Project
Summer Production 2017

Partners
Brooke House Sixth Form College
Graeae Theatre Company
Arts Council England
Garfield Weston
London Borough of Hackney
Young Hackney

Funders

A Wild World
(This is not what you expect)
Immediate Theatre’s Summer Exposure Project
July – August 2017
The Project

The summer production was a wonderful culmination of the year’s work. We were delighted to stage inclusive ensemble style youth theatre performances at Chats Palace and the Hackney Empire in August 2017 inspired by the story of The Little Prince by Saint-Exupéry.

Participants were recruited from our youth theatres as they had already explored the story during the term. The Little Prince was chosen because it can be appreciated on many levels and touches on themes that had been raised by participants following the death of our Associate Director, Tony Gouveia. This includes the child/adult perspective, investment in people and places and the importance of things that cannot be seen but felt. It also provides a starting point for working inclusively and exploring human rights. Resultantly, we were able to create an environment which allowed all artists and participants to contribute, working from their personal strengths.

Our staff team of facilitators were joined in August by Director Rob Watt and Designer Jo Paul for our Summer Exposure project. Rob drew on the ideas generated by the groups in term-time to create stimuli as a starting point for the 10 days of devising at Chats Palace. Jo then created a coherent setting for the piece. Our staff team acted as lead artists in music, text and costume while Rob used ensemble techniques to create a multi layered production drawing on the range of skills and abilities within the group. Staff were supported by 3 new Peer Facilitators studying Level 3 drama at Brooke House Sixth Form College alongside 1 experienced Peer Facilitator.

The Participants
The participants were aged between 11 and 25 years and included both disabled and non-disabled young people. All the participants came from the local area, with a large number previously engaging with Immediate Theatre on a weekly basis through our Estate Based Youth Theatres. We had a mix of male and female participants, however males were somewhat underrepresented with only 6 attending. We also had a number of older young people participate, with 6 being in the 16-25 bracket. We have found this age group particularly difficult to engage and were encouraged to see such a diverse range of ages making up the company. In addition to this, 5 participants, aged 11, were in the process of transitioning from primary to secondary education. The group consisted of 6 young people with disabilities, and 6 who require a learning support plan at school. 91% of participants are Black or Black British and the remaining 9% White or White British, giving an accurate representation of our client group within Hackney.

Working inclusively
The project brought together 24 young people from across Hackney, comprising young people who engage regularly on our Estate Based Youth Theatres and others who were new to the organisation. Amongst the group were 5 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and a clear highlight of the project was the way in which the ensemble approach enabled everyone to contribute and create a performance which was enhanced by its inclusivity.

We are really pleased with what the group achieved. The disabled young people thrived working in a large group, which included young people with challenging behaviour, and
all of them went beyond what they had previously achieved in an exclusive SEND setting. This is evidenced in Case Study 1. We hope that this experience will increase their confidence in other mixed settings as they move out of school and on to college.

It took a few days for the non-SEND young people to appreciate that everyone was part of the same team and to learn to monitor their reactions to other participants but by the end of the first week they were fully engaged and working together. The open and “out of the box” responses of the SEND participants provoked a deeper response from staff and participants alike and had a very positive influence on the final performance.

“One of the best bits for me was making such an inclusive show. I believe that we made a show that drew on the strengths of both the young people and the team; challenged them to take a risk and experienced a new way of making a show. I was impressed with the diversity of the group in terms of needs, behaviour, backgrounds and abilities. I believe that this helped make a layered, complex, beautiful and inclusive show.”

- Rob Watt, Director

“A Wild World shifts between worlds playing with metaphors and form and embedding clever, artistic decisions which dually shares the responsibility of access for all cast members. We are expertly and confidently guided by the songs (youth-led, from their creation to presentation), boldly punctuating and threading the worlds together into one diverse but unified experience”

- Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Advisor from Graeae Theatre

The staff team included three disabled people, for whom Immediate Theatre were able to provide support workers. This further promoted the inclusive atmosphere; members of staff became professional role models for all the young people and in particular those who were themselves disabled.
"Being a disabled person in the staff team myself, I expected to receive questions from the young people about my impairment, but it didn’t seem to matter to the group; the work, the group and the relationships to each other were the important elements and creativity and fun were upper most each day. When access needs are catered for, responsibility for each other is encouraged, and where everyone has a voice, individual and group creativity is given room and equality is promoted."

