A majority of facilitators should have relevant lived experience of some intersectional oppression reflecting the lived experience of the young people in question.

- Workshops should always include mechanisms by which young people can change the content and direction of the workshops.
- Workshops should always include paid time for facilitators to reflect together.
- Non- or anti-authoritarian practices should be used when developing agreements with young people on expectations around conduct in workshops. Models for this include the creation of Manifestos or the use of Footprint Contracts.

Embedding Structural Praxis

- Organisations should develop training programmes for staff (freelance and salaried) on a range of skills relating to continuous professional development. These should either be free to attend, or ideally be paid.
- Training priorities include understanding group dynamics, trauma informed practice, and reflective or question based practice, as well as sharing effective creative methodologies.
- Organisations should begin or continue to develop anti-oppressive practice and understanding of intersectional oppressions that affect marginalised young people.
- Organisations should draw up plans and policies that embed structural praxis.
- Organisations should develop and regularly review an 'ethics of care'.
- Networks of practice need to be maintained and developed so that learning in all these areas can be shared, and a consistency of approach developed that is also flexible and adaptive.
- Marginalised young people highly value being given choice and autonomy. Projects should seek to give expression to these by developing appropriate aesthetics and by linking up with networks and audiences where young people can influence policy that affects them.

Inclusive Data Collection

- Inclusive data collection often requires a tailored approach, collecting information through a variety of methods to meet the needs and access requirements of the participants.
- Marginalised young people are at risk from being excluded from data collection that is enabled through the use of Smartphone Apps, as many of them, their parents, and their carers, face complex and significant barriers to this, some of which are institutional.

- There is a gap in the research on how marginalised young people are excluded from data collection, and further research on this topic would be useful.
- It is not possible to recommend any one platform for data collection. It may be more realistic and fruitful to develop agreed indicators that can be correlated regardless of platform.These indicators should also be comparable with ONS indicators.
- Policies should be developed that clarify what data collected from young people by one organisation should be shared, and how.
- Arts organisations should be supported, and funded, to improve their data collection where necessary, and to implement ways in which it can be correlated across the region.

Literature Review: participatory arts and inclusive practice

Attentiveness to inclusive practice is a core aspect of much work in the participatory arts. Indeed, the pursuit of inclusion is extremely commonplace amongst arts practitioners who are politically or pedagogically motivated to develop work, both, for and with specific marginalised communities. While the settings, contexts and locations differ greatly, work in the participatory arts sector is often united through catering to the knowledge and lived experiences already held by the participants. Many participatory arts practitioners develop creative arts programmes from the perspective that participants need to feel like they not only '…have a voice in their community but that this voice will be heard' (Busby, 2021, p. 5).

Participatory arts as a springboard for inclusion and social change is, therefore, not a new concept. Early research into youth theatre, carried out by Jenny Hughes and Karen Wilson, discussed how participation can positively benefit young people who have been marginalised by their socio-economic situation (2004, p. 58). Over the past thirty years, policies, funding streams and academic debates have varied and evolved, having a direct impact on how community arts practitioners measure the impact of this type of work. In recent years, researchers have strongly advised restraint when celebrating the instrumental effects of practice (Balfour, 2009; Thompson, 2009; Snyder-Young, 2013; Gallagher, 2014; Adebayo, 2015). In applied theatre scholarship and practice, debates about the binaries of effect/affect represents a key area of debate. Both James Thompson (2009) and Mojisola Adebayo (2016) argue that a sole focus on impact invites forces of restriction and manipulation, and instead implore practitioner-researchers to pay closer attention to the performance affects created through aesthetics. Michael Balfour advocates for 'a theatre of "little changes" which eschews big claims of social efficacy' (Balfour, 2009, p. 347). Kathleen Gallagher, in her book, *Why Theatre Matters* (2014) also recommends avoiding overstating the impact of drama projects with young people, asserting, 'There are many such stories of transformation in the arts and education literature. They do happen. But it is often far more complicated than neorealist narratives would have us believe' (Gallagher, 2014, p. 132).

In her recent text, *Applied Theatre: A Pedagogy of Utopia* (2021), Selina Busby surveys this scene. While Busby agrees with Gallagher that the complex shifting relations of self and group identity should not be underestimated, Busby argues 'neither should the potential of theatre to contribute to this complicated process be overlooked or underestimated' (2021, p. 6). Busby welcomes the integrity and scrutiny that the aforementioned debates bring to participatory arts work, in doing so, she underlines the difficulty of using qualitative methods to produce hard evidence of improvement (Ibid). Despite these complexities, Busby believes that applied theatre work facilitated with a view to provide access to the arts to those who are excluded should 'be understood as being fundamentally emancipatory in intent' (Freebody and Finneran, 2021, p. 45). Describing this further, Busby writes:

> Art and specifically theatre, provides a lens through which individuals and groups can process and reflect on their lived experiences of the world and offer a means of understanding and articulating the complexities that surround us both implicitly and explicitly. Theatre-making with aims of social justice enables people to find new ways of communicating their views, their discontent and their wishes. [...] Theatre is one tool in our armoury that may help us to relate to our complex world and to improve insecurity, mistrust, exclusion and responsibility (Busby, 2021, p. 9).

The theatre Busby describes is one of hope; encapsulating this she describes her approach to practice and research as a 'pedagogy of utopia' (Ibid). Here, utopia is employed not to simply signify the hope of a better place but rather to underline the potential of participatory arts to enable people to become re-sensitised to their circumstances, in a way that develops a desire to change or disrupt these circumstances (Ibid). It is a practice that invites participants to ask questions, challenge social norms and imagine different futures. This scholarship is particularly relevant for understanding the potentials of inclusive practice with young people experiencing additional challenges to social, cultural and artistic participation, and different approaches to enabling long term sustainable engagement.

Drawing on Neil Thompson's (2017) social studies scholarship on exclusion, Busby suggests the power of participatory arts to attend to a 'politics of dignity' (2021, p. 9). For instance, Thompson (2017) writes that the prejudiced nature of exclusion is experienced not only on an economic basis but in terms of dignity. Exclusion can produce low self-esteem, which can lead to lack of capacity to

aspire. For neuro-diverse people, experiences of non-inclusive environments in earlier education can have long-lasting impact, contributing to a negative sense of self (Hamilton and Petty, 2023). Cared for and care experienced young people are frequently discussed in terms of social exclusion and as having poor life outcomes (Gaskell, 2010). The Government Green paper 'Care Matters' set out to identify children's well-being risks, drastically simplifying the nuanced nature of children's experience of the care system and how it shapes their well-being and life outcomes (Ibid). Research demonstrates that those who are excluded and have lived experience of discrimination are more likely to thrive if their experiences and needs are listened to (Gaskell, 2010).

