

Estate-based Youth Theatre

Immediate
Theatre

SUMMER EXPOSURE 2020 *'Deliver Who', 'Shielding' & 'No New Norm'*



3 – 14 August 2020
Wally Foster Community Centre

Immediate
Theatre



PROJECT SUMMARY

The process for this project began in March when our young people applied for funding from the Youth Opportunity Fund to develop a script in collaboration with a professional playwright, based on themes that resonated with them. Due to COVID-19, this funding opportunity was suspended, and the team awaited information on lockdown. We were able to secure a smaller grant from the Youth Opportunity Fund and a CVC Summer Innovation Grant from London Youth in June/July, which enabled us to put in motion, in line with government guidelines, the go-ahead to complete face-to-face work.

Justin Marosa was selected to produce a script and began working with participants of our regular Wally Foster Youth Theatre, taking stimuli from their work over the previous term, where they has been exploring wellbeing. The group wanted to create a play which would explore mental health/wellbeing in relation to digital devices, and the increased screen time young people had experienced during lockdown. They decided on the title 'Afraid to Unlock?', inspired by a piece of writing from one of the Wally Foster members. Through three development workshops, young people worked alongside Justin to explore these ideas and develop a structure for the play. These workshops enabled young people to gain an understanding of the processes that go into creating a new piece of work and gave them a sense of autonomy in their summer project – something we felt important after the effects of COVID-19. During this process, the focus shifted to relationships, and young people wanted to create a piece which explored how the lockdown had impacted on their relationships. In the end, three separate scripts were produced – '**Deliver Who**', '**Shielding**' and '**No New Norm**'.

The project took place from 3rd – 14th August at the Wally Foster Community Centre, welcoming 17 young people aged 12-25 (inclusive of young people with SEND). Justin Marosa led the project as Playwright/Director, with support from Hannah Drummond as Project Coordinator and Kyarna Morris, Julene Robinson and Montell Pemberton as Facilitators/Co-Directors. The team were further supported by Peer Facilitator Isla Rainforth and placement students Hannah Cassidy-Matthews and Sophy Johnston. Participation Manager Charmain Humphrey oversaw the team, ensuring Immediate Theatre practices were implemented and all members of the team were fulfilling their roles. Charmain was also on hand to support the young people with 1-2-1s and referrals, as well as being the designated first aider and enforcing all COVID health and safety measures throughout the project.

We were delighted to be able to work with designer Amanda Mascarenas again this year. Amanda worked with Justin to create a moveable and modern design that worked with all three scripts. Justin also had specific ideas about costume that would easily highlight the protagonist of the piece.

The project culminated in three final performances which were filmed and edited by the team and shared privately with young people, parents and the Immediate Theatre team. Young people also engaged in Free Writing, Photography/Filming and Dramaturgy workshops. Many of our regular participants have a talent for spoken word/poetry, so we felt it was only natural that we allowed them to explore these skills in new ways and engage other young people in the art of writing. Throughout the project, numerous young people had the opportunity to use the cameras and understand the basics of photography through documenting the process. Dramaturgy was explored throughout the process as the young

people engaged with the importance of composition, particularly when filming, in order to convey the themes/messages within the scripts. Young people also developed some fun 'takeover' content for our social media during the project, coordinated by Hannah Drummond and Immediate Theatre's Marketing Officer Georgia Gill, which they really enjoyed taking part in.