- Jo Paul, Designer

Working inclusively had a significant impact on what the young people felt they had learnt, with 85% of the young people identifying that at the end of the project they had learnt to “support others” and “work as part of a team”. Almost all their comments highlighted this, the first underlining that even someone who does not generally consider himself “supportive” felt that he had become so on the project:

"[I have learned] to support others because that’s not really me” – participant aged 11
"I can help people and people can help me.” – participant aged 11
"It felt like a community” – participant aged 12
"I helped people” – SEND participant aged 20

"I think the young people gained an understanding of how to work with other young people who may have a disability. This new skill will serve them well in life and may have already impacted the way they think.”

- Felicia Ellis, Peer Facilitator

Theme and structure
The production was initially inspired by the book The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. This had been chosen by the team because of its imaginative approach to dealing with loss following the death of our Associate Director, Tony Gouveia, which had been felt keenly by many of the young people. During the planning stages, the team chose to focus on key themes that emerged from the term’s work, engaging the young people through a series of assignments, tasks and questions. The result was an ensemble performance without a central narrative - a group of young people exploring the rules of a world where there are no adults.

"This is not what you expect. This is stated on the front page of the programme for Immediate Theatre’s A Wild World, the company’s summer production. A few reasons this is true is down to the human qualities of the characters, the stories, and the genuine artistic platform given to young people to brave their talents, dreams and rightful expectations of themselves and their peers, in front of their peers.”

Jodi-Alissa Bickerton, Advisor from Graeae Theatre
"The impetus I’m told came from the cast and they wanted to explore the idea of gaining adulthood and at several points during the play there is a slow-motion race to gain a hanging key that always seems just out of reach, the key to adult understanding. It was split into sections each given a title literally plucked from the air on nine cards strung up and pulled down to be announced some corresponding to the subject others only tangentially so, some funny, some not, some exuberant some introspective, but all inventive and well-acted, the children and young adults owning their own play, and acting it with confidence."

Excerpt taken from audience member’s blog

There was some question as to whether the non-narrative approach was a problem for the young people.

"It would have been better if the company had a better understanding of the play. They enjoyed doing the play and knew the movement and when to go on stage to perform. But when questioned about what the play was about, some didn’t know."

- Charmain Humphrey, Participation Manager

"As this was not an approach to making work this group had experienced before they were confused at times about what the show was 'about' – I would have liked to have found a way that they owned this a little more."

- Rob Watt, Director.

However, this does not seem to have been a problem for most participants or the audience.

“l’m not sure I knew what it was about, but the process was exciting - we didn’t know what was going to happen next, we were free to be creative. The audience seemed to enjoy it and everyone had a different point of view which was interesting.”

– Participant aged 12
Design
We had imagined that design would play a key part in the production not only to lift the production standards but also to support the involvement of those that were less verbal in their approach.

“For me a great plus of this project was that the design process was integrated into the work with the young people from the start, on day one it was instigated by a large box of treasures and unusual objects to explore and each day we discovered a new creative road to travel along inspired by the objects, the themes, the stories, words and music of the young people. The resulting show was a piece with design and the young people at its heart, working hand-in-hand with their stories, creativity and playfulness, and the access needs of everyone wherever they were at. Enabling the young people and the audience to leap from chapter to chapter, whilst maintaining a hold on the strange non-adult world and non-linear narrative.

- Jo Paul, Designer

“The story was really nice about monsters and a world without adults” - SEND participant
In one of the highlights of the show, the group create fake snow to represent Alaska.

"I feel that all the young people truly participated in the design and had an ownership of the space and making it change as the scenes moved on. I was really pleased with the T-shirts, each of the participants clearly expressed themselves through this process."

- Charmain Humphrey – Participation Manager

The Soundtrack
One of our permanent members of staff, Jerome Boothe, had expressed a desire to lead on creating sound and music for the performance. Music and lyric writing is an area of expertise for Jerome but not one he has had the opportunity to use significantly in Immediate Theatre’s work. Rob wanted to challenge Jerome to think differently and to work with sound as well as music to create a soundtrack for the performance. The result was an extremely varied soundtrack ranging from repeated use of buzzers and effects to life song, group rapping and instrumental sections.