Company Three's *Brainstorm* project provides a valuable case study to demonstrate the power of applied theatre to renegotiate the problem of young people not being listened to. The project originated in a London youth theatre, where young people worked alongside cognitive neuroscientist Professor Sarah Jayne Blakemore to dramatise their life experiences. Company Three describes *Brainstorm* as a thrilling exploration inside the teenage brain (Company Three, 2023). *Brainstorm* went on to showcase at the National Theatre and before making its way onto BBC iPlayer. It is now an international blueprint for a method of working with young people that allows them to make their own version of *Brainstorm*. A research paper by Robert Blakely (2017) has demonstrated that *Brainstorm* changes the way audiences think about young people and the science behind how their brains work. Such a blueprint holds potential for future applied theatre projects with cared for and neurodiverse young people, providing opportunities for them to explore the complexities of living in the care system and/or the nuances of being neurodivergent – in a world catering to those who are neurologically typical. Furthering an understanding of approaches to inclusive practice, we can also learn from the 'relaxed performances' facilitated by the Autism Arts Festival in Canterbury, where organisers developed a suite of features to make the festival more accessible, enacting a sense of solidarity, while engaging with the politics of neurodiversity (Fletcher-Watson and May, 2018).

Importantly, Busby (2020; 2021) carefully considers both the values and the potential problems of using theatre to promote inclusivity and aspirational thinking. Through an examination of her theatre project *Crossing Bridges* with shelter dwelling youth in New York, Busby (2020; 2021) urges applied theatre practitioners to be mindful of the potential cruelties of social justice projects that unfairly raise the hopes of young people. *Crossing Bridges* sought to use

theatre as a tool to allow participants to re-imagine a future self, through providing access to cultural spaces and professional artists. Inviting participants to *cross a bridge* into cultural domains from which they are marginalised, holds potential to reinforce dominant exclusionary ideologies (2021, p. 81). Drawing on theories of cultural capital and critical race theory, Busby underlines the duty of the practitioner to create a creative space founded on equity. Within the *Crossing Bridges* workshop space there was a strong emphasis on exchange between the young people and the culturally elite professional artists. A method of devising was adopted that did not privilege the techniques of either group, for example, vocal techniques were exchanged for rap and break dancing was exchanged for chorus line routines (Ibid).

Using theatre to improve insecurity, mistrust and exclusion also becomes problematic when arts organisations parachute in and out of marginalised communities. The power of investing into long term sustainable partnerships is demonstrated by research covering the Dharavi youth project in Mumbai which has run for ten years and is ongoing (Busby, 2021, p. 45). Similarly, to the *Crossing Bridges* project the Dharavi project was founded with the aim to allow for creative exchange between two cohorts who would not usually come together. This project brought together several of Busby's students from the prestigious Central School of Speech and Drama and young people from a housing settlement in Dharavi. Over a sustained period, this annual five-week project has become a deeply embedded practice in Dharavi, the supporting NGO and Central (Ibid). Despite it being relatively brief each year, Busby writes that 'the project has become as reliable as the annual rains and is as anticipated (Busby, 2021, p. 65). Participants view their performances as a way to share concerns about a wide range of pressing issues affecting their communities (Ibid). Busby describes how this work raises a sense of optimism through 'a long chain of short-term interventions' (Ibid) that are inherently utopian in their capacity to raise critiques of the social order, creating the potential for alternatives to be imagined.

While Busby remains troubled by the tensions of short-term projects, her unease has lessened over the course of this sustained partnership due to key developments that have occurred (Ibid). Not only is there an 'integrated investment' (Busby, 2017, p. 97) that champions young people's experiences and pulls together a diverse group allowing for an exchange in creative skills, but this project has allowed Dharavi participants to train to become facilitators, enacting long-term change for these individuals and their communities. The

case studies discussed here are particularly valuable to an understanding of how key debates concerning participatory arts approaches to inclusion can be usefully employed in practical settings, promoting long-term sustainable engagement with young people experiencing additional challenges to participation.

Findings and analysis

1. What is 'inclusive practice', and how is it put into action?

Providing a range of creative modes of expression

Creative activities help this sense of autonomy enormously. Not all activities appeal to all young people, so a choice of modes of expression is essential. For example, one young person found her particular voice through artwork and puppetry, which complemented each other and allowed her speak about difficult experiences from a safe 'distance':

> "K was able to identify a theme from the books and reflect on that from her own life, which followed into her artwork. Her drawing & puppet were herself – an exploration of her masking inside/outside. She's keen to talk about what she's going through. This was a more positive way to explore it. The puppetry gave her an opportunity to express things she wants to talk about. Found her way to the abstract nature of the task"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Creativity also enables connection, reducing competition and building collective sharing:

> "People responding well to supporting each other during the creative letter writing exercise. Everyone got the chance to have a rant and connect about this"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

It also provides a space lacking in other environments for positive and supportive engagement with deep issues:

> "They had a lot of depth to them. Some of the stuff they wrote, you go, oh, wow. Yeah, that's beautiful. I haven't thought about that. So I'd imagine some of that might have been a bit surprising to them as well. Like we were saying before, there's no room for that kind of creativity in school"
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

Working with guest facilitators can create a sense of excitement, as well as widening the range of activities:

> "...different guest facilitators come in. So we had one that was a dancing teacher, so they taught us a dance and we did the dance and performed that, which was most of the group. Then we had two girls doing a Rap. We had one girl playing a clarinet. We had another three young people. They did a kind of a dance movement piece. And then there was another one …we all wrote an acoustic guitar song and every one of the group sang that together. That was the final finale piece at the end. And there was also a drama piece of acting as well. Everyone got to shine in their own way"
>
> [Malik, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

Having real choices and a range of different artforms allows young people to experiment and move safely from the familiar to the unfamiliar:

> "I noticed that lots of them chose things. First of all, that was in their comfort zone, like a song that they really like or might have been told they're good at singing or I think there was a couple of them who sort of developed something new in the space. So for example, D was working with a young person who I presume didn't have an idea of what they'd do and D's party trick is the robot dance. So she'd taught this young person some robot moves. So they came on and just did a very small sort of robot movement piece. And then, yeah, other observations just around the longer we whoop and cheer, the more they're going to carry on doing exactly what they've just done and say they're not finished yet"
>
> [Lucy, 20 Stories High Producer]

Using non-verbal forms of expression such as dance, music, and drawing gives space to young people who do not feel confident or able to express themselves in words, for whatever reason, and validate their specific experiences:

> "Everyone seemed to feel very safe – especially during the non-verbal exercises"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Choice, autonomy and leadership

The role of choice in workshop processes is crucial. This may seem obvious but there are many ways in which choices can be more or less meaningful. The timing, extent, and breadth of the choices open to young people can determine how much autonomy and control they feel they have over the sessions. For example, if it is made clear early on in a project that the choices are meaningful, this can have a greater impact and set up a positive culture:

> "Finding that those things happen early, those collective shared things, less competition, more focusing on the group, almost like a chorus inclusion".
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

This can be enhanced by choosing and then leading an activity:

> "They enjoyed having autonomy and leading exercises"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Meaningful participation is not just voluntary, but unforced, with a range of options, and the acceptability of opting out. This was noticed and commented on by parents of participants:

> "Having it as voluntary. They don't have to come. It's not forced"
>
> [Collective Encounters' Parent/Carer Focus Group]