KEY AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- ➔ Support young people in developing social skills, confidence, team working and listening skills
- ➔ Support young people to work through social distancing measures and re-engage in a face-to-face setting
- ➔ Produce a series of filmed performances exploring topics chosen by young people

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Based on young people's goal setting forms completed at the beginning and the end of the project:

- 88% of participants reported that they had fun and made friends in the project
- 88% of participants reported that they developed their theatre skills
- 63% of participants reported that they had explored issues/themes relevant to them
- 88% of participants felt they had contributed their ideas
- 50% of participants reported that their confidence had increased as a result of taking part in the project
- 63% of participants felt they were more able to trust others at the end of the project, compared to 28% at the start
- 63% of participants reported that they felt proud of themselves at the end of the project
- 100% of participants felt they were able to support others at the end of the project, compared to 29% at the start
- 38% of participants reported that they were more able to understand emotions and have empathy for others at the end of the project, compared to 15% at the start

Significantly, the average score for overall life satisfaction on Cantril's Ladder increased from 4/10 at the beginning of the project to 7/10 at the end of the project.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Witnessing the positive journey of all participants, but the following in particular:

X began the project being an insular young person, happily working alone on tasks and not really engaging with their peers. Having worked in a group with other young people of a similar and older age to themselves, X really began to grow in confidence and became more comfortable working in the group. They played a significant role in one of the films and began to develop a good understanding of character and stage presence. The team felt that working in these smaller groups allowed X to have the space to be heard and be creative. They allowed themselves to get to know their peers during breaks and built positive relationships within the company. This was highlighted clearly when on the last day of the project, X's highlight was 'getting to meet new people and make friends'.

Y has been a participant of Immediate Theatre for many years, attending our regular Estate-based Youth Theatre sessions, and is very particular about the people they trust and makes connections with – specifically within the staff team. Y had to adapt this year as member of staff they are usually supported by were not able to do so in the capacity they usually would, due to role allocations. Y built a positive relationship with our student placement Sophy within the first week of the project and this was a great development in Y's understanding of change. Y flourished in the sessions and filming, no longer worrying about where their favourite staff members were and instead focussing on the task at hand.

Z has been a regular attendee of our EbYT sessions and has struggled in previous terms with appropriate behaviour and focus. Z came into the project on the second week and spent no time at all sourcing the play they wanted to go into – once they had been given their role they set to task on learning lines and supporting the group with other tasks. On the day before filming, one of the other participants dropped out, leaving a lot of lines and scenes bare. Z stepped up and offered to fill in this role, promising to go home and learn the lines for the next day. Z showed up the next day with their lines learnt and ready to be filmed. Z has really matured and become a great team player through the course of this project and the team are really proud of them.

Excellent behaviour and understanding of the social distancing measures from participants:

All of our young people and staff team had to work hard on ensuring social distancing measures were upheld throughout sessions and had to navigate producing a performance which explored relationships from a distance. They did so with maturity and professionalism – this in turn highlighted their improved behaviour across the board, having previously worked with participants in our EbYT sessions. Having three separate plays to develop also enabled participants to work in smaller bubbles.

It was particularly impressive considering the age range of young people, from ages 12-25. All participants displayed professionalism when working in their groups and during the filming process, working long days and re-taking footage where required, with little to no complaints or 1-2-1's needed.

Inclusivity of the project:

This year's project saw a bigger mix of participants with varying needs and from various backgrounds. The three groups were not divided based on learning differences or skillset and this worked well. Young people treated one another with respect and allowed those who may need additional support or reasonable adjustment to work on their communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to work in a group and adapt to different situations.

Each group created positive relationships with one another and supported each other throughout the process. Some young people who have not worked in a mixed skilled environment before really rose to the challenge and this resulted in professional work produced as an ensemble. Young people also learnt about patience and compassion, learning how to navigate those with additional needs and supporting wherever they could.

Re-engaging in face-to-face work:

We are particularly proud of the young people's resilience in coming back to face-to-face working. This can be tiring, daunting and anxiety inducing for various reasons. The Exposure participants managed to navigate this potentially difficult adjustment with maturity and humour. We were especially impressed by our SEND participants, who adjusted and adapted

to the new ways of working very well, and by our team, who created various creative and playful methods to ensure social distancing was upheld.