"My greatest challenge was having to think outside the box and not just source music from things I had heard before. Changing my mindset from using deliberately evocative music to using music that was abstract and relevant to the performance. Before the project I had not used cueing software. I am proud to say I can now use it to run a show. I scored a performance for the first time and did it well. I facilitated young people of all abilities and backgrounds to express themselves through lyrics movement rap. I made a difference."
One of the best bits for me was when a student who had written what was in my eyes a splendid and very insightful poem about what she felt the world was coming to but was too shy to perform it. The best moment for me was when this student started to perform this poem after repeated rehearsals with me and began to see the depth and deeper meaning of what she had written, from that point on she began to believe in the words she had put on the paper. You could almost see her persona growing each time she performed the song.

Coming into this role for the first time, I didn’t even fully believe in myself but my journey with these young people made me realise I could fulfil the role and made me grow in confidence by seeing the change in them and subsequently their performance. I have felt empowered by this experience and it has made me start to think more about using music and movement in my own work. I know I can do it now. I have a different tool to engage young people with now. The approaches to working that I have learnt during this project have greatly improved my openness to experimentation. It has also made me rethink what the success criteria are for a show as A Wild World was literally an experiment that went very well. We made a mess and ROB and JO were amazing at making sure the young people’s ideas were realised."

- Jerome Boothe, Youth Drama Worker

The whole company closes the show by dancing
Working with peers
Following a training and recruitment process at Brooke House Sixth Form College we were joined on the project by three new Peer Facilitators. A fourth had to pull out at the last-minute due to another project, but his place was taken by one of our existing and most experienced Peers, Kyarna, who was able to support the new Peers to understand their role within the project. We were also joined by a young intern from Germany whose role was to support the young people with disabilities. The Peers had a very positive impact on the process, as highlighted by Rob Watt in his report:

"The peers were brilliant at holding the young people together, supporting them through a process and modelling behaviour that enabled the creative team the time and space to shape the show. We made sure there was a debrief at the end of each day as a way of reflecting of the day and planning for the next day."

- Rob Watt, Director

The experience was also very positive for them:

"The very best part was definitely the performances, it made me proud to see the huge difference in the end compared to how it was in the beginning of the project. Also I loved the routine, continuously doing the same things and at the same time creating something completely new every single day."

- Clara Behmenburg, Intern

When asked “What have you achieved?” Peer Facilitators said:

"Happiness from walking in on that first Monday thinking how on earth are we going to create a play. Then seeing and being a part of the play come to life just brought me happiness."

- Felicia Ellis, Peer Facilitator

I feel like I’m more confident and my ability to work with people (especially young people) has increased

- Prince Owusu, Peer Facilitator

“I have achieved being able to compromise and expand my mindset, and then being open minded in other to receive and create brilliant ideas."

- Hope Udeme, Peer Facilitator

We hope to continue working with all the Peers during future holiday projects. Hope and Prince have been contracted for ongoing evening work in the Autumn term, Kyarna and Felicia have started university studying Law Work and Youth, and Clara, from Germany, is looking to study Applied Theatre.
Working with professional artists and challenging our team
The regular staff team were joined by Director Rob Watt and Designer Jo Paul. Both artists had worked for the company previously and understood our work but had not been with us for many years. The team came together for two days of training and development prior to the project, ensuring that they were ready to receive the group. Rob’s strong ensemble approach worked very well at enabling the team members to develop their own skills:

“The creative team was brilliant at helping the young people play. Jo created a set that was both based on their ideas but also helped them perform the show. The list section, for example, was both visually stimulating but also helped the young people perform the piece. M, who is on the autistic spectrum, was helped to remember this moment by his list being drawn as symbols.

Jerome’s approach to making the sound for the show was awesome – with a little direction into helping him think about different types of music as texture he really ran with it. “

- Rob Watt, Director

“I valued working with Rob, our ideas sparked off each other whilst always encompassing and promoting the young people’s input and needs. Rob and the team embraced the design as an integral element from the start, rather than it being pre-designed or an afterthought. This meant that a visual aesthetic, playfulness and creativity had more space to flourish and add into the drama work. Similarly, for the sound, music and costume work. “

- Jo Paul, Designer
“Working with the team was a real delight. The fact that they were so willing to show their vulnerabilities during the activities, allowed the young people to feel more relaxed about their own actions and performances. This atmosphere of experimentation promoted everybody’s creativity.

Working with Rob was amazing. His attitude and demeanour created a safe space where I could make my ideas a reality. I was not scared to make mistakes, instead I was encouraged to make mistakes.”