Building confidence and feelings of safety

The approaches referred to above help build an environment of trust, without which creativity cannot flourish. It allows young people to take risks, but to the extent and in the manner that they are able to, without feeling that they have to. Creativity particularly supports this, and enables young people to speak to people with power over them in way that would otherwise not be possible:

> "So rather than sitting with the adult professionals and just talking, the young people would do a performance to make them think. And that was actually far more effective. And impro kind of enhanced the

> conversations we had with the actual professionals around young people's needs. So the arts actually infilled those gaps. And for a lot of professionals they filled gaps that they'd never seen until they saw it done as a piece”
>
> [Interview with Pilgrim Street Arts]

It also makes it possible for young people to feel strong emotions and manage them in ways that might otherwise be difficult for them:

> “The group became emotionally moved by the reflection activity about people they have lost but came together beautifully to support each other. This was led by Q and she is leading a group cheer where they bring their hand together and shout Collective Encounters”
>
> [Collective Encounters’ End of Day Report]

Pastoral support and safeguarding

All the organisations in these case studies have staff whose role is to support participants with their wellbeing or with issues that arise. All report the efficacy of separating out the creative and pastoral roles:

> “We have a wellbeing and training manager. She can work as that sort of pastoral care that sometimes the tutors can't offer...If somebody's a bit upset if they come in late. So she's normally milling around in the foyer so that the young people know who to go out with. She's a safe, quiet space, or she'll come into the session so the young people can have a laugh there as well. So she breaks down that barrier between the tutor and the young person if it's a bit chaotic and hectic for them”
>
> [Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

In addition to this, reflection on Collective Encounters' Summer Arts Adventure confirmed that due to the time consuming nature of the Youth Participation Producer’s responsibilities, there is a need for someone to take sole responsibility for food preparation, allowing the YPP to lead on pastoral care and safeguarding. Sharing these responsibilities would enable the YPP to be more present in the workshop space creating stronger bonds with the young

people, this in turn would potentially allow the YPP to address pastoral and safeguarding issues with greater knowledge and a better sense of connection.

Reflective strategies

Reflection involves making space and time for conscious consideration of the barriers faced by young people, and practices that are effective in removing these, by facilitators and organisations. Types of reflective practice documented in these case studies show a consistency of approach.

A common practice is the use of *'Check ins'*. These might take place at the beginning and end of a session, and may also be necessary at other times, especially with smaller creative breakout groups that are part of a larger session. Where there is a particular topic being discussed, they can be useful in keeping groups safe by looking out purposefully for things that might trigger participants. They help to establish reflection as a regular and conscious process:

> "In terms of people feeling triggered – check what people are sharing before they share. Group work. Check in on groups on what they are working on"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Observations gained through checking in and out can be reinforced and acted on if time is given for *deep thinking about behaviour,* 'comfort zones', and how to move beyond them. This can increase feelings of safety, and creates an environment in which young people feel listened to:

> "I suppose when I say safe, I think I just mean somewhere where you feel like you're going to be listened to. You are not going to be judged or told that what you're saying is wrong or that you shouldn't say that, do this instead. I guess kind of creating an environment where whatever comes to them, it's okay for it to come out"
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

This allows for both young people and facilitators to work in an atmosphere that is encouraging both of learning from mistakes and making changes. *Problematic behaviour can be examined and 'stepped away from'* without judgement, and with the possibility of change:

> "I think because of their kind of behaviour management and the drama between the group as well, having this every day as a new day, whilst that was unsaid between the workers, it felt like that's naturally what we were doing because it meant that we could park the problems or the issues that had arrived the day before and we could give the young people a clean slate so that it wasn't, we were flogging them for things that they'd done previously"
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

It is a reflective *'question based'* pedagogy,

> "When young people are getting caught in 'dramas' better not to rehash the incident for too long. Check in on them, have they eaten? Are they feeling calm?"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Facilitators' actions and behaviour will act as a model for how young people behave and interact. It is desirable then that this modelling is consciously engaged in, and again, this requires people and organisations to give time to reflection:

> "So just kind of seeing those (difficult behaviours), try and model those behaviours for the other young people"
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

For reflective practice to have an impact, *young people must also have a voice* within it, and must be able to articulate that on their own terms. This not only includes the non-verbal, as discussed above, but also needs spaces to be available that allow them to separate from a given activity, take time out, socialise, or sit quietly and undisturbed:

> "Having a voice isn't as simple as just speaking out. We have to do it in varied ways to capture their thoughts, ideas, feelings so, that comes into the art as well. At the moment we've also got a creative cafe where young people [can sit] when they're in distress"
>
> [Interview with Pilgrim Street Arts]

This can allow the relationships between the young person, the facilitators, and the wider group, to be renegotiated during the course of a project:

> "She was really into dance, but she was like, I don't like that type of dance. We just said, okay, that's fine. We're obviously not going to kick you out, but you are disrupting the room, you're disrupting all the young people's learning now. We took her out them sessions for a couple of months really. She went in with the younger ones and then she ended up helping them"
>
> [Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

This provided the opportunity for this young person to take on a leadership role by helping out with the younger participants. It is also valuable to consider what might have happened if the young person's specific interest in dance was incorporated into the workshop process. Busby's Crossing Bridges case study noted in the literature review there is an underlined understanding of the value of facilitators taking a non-hierarchical approach to the talents of young people and professional artists (Ibid). This mode of working requires that *sessions are designed to be responsive and flexible*, and that facilitators have the skills and the support to be able to respond quickly to unexpected situations and radical changes of direction:

> "And that really, really had a focus on verbal communication and we started to find holes in that and how that wasn't inclusive. So we changed things up, we made adjustments"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

> "I guess you had to kind of adapt exercises. I think also making sure that no, we didn't force anyone to do something they didn't want to do. If it got to the point where it was disruptive, someone not taking part, then that was more of an issue"
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

Reflective practice must not only take place within the lifetime of a project, and in individual sessions. It also requires structures that are embedded within the practice of the organisation. These structures include intangibles such as the skills and experience of project managers and producers, but also intellectual assets such as *Handbooks and Access/inclusion Riders* that set up and

transmit the culture of the project in terms of expectations passed on to participants, and also *Learning tools and support outside the session* that aid in the transmission of this culture. This allows for participants to explain how they like to be included, and also creates mechanisms for learning from this information:

> "We have a handbook for each participant and within the handbook it has an access rider and the access rider is supposed to be used as an ever-growing tool as well. One page is like what they're into, their interests, I best communicate by. And then the second page is dislikes. When you're anxious you can help me by and any condition or anything that we need to know"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

Learning tools for participants may include resources in a number of formats that suit different needs, for example, audio files of scripts that supplement or are used instead of text based scripts.