New ways of producing and promoting work at Exposure:

Under normal circumstances, Exposure would produce two live performances for family members to come and see; however, this year the decision was made to create a filmed production that could be viewed by parents from home. We believe this decision moved appropriately with the times and created a new way of working for Immediate Theatre, and in particular the Exposure project. With any new medium/creative elements added to a long-standing project, there were areas which needed to be tweaked, however, we feel it is incredibly positive to know what we as a team, and our young people, can achieve outside of the realms of 'normal' working practice. We also did an Instagram takeover with the participants, which went really well and is something we plan to expand on in the future.

STAFF COMMENTS

"Watching the young people focus and produce a high-quality piece of work – having never worked on a film before, they were all really professional and their attitude to social distancing was amazing!" – Montell Pemberton

"They learned over the course of the project where and how to support each other better without being prompted and each young person's confidence improved. They now have a film they can use to promote themselves and their talents beyond Immediate Theatre" – Hannah Cassidy-Matthews

"I think they were incredibly excited and grateful to see us and each other face-to-face again, so the interaction and social element was very important even if social distancing measures were enforced. I think a lot of the young people gained a huge amount of confidence, both in performance and with each other – they definitely came out of their 'lockdown' shells over the course of Exposure" – Sophy Johnston

"I feel the young people enjoyed themselves and grew through the process. They managed to work well in their own groups during the rehearsal process. It's great to see young people adding their skillsets to the pieces through improvisation and poetry. They also learnt to perform to camera as opposed to stage" – Justin Marosa

"The best bit of Exposure was not only seeing participants I am already familiar with but also identifying relationships with new young people. My brother, a participant, has confided that he has gained confidence from Exposure. This gain was present with all the young people" – Kyarna Morris

"I was thrilled to be back in a physical space with our young people and it was clear from their consistency and professionalism that they were too! I believe the young people and the team worked well on ensuring the restrictions were upheld and ensured this did not affect their experience or creativity" – Hannah Drummond



LESSONS LEARNT

Looking at the various ways of uploading and previewing work:

On reflection, although the upload to YouTube worked effectively, it would have been more climactic for the young people to have performed live in the Wally Foster Centre. The project didn't have the 'normal' thrill of finishing the performance and although that is the nature of filming, we feel that next time it would be important to find a way of incorporating that alongside learning and working with the new mediums. This could have been achieved through live streaming the performances to the audience, for example. This would also allow us to capture an audience number for the live sharings.

Staff Training/Team:

Some members of the team were employed later on in the planning process and missed the staff training – it would have been beneficial to have found some time to cover the key aims and roles of the project with new staff members. One solution is to create a basic staff training booklet that outlines how Immediate Theatre operates summer programmes, who is who and how certain elements work as these vary from company to company.

Editing time:

We felt that the final quality of the work would have been higher if the editing process was longer – there could have been a 7-day turnaround to allow editing to happen with the final shots. This could have worked alongside the livestream – the audience could view a live version and a final edited film to be shared more widely and kept as a memory for the young people. This would also have allowed the young people more time to explore and film with Justin, which they all really enjoyed.

STAFF TEAM

Charmain Humphrey – Participation Manager
Hannah Drummond – Project Coordinator
Justin Marosa – Writer/Director

Montell Pemberton – Facilitator/Co-Director
Kyarna Morris – Facilitator/Co-Director
Julene Robinson – Facilitator/Co-Director
Isla Rainforth – Peer Facilitator
Sophy Johnston – Student Placement
Hannah Cassidy-Matthews – Student Placement

Amanda Mascarenas – Designer

"Staff worked well together considering some people were new" – Montell Pemberton

"I found the team very welcoming and really enjoyed working with everyone. There was such a good balance of skills that brought out something different in each of the young people" – Sophy Johnston

"I felt all the team worked hard for each other and wanted to support each other, especially through warm up games and getting young people to focus" – Justin Marosa

"There was communication at all times and roles were evenly delegated. We were also able to successfully cover each other's groups when a team member was absent" – Kyarna Morris