- Jerome Boothe, Youth Drama Worker

Every day was concluded with a staff team debrief at which it was clear that everyone was able to contribute their ideas and reflect on what was working well.

Performances
Two performances were staged at Chats Palace in the same space where the group had been rehearsing. The production team were very supportive and enabled the group to achieve quite a magical effect. The play was performed in the traverse which meant that audience capacity was limited but everyone had a great view. Transferring to the Hackney Empire Studio was a challenge but in the end went very smoothly, with the young people coping very calmly with the new environment. There was also capacity for a larger audience and we performed to approximately 80 people. Feedback was very positive, with all those who completed surveys reporting it as “Excellent” or “Very Good”.

Accreditation
23 young people achieved “AQA creating and performing in an original drama piece” accreditation with only one young person, who had to leave the project early, not able to complete.

The company forging connections by sharing hopes for the future
Project Aims
• to bring together 25 young people aged 11 – 25, including those with SEND, to create an inclusive ensemble performance
• to work with stimulus explored through the summer term work drawn from The Little Prince to identify themes that interest and challenge the young people
• to train and introduce to the group a new team of Peer Facilitators looking to go on to further education/employment in the creative industries
• to engage experienced professional artists to inspire and challenge our regular staff and to enable them to stretch their own artistic vocabulary
• to stage the performance at professional venues (Chats Palace & Hackney Empire)
• to provide accreditation for all the participants

Statistics
Participants engaged 24
Number of sessions held 22
Number of Peer Facilitators engaged 4
Freelance Artists employed 3
Period of employment for Artists (days) 141
Staff Artists employed 3
Accreditation achieved 23
Audience 156

Case Study 1
M is a 20-year-old young man, who has been working with Immediate Theatre since January 2017 through the Forest Road Youth Hub in Dalston. During his time with Immediate Theatre, M had previously engaged in our weekly afterschool sessions, taking part in 2 end of term productions, Wonderland and The Little Prince. Immediate Theatre staff encouraged M to join the Exposure project in the summer, as did friends who were also going to take part.

M faces several social and emotional barriers as a result of his autism, including struggling with basic social skills such as making eye contact and engaging with his wider peer group, anger issues and verbal aggression, and depleted energy levels. M lives with his dad and sister, and grandmother is based nearby in Hackney who he regularly visits. M’s mum is never mentioned. He was born in Hackney and moved briefly to Newham but returned to the borough under Hackney’s care in January. M has been involved with social services intermittently since birth, and his social worker actually worked with Immediate Theatre during the Exposure project to conduct observations on his behaviour. She was really happy to see M engaged, communicating well and making an effort despite facing so many barriers. Said that she could see that the atmosphere in which the group were working was clearly a safe space to express creativity, commending us for this and stating that she intended to note this input in her report.

At the start of the project, M’s social and emotional barriers and challenging behaviour were apparent, as he was faced with a new routine, new group of peers and new environment. The nature of our work with young people often requires flexibility of times and schedules, a concept which conflicted with M’s need for strict routine and familiarity. As a result, his behaviour could become obsessive and fixated, and he could turn verbally aggressive to staff. An example of this would be in his attitude towards the food provision for the project. One day when milk was missing at the start of session, and M had become
used to having it immediately, he had a small episode of anger, demanding it from the team and quickly becoming challenging to work with. Again, a few days later, the team put a sanction on certain treats which were offered as some participants had not been respectful enough. M felt indignant that he had not acted disrespectfully and so could not understand why he would be punished alongside all of his peers. Staff introduced a new system to reintroduce the treats, but what this really highlighted was M’s need of routine and inability to comprehend changes to that which were not a direct result of his actions. By the end of the project, staff were happy to observe that M was more flexible with his routine; despite still functioning best in his familiar schedule, he was able to understand staff explanations as to why changes had been made and was able to internally cope with this.

Being in a mixed group, comprising those with and without disabilities, as well as a range of ages between 11 and 25, was an entirely new experience for M, and rather daunting in the first instance. However, as the weeks progressed, he was able to interact with a wider group of peers and not just those he was friends with prior to the project, and come out of his shell.