> "We've created a website that they can access that houses video tutorials of movement bits, has audio versions of the script so that they can listen to it completely, which a lot of our members love. So we record me and I was like, "oh no, he didn't". And then they listened to it. But even I would say all of them listen to it because it also has the synopsis of that scene. It introduces what's going to happen in that scene. So it's like they're listening to an audio book, let's say, and a digital version of the script. So that can be tweaked. They can print it themselves, they can make it bigger, they can put an overlay over the top of it, change the colour of the paper, all of that stuff"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

Finally, it is important to recognise *the limits of reflective practice*. Creative facilitation may have therapeutic benefits, but it is not a therapeutic process:

> "I think there's a fine line between being an understanding practitioner, but knowing your limits is I'm not a drama therapist, I'm not a therapist, I'm not a social worker, I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist, so what are the strategies that I have to be able to listen and respond?"

[Joe, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

What are the barriers to participation that can be experienced?

Barriers to participation are complex and interact with each other to reduce the likelihood of marginalised young people being able to access youth theatre.

Physical, psychological and emotional environment: these can include the design of the buildings, the lighting in the rooms used, and the acoustics of the space, can all impact the experience of young people, especially those who are neurodiverse, D/deaf or are cared for. The first impression given by a building and its staff can be crucial – for example, do the staff model welcoming behaviour? Is the entrance lobby inviting? Some young people reported not being able to hear properly due to the nature of the building's acoustics (highly reflective walls for example). Some left rooms when the noise level "became too loud". A building that looks dilapidated may reinforce feelings of lack of worth. Conversely a large, interesting, multi-roomed building with long corridors may prove very distracting. Switching venues between sessions can interfere with the cohesion of the group. Some participants in Collective Encounters sessions found that the curtains were distracting. These participants had a clear preference for the second of two buildings used in the sessions, but unfortunately, this was only available for the second two weeks of the four week project. The location, cleanliness and safety of the toilets is also an important consideration.

Mobile phones were also identified as a distraction, and source of disagreement. Some participants appeared to ignore others, and staff, while on their phones. This could mask shyness, feelings of being overwhelmed, or anxiety about a difficult situation outside the room.

Group tensions and interpersonal dynamics were of course an expected issue, and played a large role in mediating the extent to which young people were able to get involved. Looked after children (and others) will often have experienced long term adversity and specific traumatic events, and neurodiverse young people may have different ways by which they prefer to interact, or choose not to interact. Some participants may not have English as a first language. Young people in this context may 'act out' tensions and situations from outside the

group, and will also (as in any group) develop preferences for specific group and staff members, and may not express this competently or with compassion:

> “They weren't great as a group at speaking and listening and kind of reflecting with each other. So those questions that were posed together in the [research] material for them was quite difficult and I don't think they all fully understood the questions no matter what ways we tried to kind of articulate it for 'em”
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters’ facilitator]

There is a risk of young people becoming overwhelmed, or defaulting into conflict because this is a normative learned mode of communication. As one participant said: "We're too on top of each other too much". Games that are intended to foster cooperation and communication can be regarded as competitive by hyper-vigilant young people. Young people in stressful situations may also not be sleeping, and so will be tired during the day. They may also be poorly fed. Finally, marginalised young people’s expectations of participation are formed by expectations of *not* being listened to. One illustrated poster created by the Collective Encounters group expressed it this way:

> “LAC kids are in crisis[1]. Feels as long as they are getting paid we don't matter to them. Us kids need help. The care system is a mess. Feels like us kids don't have a voice. Social services always tell us they know how we feel but they have no clue. Feels as if we are all left to struggle alone and we have no support, we just get placed wherever they put us and we have to deal with it all”

Ongoing family or school issues outside the group can also affect young people’s ability to engage in a group. There were numerous instances reported of this. For example:

> “X was distracted by a call with Mum & unable to take part at the end of the day. She was anxious about going home to Mum at the end of the day. She made disclosures about her home life but it wasn’t a safeguarding issue.”
>
> [Collective Encounters’ End of Day Report]

[1] The young people in this project referred to themselves as ‘LAC’ (Looked After Children) but we are using the term ‘Cared For’, in line with Social Services practice

> "And there was a lot of kind of stuff from home that would come in and they'd just out of nowhere just start shouting. And one of them would throw stuff at the other one or one of them would shove or kick the other one. And then there was tears."
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

Exploring upsetting themes or issues: difficulties in finding the right level of content creation are of great concern in working with any people who have experienced trauma. Unsurprisingly some young people experienced barriers in wanting to create material that related to anything personal. The following are examples noted by Collective Encounters' facilitators at the end of the day:

> "A and J struggled with the superhero exercise that asked participants to think about their best qualities"

> "Some people felt triggered by the material or that they had shared too much"

> "V was overwhelmed by sharing food at the table"

Facilitators also made more detailed observations in the interviews:

> "Finding that balance I think is quite tricky. And I think the young people didn't have the kind of emotional tools to be able to switch from talking about those things and then getting back into more fun frivolous exercises or more artistic exercises"
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

> "Some of them would find it quite triggering if someone created a character that was based on experience in social work, and they wanted it to be a big fantasy thing, if that makes sense"
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' facilitator]

Access and inclusion adjustments that facilitate participation for some can have the effect of excluding others. This is often referred to as an 'access clash' and can occur when balancing different inclusion needs and limited resources to ensure that everyone can participate safely and fully. It creates an invidious

situation where different kinds of barriers cannot be removed equitably. The examples below illustrate this well:

> "When you've got somebody who's blind, somebody who uses a really huge motorised wheelchair and three other people who are nonverbal, it's like where's the time for that in a two hour session? We just don't have the staff. So a way to combat it is more staff, but it's a difficult thing because we don't have the money to sustainably have five members of staff. I really think a pastoral person in each group would be so vital and it would really help access clashes and support the access clash. It has to be a space where it's okay that someone is saying, I want you to play that music loud cause I love it when it's loud and that person goes, no, I hate loud music"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

Financial exclusion: Finally, whilst all the organisations in the case studies are committed to providing free activities for people, and supporting this by covering costs such as travel, it is not clear that partners can or will always do this. For example, Lucy Graham (20 Stories High) argued that this is reflected in the difference in attendance between the sessions they ran in Huyton and those in Kirkby. For participants in these workshops, it was up to parents and carers to provide transport, and when the location shifted from Huyton to Kirkby, it seems likely that the increase in distance was too much for some. This may have been because those parents/carers had other responsibilities, and other children who they needed to collect from other locations.

2. How do young people experiencing additional challenges to participation define 'inclusivity'?

"Inclusion" is a complex concept that is context specific and carries with it certain educational and occupational assumptions. The young people in this research were not expected to respond to direct questions on the subject, except in the context of two specific sessions run by Collective Encounters for Cared for Children, in which the concept was broken down and explained. Even then, it did not completely resonate with them. Other information was gathered indirectly through analysis of the creative results from the project.

Young people tended to talk about what made them *feel* included, in terms of concrete activities and emotions. Analysis of the images, created to explore 'being included' and 'not being included' also illustrated these, and in some cases showed the importance of interconnections between activities and emotions.

Parent comments, as recorded in Collective Encounters' focus group, tended to confirm what was said by young people. They also showed that for many young people, inclusive practice can be demonstrated by observable changes in young people's confidence, behaviour and skills.

Feeling included, becoming more inclusive: one kind of inclusion resulted in greater confidence in social situations:

> "I've got to know two people, I've made two friends. That's good for me."
>
> "When you come into new places it's awkward and then you meet a new person and make a friend - It has helped my self esteem and to express myself"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Another led to the development of and appreciation of skills in individuals and groups:

> 'This is the only time I am elegant'.
>
> "Happy, I got the audience to laugh a little"

[Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

One illustration placed the word 'play' in the centre, and linked it to a constellation of creatively expressed linked concepts and emotions, such as 'imagination, celebration, contemplation' and 'creativity, positivity, nativity, productivity'. Another drew a composite character, including the words "you can't see sometimes what is inside".

One of the sessions specifically addressing inclusion generated the following conversation:

Facilitator: What made you feel included this week?	*Young people:* Being kind. Not rubbing noses in it. We have participated. Making sure all are involved. We had opinions on what we eat and we have been encouraged to join in when we've had difficulties. When we have lunch we chat together. We've been brought together.
Facilitator: How would you like to be included next week?	*Young people:* More choice about activities. We get to decide on games but we have to do the hard work. Water fight. Not sure. Everyone to have a go at cooking. Don't know.
Facilitator: What words do you associate with included?	*Young people:* Dialogue, sharing ideas, happy experience, good energy, encouraged to join in, gently asked for ideas, getting my feelings heard, respecting others, interesting activities, amazing staff.
Facilitator: What words do you	*Young people:*

associate with 'not included'?	Can't afford it, nobody to come with you, lack of communication, not being invited to friends' birthday parties, not being allowed to speak, not being allowed to touch stuff, being made to feel self-conscious

It is interesting here to note that most comments related to the social gains of inclusive practice, rather than the creative gains. It also seems in the facilitated session that the hardest question to answer concerned future activities. Not all participants found it equally possible to get involved, or equally positive, both in the project as a whole and particularly in these discussions:

> "K said it feels like therapy and just wants to do drama and draw and have fun"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

Parent observations and changes during the project: parents, carers and extended families form an important part of inclusive practice. Even the most isolated young people will have relationships with a carer or social worker, whilst many have extremely complex relationships that may be both demanding and also necessary, even where they can be damaging. Increasingly, participatory work in this context involves facilitators working with the extended networks that young people bring into the sessions:

> "Knowing that a child is coming to your youth theatre, but their Nan is coming to help make the costumes and their mum is helping front of house and is attending the beginner's actors drama and the sewing class and it's all of that"
>
> [Gaynor, Imaginarium]

This can have unforeseen consequences about changing parental or institutional narratives about what young people are capable of:

> "We encouraged him to invite his parents to the premiere and they sat in front of us. And then we end up talking, they're like these amazing wonderful people and they're like, he never invites us anywhere"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

It is not always possible to build these relationships:

> "Sometimes there's no rhyme or reason for sometimes you don't know what's going on at home. If they don't tell you, if their care doesn't tell you, their guardian doesn't tell you there's nothing that we can do"

[Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

But inclusive practice can radically change the opportunities young people have to access the arts, and access to a wider level of participation in social presence:

> "We had parents in tears because we welcomed and engaged their neuro-divergent children. We even had headphones if they needed them. They tend to bring their own, but there's always a place for them"

[Y-Kids]

> "I feel emotional even saying it, when his Mum seen some of the things that he was saying, she was so upset that he felt like that and so upset that she couldn't, didn't know that. And I feel like it was a moment for them as a family and it just really felt like through that way that was the way he wanted to tell them about how he felt during that time"

[Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

Parents and carers interviewed in Collective Encounter's focus group also reported on the social importance of sessions conducted with inclusivity at the forefront of practice. For example, young people making friends when they didn't expect to, results in children feeling a greater sense of being listened to or being their authentic self:

> "P's got quite a big group of friends in school and they all act in a very certain way, P has to conform to stay in the friends group, but here she's just allowed to be herself. She's not caught to be in box like she is in other places; the kids here, they are all neurodiverse. That works for P"

[Collective Encounters' parent/carer]

This corroborates findings from phase 1 that inclusive arts projects are accessed by marginalised young people to a much greater extent than they are represented in the population.

The young people themselves are often both insightful and specific about the changes that engaging in arts projects can bring. Once again it is evident that they describe these mainly in terms of developing friendships, making connections, and changing behaviours, and only secondarily in terms of the specific creative skills they may have enjoyed learning:

> "I can listen to what people say instead of flipping out"
>
> "I learnt to work with others"
>
> "I felt like a god"

[Collective Encounters' participant]

> "Talks a lot about the programme to Grandparents/Dad/Social Worker"
>
> "Arts inspiration gave her an opportunity to talk about her late mum in a positive way"
>
> "Just like all the trauma he's been through….he's had a terrible life for a young person and he's just loved coming here. He's been dead happy. He's been singing and dancing…when he gets like depressed cos of what's happened to him and his family he's been like really happy coming here. It's really good"

[Collective Encounters' parent/carer]

Young people gaining a voice and taking power: whilst inclusive practice is mostly experienced by young people and their parents and carers as promoting change in the social dimension, it is clear that the creative aspects of inclusive practice promote conversations about power such that young people feel able to express demands that have policy implications:

> "Listen to us our thoughts are valid"
>
> "We want a place to call home, a place to call ours"
>
> "Be kinder to us"

[Collective Encounters' participant]

One drawing illustrates this beautifully - a broken heart has been stitched together and on it is written "bring positivity". The two divided halves link writing such as "we need to be heard" with "keep them safe". The ultimate creative expression of this is a direct address to power, included in the final performance, which begins:

> Dear powers that be
> The system is broken- it's messed up
> We matter
> We work hard
> We are experts to experience yet we are neither seen nor heard.

['Dear Powers That Be', Collective Encounters participants]

3. What makes long term sustainable creative engagement more likely?

This section examines evidence that provides in depth information about what factors lead to projects becoming sustainable in the long term. It builds on findings from the first phase, and adds insight from the experience of young people. The first phase identified the following as providing a 'roadmap' for sustainability:

- A strong sense of purpose, with intentional and deliberative roles by which young people could shape their future
- A diversity of networks beyond the arts sector, including signposting young people to further provision, and progression routes
- The predictability of funding and reliability and strength of partnerships
- The skills of and respect for facilitators
- A commitment to innovation and experimentation

This phase specifically addresses the interactions between the creation of a sustainable business model, and inclusive practice.