M is very keen on crafts and so came into his own when designing sets, props and costumes. He took huge pride in his work and how his contribution had aided the production. Dramatically, M focused on body conditioning as his progression focus for the project. He needed to focus on his physical positioning and his role, committing to where he was needed to be on stage and how that contributed to the team effort. He took this on very positively, thinking very carefully about how his physical presence impacted the performance and his peers, instilling a sense of responsibility for himself and how this could impact the bigger picture.

M’s father, sister and grandmother were delighted to see him perform both at Chats Palace and at Hackney Empire.

M participating in a group exercise
Case Study 2
T turned 11 years old in July 17, making her the youngest participant on the Exposure project. T was amongst our transition participants, preparing to enter secondary education at the time of the project.

Immediate has worked with T since she was 6 years old, but lost engagement with her when we relocated our session out of her her local area. She tried to continue attending in our new location on Nightingale Estate, but this was not sustained beyond a few weeks. We got back into contact with T when we informed her family of the passing of our Associate Director Tony Gouveia earlier this year, and as a result were able to reintegrate T to Immediate Theatre through the Exposure project as it was dedicated to his memory.

T is described as quite feisty, with a strong personality which is often dominating, opinionated, and at times self-centred and not a team-player. All of this is, however, balanced out by her many redeeming qualities which manifested after staff challenged her problematic behaviour.

T’s main progression on the project lay in her relationships with peers. T’s two cousins also took part on Exposure, the younger as a participant and the elder as a peer facilitator. T experienced quite strong jealousy when other participants formed relationships with her younger cousin and at one point this nearly led to a physical altercation which was resolved before it escalated. T had to learn about healthy relationships in this instance, discovering the importance of branching out and allowing friendships to form outside of your own.

T also had to learn about integrating with those who are older and those who have learning disabilities. At the start of the project she found those with learning disabilities somewhat funny, not through malicious intent, but rather through lack of exposure prior to this. As the weeks went on, she was able to develop her empathy and eventually took on a role as a buddy by checking on participants with learning disabilities at lunch time. This behavioural change seen in T over the course of the project highlights the importance of engaging transition you people on the project; it is vital for their social development at this crucial age to introduce them to wider pool of peers in preparation for secondary school and indeed the wider world.

Staff stated that the real changing point for T was when making costumes for the performance. Participants were asked to design a black t-shirt using neon paint with total artistic freedom. Staff never got to see the t-shirts until the dress rehearsal, and when T came on stage it was very emotional as her t-shirt had the name of our late Associate Director written across it. This brought to forefront why she was taking part and how her compassion could manifest in her creativity.
Lessons Learnt
- Working with an inclusive group is both very exciting and positive for all. Having a suitable space which facilitated everyone’s needs was essential as was the travel budget to support attendance.
- Having an inclusive staff team enhanced what the group achieved. We should look to sustain the diversity of ethnicity and age as well as including disabled artists in the future. This is the first time that we have engaged support workers for disabled artists, it was a great enabler and we will look to do this again in the future.
- Sharing food at lunch time has a very positive impact on developing a supportive team. It would be even better if we could provide hot food which some children are missing out on during the holidays.
- The young people really enjoyed performing at the Hackney Empire though the transition was a challenge for staff. The project has helped us re-establish a relationship with the Empire which we hope to develop.
- Outreach work conducted by Peer Facilitators prior to the project was very successful and we need to ensure this same effort occurs in future years.
- The staff team, particularly Jerome Boothe felt both inspired and empowered by Rob Watt and this is already impacting on the work that he is delivering in our regular youth theatres.

The Artistic Team
Directors: Rob Watt
Jerome Boothe
Charmain Humphrey

Designers: Jo Paul
Artistic Director Jo Carter
Technical Support Gary Horsman
Peer Facilitators: Prince Owusu
Hope Udeme
Kyarna Morris
Felicia Ellis

Support Workers: Clara Behmenburg
Anna Van Der Poorten
Silvina de Vita
Immediate Theatre
The company’s purpose is to involve communities in making theatre that inspires wellbeing, breaks down barriers and engages people in the process of personal and social change. Our work is:

**Inclusive**
Working at the grassroots and celebrating diversity

**Interactive**
Involving communities throughout the creative process

**Imaginative**
Finding new ways of engaging with vital issues

Immediate Theatre
24 Ashwin Street
London
E8 3DL
T: 020 7682 3031
E: info@immediate-theatre.com
W: www.immediate-theatre.com

*All photographs courtesy of Andy Drysdale*