A sustainable project will also be inclusive: at the most basic level, assuming access issues such as travel, disability, neurodiversity and others are not issues in themselves, any project will only succeed if young people want to continue with it. Projects that do not deliver in this respect will not be able to continue. Young people who gave feedback were very clear about wanting continued engagement:

> “I want to come back again"
>
> "Definitely do it again"
>
> “Not happy it's ending, wants to do it again”
>
> "I feel ok about it ending, I want to do it again"

[Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

These reactions evidence a level of commitment, emotional engagement and reward by the young people:

> "I think it was massive for them. I think it would be much easier to work with them in the future because they've been through the process and they know how amazing they would feel after it's done and they have [a] much better idea about how it would work better, what level of focus maybe they would need to carry on"
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

Profound effects can be observed in quite short spaces of time, and these are amplified where there is consistency, and when young people sustain their participation and pass on their experience to new participants. Young people tend to retain memories of creative projects, and the effects can be lifelong:

> "I think that whoever funds these programs.....you really need to look at what the research brings from what's happened and realise how profound this can affect a young person's life. I know that them kids are still thinking about that program today"
>
> [Malik, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

The shared experiences of being involved in creative projects creates long lasting emotional bonds that sustain young people who may not experience those bonds in other parts of their life. They experience projects widely separated in time (for example, ones that only run in the holidays), as essentially the same project, where by once again an elective family is brought together:

> "At the end when we kind of went over their thoughts on the whole process, there was quite a few comments about being family and wanting to make sure they all saw each other again and could we do this again at Christmas?"
>
> [Sarah, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

A sustainable, inclusive, project needs and generates partnerships and funding: in the context of an inclusive project, more engagement promotes more engagement. It creates a virtuous circle by recognising and raising the profile of

communities of people that have been marginalised by exclusion, but it also demonstrates that work often dismissed as 'instrumental' can create its own aesthetics that can also be challenging creatively. This contributes to a wider debate for the distribution of funding both within the arts and beyond, and that in turn creates networks and alliances that have common goals that link the creative impact of inclusive projects with other goals in arenas such as public health and community building. Projects of this nature also make their case in terms of demonstrating new methodologies for reaching 'excluded' groups of people.

> "Individuals can tell us why they feel proud or someone might do a dance, give me a 'proud' dance. A really interesting way that we've developed that currently is that RAWD is not just a social space, it's a challenging space for some people"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

The particular details of one project also generates the evidence, and provide ideas, for the next project. For example, while 20 Stories High and RAWD experienced issues in the partnership with Endorphins, the work they did in Knowsley nevertheless demonstrated that there is a need for inclusive theatre in the area, which cannot be met with the existing level of provision, and raises a challenge as to how to continue this work.

A sustainable project generates advocacy: projects need to be in depth and long term to be able to advocate for and give voice to their participants. But this advocacy also helps projects become sustainable, by creating the networks, partnerships, evidence base, and above all the creative work, that raises the profile of the people involved and enables them to engage in influencing people with power. These processes always have to have a beginning, and a key aspect of this is investment in the organisations, networks, staff, audiences and participants that collectively create the project. Building these in a new area can be very difficult, and pilot projects in particular need development time and acceptance that work with smaller numbers of people can be just as important as projects that reach large numbers then do not continue:

> " we know that that takes a lot more learning and a lot more research and a lot more experience and time"
>
> [Steffi and Alice, RAWD facilitators]

Data Collection on Digital Interfaces

As outlined in the introduction, this second phase of research also sought to examine the efficacy of the digital interface *Spond* in managing data and communications for youth theatre provision in the Liverpool City Region. A literature review attempted to determine wider understanding of using digital interfaces to collect data on young people, with a specific emphasis on marginalised groups.

Limited information on the use of digital interfaces in the specific context of youth theatre provision is available. Information on the general use of data collection through digital interfaces is more readily available and tells us:

Smartphone Apps are not 'neutral': they are accessed in different ways by different demographics. All forms of intersectionality affect how and if they are used, with gender, age, occupation and educational status being particularly pertinent.

This study also appeared to show that people needed to be able to focus to use Apps. For example, different forms of neurodiversity influence the ability to concentrate on one task, or to multitask, rapidly moving through different apps. Usage patterns varied according to App and operating system, which is a function of wealth, in that less well off people will not have the most up to date phones or operating systems.

For example, young people with high levels of education are more likely than students, freelancers, employed and unemployed people to be engaged in smartphone multitasking behaviour (Chen, Wang et al., 2020). The same study also showed that agreeable and extraverted people were more likely to perform smartphone multitasking behaviour (ibid).

Other factors that must be taken into consideration are that, in the context of data collection, *attitudes towards privacy* affect the take up of Smartphone Apps. People who regard themselves as 'innovators' are more likely to use them in this way (Karikoski, 2012).

A study carried out with refugees suggests certain factors that may be of relevance when working with marginalised groups. This study confirmed that more education and a higher income predicts greater Smartphone usage, and

that low literacy is a predictor of non-usage. This study, citing Sugie (2018), also noted that:

> "most groups with sensitive or potentially negative interactions with government agencies are more likely to be concerned with issues of privacy, monitoring, and surveillance"

The author also notes that in the case of refugees, the main demographic affecting usage aligns with factors that affect the general population (as above), and that possession of a Smartphone does not imply it will be used for a given purpose (Keusch et al., 2019).

The use of *Spond*

The Case Studies carried out for Phase 2 specifically explored each organisation's response to *Spond*. This revealed a range of experiences.

Liverpool's Royal Court works with a mainstream group of young people, some of whom have additional needs in terms of access and inclusion. They have successfully implemented its use, and manage all their data collection with it.

Key features influencing *Liverpool's Royal Court*'s successful embedding of *Spond* appeared to be:

- a specific role holder, with expertise in the application, was available to implement it across youth theatre provision within the organisation.
- two data systems ran concurrently during a fairly lengthy implementation period.

Reported benefits included being able to dispense with paper data collection and registers, and easy access through the facilitators' smartphones to the database, in real time. It also helped them manage consent across a range of activities, and manage information about access and inclusion needs.

However, they also report limitations to use. Not all young people have smartphones, or want to use them in this way, in which case the facilitator has to sign them up. Also, the use of *Spond* was not universal amongst all parents, carers, and young people meaning traditional communication methods with participants needed to be maintained.

This means that the automatic features of Spond's 'back office', for example, automatic email and app notifications, will not reach all participants. Some sophistication and knowledge of the participants is needed that cannot be enacted through Spond:

> "So some I'll know can only be contacted by phone so I'll just put them in green. So I know they're definitely contact by phone or can only be contacted for summer, half time, whatever it might be"
>
> [Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

20 Stories High and RAWD worked with groups of young people with disabilities and/or who were neurodiverse. As described above, this project was their first contact with these young people, in an area of Merseyside with little provision for this group. They felt unable to implement *Spond* due to the short lead time, and a perceived lack of support from the *Spond* team, which was confined to a brief introductory meeting.

20 Stories High and RAWD were also working with a third party responsible for recruiting young people to the project. *Endorphins* uses an online sign up system via the *Endorphins* website,[2] to advertise projects across a wide range of localities. Sign up requires an account, activities are not usually free, and it is not clear how to contact them by phone, though some programmes display a phone number. In this case, participation was mediated by parents/carers working through *Endorphins*, and the use of *Spond* would have added a 'double sign up' requirement that might have become a further barrier to participation.

Despite this, *20 Stories High* was positive about its use in the future. They saw benefits for data collection:

> "I can see how it tracks data really easily and in a way that as a company you really need to book their ideas up around data and how we keep data. It looks like a solution to a problem that we have"
>
> [Lucy, 20 Stories High Producer]

Yet, they also had concerns about its accessibility, and the exclusion of people who do not use Smartphones:

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[2] https://endorphins.uk/ accessed 25/10/23

> “There was lots brought up in the meeting around access, which if you are going to use it and you're going to tell participants that that's what you're using, you aren't going to get over the fact that some people won't be able to get on it”
>
> [Lucy, 20 Stories High Producer]

20 Stories High noted that the transition to *Spond* would require running two data systems simultaneously, and had concerns around staff capacity to implement this, stating that a dedicated person might be needed. They were also unclear about how *Spond* would integrate with their existing procedures for supplying data to Arts Council England (ACE) and Liverpool City Council.

Collective Encounters ran a *Summer Arts Adventure* for cared for children. Many of the participants and facilitators are neurodiverse, and have specific communication needs relating to ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia. *Collective Encounters* also reported that the introductory meeting with *Spond* came too late. They decided that they would be unable to implement *Spond* for projects such as this. Issues of inclusion were paramount in this decision, and it was also observed it would need a long lead in and data conversion time. Not all young people find written communication suitable. As a result, a very individual approach is needed.

As with *20 Stories High*, it was not appropriate to use *Spond* in the recruitment process. This project was delivered with partners from Social Services and care agencies, all of whom have different policies on the use of Apps.

Cared for children have to be recruited in a very specific manner, with a tailored approach for each person. This includes identifying the preferred modes of communication, which include email, text, phone calls, and even written letters. Children in Care Homes may be looked after by as many as seven adults, and there is also a high staff turnover.

Foster carers may be prevented from using Apps in this context by institutional and procedural restrictions and they are also required to do risk assessments on activities and get approval from the families, so in this case it is not clear who would manage the use of an App and what the privacy and child protection issues would be. The National Minimum Standards for Adoption and Fostering do not provide clear guidance on this.[3]

[3] https://www.minimumstandards.org/index.html; accessed 14/11/23

It is not clear how *Spond* would work where multiple carers have parental responsibility. There is also a concern that it is exclusionary to use a system which some young people, as well as their carers, will not have access to. Most young people who attend *Collective Encounters' Summer Arts Adventures* did not own a Smartphone.

Another major consideration, for those that do, is the costs of data access, and the likelihood that they may not be able to access WiFi where they live. Other issues include neurodiverse parents and carers reporting that they find *Spond* difficult to use in the existing context of Sports Clubs, that it is confusing when there are multiple children attending multiple clubs, and that they use other Apps to communicate with other parents and carers to confirm events (in particular, WhatsApp).

Other themes arising from the analysis

Lived experience of facilitators

While not all facilitators will have been able to engage in training on these topics, it is clear from this research that *the lived experience of facilitators is central* to inclusive practice. There is no simple correspondence between participants and facilitators' experiences, but it is clear that the more teams are made up of and led by facilitators with relevant lived experience, the more effective they will be. Young people identified this:

> "He is always there for me and always on my side - he is there for everyone"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

This does not mean that people without relevant lived experience should not be facilitators, as it is also evident that projects working with a diverse range of facilitators as well as bringing in guest artists are also more inclusive. It is however important for facilitators to be reflective about their position and motivation within this work, because they are *modelling behaviour, skills, and achievement* to young people who are experiencing similar disadvantage:

> "As a young person from a working class background with various kind of familial issues, my pathway could have been very different if I'd gone the same route as my peers. But [...] I engaged in the arts and I grew as a person. People took time and invested within me. That helped me to go and have a career as an artist, as an actor, as a director, and a facilitator"
>
> [Joe, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

> "If it was a female child who had an issue, usually one of my female colleagues would be one to go out the room to have the word with them. And then if it was a young lad, it would be me. I'll go out. It's usually there was kids who gravitated to their staff member, and I think that each staff member had their own moment of being able to"
>
> [Malik, Collective Encounters' Facilitator]

> “I really, really do believe that the people who grew up in Knowsley have a certain experience of life and they deserve more. And I think they deserve to understand what they can do in the world, whether that's disabled or non-disabled. And I think that's something that as a person who's from that place, it's not shown to you on a computer screen. It's not, doesn't come in a text message. You've got to sift through a lot of stuff to understand your potential as a person”
>
> [Steffi, from Knowsley, RAWD Facilitator]

> “I think there's somebody in every room or there's a tutor that looks like every person who goes to the youth theatre. So whether that be you are Black, Asian, Malaysian, white, whatever, we've got tutors that are ADHD, we've got tutors that have got dyslexic. I think it's just being relatable, building those relationships with the young people”
>
> [Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

> “Our staffing is completely neurodiverse, so this is the entire structure that we are working with. As regular employment for neurodiverse people is actually in the really low figures anyway, we are addressing several balances by doing that. There is a thing about creating a reimagined space, a safe space, knowing that our wants and needs can be met in a slightly different way because nobody's having to try and fit into the neurotypical world”
>
> [Abi, Wilful Misfits]

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The research shows that inclusive projects develop a range of effective practices of participatory forms that allow for voluntary participation without expectation, alternative modes of participation (both socially and creatively), spaces for temporary withdrawal or for being alone, opportunities for agency and leadership, and a say in the development of the project. These build choice, autonomy and voice for the participants. But it is important also to be reflective about how facilitators regard participation. The extent to which a person may participate depends on a range of factors, and may be difficult to interpret without knowing that person well. Much involvement in groups can be

described as *'Legitimate Peripheral Participation'*. This concept was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) to account for movement between very minimal participation to full agency and perhaps back again in any contexts where both skills and a group culture are being communicated. Numerous instances of this were documented, and understanding the legitimacy of these instances can change the way a group is perceived and facilitated:

> "M would participate and add a line to the song but then would disengage from the exercise"
>
> [Collective Encounters' End of Day Report]

> "There was one person in the group who didn't engage in what we were doing. He spent a lot of time just on the outskirts of what we were doing. And I just kept being like, yeah, what do you think, mate? What do you think? And he's not answering me. He's not looking at me. And then he came and held me hands at the end of the thing. And they're usually for me like a bit of a win"
>
> [Steffi, RAWD facilitator]

> "Obviously there's always going to be some young people that are just more forthcoming than others. Some are just more shy, some don't want to put themselves as far forward as others. So for us it's just being aware of that in the room, knowing what young person has the capability but might not have that within them to step forward"
>
> [Vannessa Mae, Royal Court Facilitator]

Discussion of themes

Understanding Inclusive Practice

Inclusive practice begins with *removing barriers to engagement*. The research shows the importance of activities being free to attend, and the need for support for travel costs and other financial burdens of participation. However, much more is needed. The impact of both the physical and emotional environment in which participation is located is large. The physical space is usually chosen by the organisation delivering the project, or a project partner. It is incumbent on them to consider the physical impacts of the appearance and state of repair of the building, the ambience, layout, furnishings, lighting conditions, and acoustics. The emotional environment is co-created by all involved. Delivery organisations will need to address this with building managers and partners. Other aspects are more within the control of the delivery organisation, as discussed below.

Young people in this study saw inclusion primarily in social terms, and secondarily in terms of creativity. Inclusive practice begins before any creative work has taken place. It is structural, and involves a conscious reflective practice, and the development of an ethic of care.

The *formation of the project group* is fundamental to the success of the project. How do young people, facilitators, and partners build the group? The group creates itself through a number of processes. Many but not all facilitators are familiar with at least some models of group behaviour, most famously that of Bion (1968). Some may also be aware of different kinds of facilitator styles, such as 'task oriented' and 'social/emotional oriented'. On current evidence however, it seems likely that fewer are trauma informed, and fewer still will have had opportunities to look at intersectionality. Inclusive practice takes place in a wider context of intersectional marginalisation and oppression, in which some young people will have had complex adverse and traumatic experiences, and some will have had these experiences reinforced by institutional oppressions, for example, those arising from histories of racism or colonialism. Violence in various forms will form a large part of this experience, whether in a domestic context, or at school, or in society at large. This violence can be physical, but is also a violence of erasure, of 'not mattering', and of not being listened to.

In current practice, it is normal to establish *'ground rules'* when working with a group. However, with marginalised groups, this may not be possible, as with 20 Stories High's experience, because every session may have different attendance. It is also likely that these groups will experience an attempt to introduce a code of behaviour as authoritarian. In the case of 20 Stories High, any attempt to build beyond the basic rules brokered by their partner would have failed – there simply was not the opportunity to co-create these in a way that the young people present would find relevant. In the case of Collective Encounters, the appropriate model was to develop a *Manifesto* which the young people were able to revise and refine on a daily basis. RAWD use a non-text-based *'footprint contract'*, which allows for the physical expression of participants' desires through movement, for example, a hand gesture.

These approaches, instead of imposing an authoritarian feel to the projects, assisted in giving voice to the young people. This raises deeper issues of participation. What is meaningful participation? When can seemingly participatory projects become normative in terms of expectation and behaviour?

Inclusive practice is too often seen as a matter of ramps. *Access and inclusion are not just about ramps* (though many spaces remain inaccessible even in these simple terms). Increasingly, inclusion begins with involving the participants from before the start of a project, by using individual inclusion statements, or access riders. These can also be used for facilitators. This research also suggests that facilitators and organisations need to develop understanding of what are sometimes referred to as 'access clashes' (see above). Working to remove these requires long term commitment and an understanding that this is an ongoing process, not a task that can be concluded and abandoned. It must also be co-produced with participants.

What makes inclusive practice sustainable?

The research shows how effective inclusive practice is developed through reflection. This reflection, in order to inform a strategic, consistent, and sustainable approach, must be *structural*, that is, built into the culture of the company. It must also be *question-based*, that is, based on learning from and interpreting practice in the light of theoretical knowledge, coupled with lived experience. There must be a *praxis* of sustainable inclusive practice. This praxis is beyond the material conditions for sustainability as outlined above, but it will

also depend on them. On the evidence of this research, inclusive practice is more likely to be sustainable if it is linked with an ethic of care, a trauma informed approach to content creation, and if it provides a voice to its participants that can demonstrably lead to social and policy change.

Exclusion is not only an intersectional and economic phenomenon, but as Thompson (2017) notes also involves a removal of dignity (see the literature review). Inclusive projects in this study have attempted to restore dignity through *an ethics of care*. Depending on circumstances, this has included cooking food together, providing emotional support, recognising the wider networks of family and friendship that young people are part of, but, crucially, not viewing facilitators as therapists. This is mainly a matter of both intent, and competency. The discipline of arts based therapies aims at individual reintegration after trauma and can create risk of harm if the difference between social actions and therapeutic outcomes are not properly understood (Pate, Rastogi and Diaello, 2022). The intention of therapy is therefore different from the intention of participatory theatre, and requires different competencies. For this reason, many of the projects in the research have workers whose main role is the pastoral care of the participants (again, though, this is not usually a therapeutic intervention).

Although facilitators are not therapists, the process of content creation in particular can benefit from *trauma informed practice*. This aims to understand how people and communities may be affected by trauma, and what this means for workshop practice. The evidence of this research shows that there is concern that young people may be re-traumatised by being asked to create content relating to their direct lived experience, especially on the individual level. The trauma informed approach, used both by Collective Encounters and 20 Stories High, recognises this. It is not enough that participation is voluntary, as traumatised people may voluntarily describe experiences, and then feel deep guilt and shame afterwards. Instead, the creation of content can be accomplished through fictionalising narratives (whilst ensuring they are exemplary), creating composite characters that do not identify individuals, and also by embodied (non-verbal) techniques such as the use of 'freeze frames'. Facilitators need skill and sensitivity to find the right balance for each participant, and a useful resource in outlining these principles is the Drama Spiral (Baim, 2015). This provides a set of principles by which practitioners and participants can find safe ways to move appropriately between fictionalised narratives and highly personal experiences.

Further examples of this kind of practice are considered in the Literature Review. In particular, Busby's 'Pedagogy of Utopia' shows how,

> "Utopia is employed not to simply signify the hope of a better place but rather to underline the potential of applied theatre to enable participants to become *re-sensitised* to their circumstances, in a way that develops a desire to change or disrupt these circumstances"
>
> [Busby, 2021]

This is similar to other theatre and educative processes that attempt what Paulo Freire calls 'conscientisation' (Freire, 1970). In Collective Encounters' practice of Theatre for Social Change, the aim is to 'make strange' the participants' world, so they can see it with fresh eyes. Clearly, special care needs to be taken with these processes when working with marginalised young people.

As discussed above, there is a virtuous circle in developing sustainable inclusive practice. The literature review highlights the role of creativity in *social and policy change*. Projects that give young people a voice will only continue long term if participants feel that some form of change comes to fruition. As the literature review demonstrates, some writers see the linking of arts with social change objectives as an 'instrumentalisation' of creativity. This linkage, it is argued, appears to downplay the affective aspects of creativity, that is the aesthetic and emotional impact. However, these objections often come from privileged artists, academics, policy makers and 'public intellectuals' who harbour an ideological objection to art for social change[4]. This cry of 'art for arts sake' usually masks an argument for defunding participatory arts, and it has, since the inception of post war state funding for the arts, had a chilling effect (Belfiore, 2012). This research shows that 'instrumentalism' is in some sense what young people want, at least in terms of an ethics of care that prioritises listening to marginalised voices. This must be enacted from the outset before creative work can begin. The creativity that arises from this ethic must then be considered on its own terms, requiring a new aesthetic, or 'perverse beauty' that does not reproduce privilege (Bharucha, 2011).

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[4] Matarasso, F: Why Nicholas Hytner is wrong about how to save the arts in England https://arestlessart.com/2023/05/18/why-nicholas-hytner-is-wrong-about-how-to-save-the-arts-in-england/ accessed 17/11/23

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