

The value of sustained participation in drama activities

Evidence of impact of Estate Based Youth Theatre.

Organisation Immediate Theatre

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1. Executive Summary

Estate Based Theatre is a programme of long-term, rolling theatre provision, run for disadvantaged young people by Immediate Theatre. The programme aims to help users develop improved interpersonal skills, artistic abilities, and emotional health and wellbeing. During 2015-16, Immediate Theatre worked with the Project Oracle Arts Cohort, to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme in these areas. Working with a small sample of thirty two young people, the evaluation found initial evidence that the programme was effective in improving the behaviour, engagement and personal conduct of young people. This finding was statistically significant, with the moderate effect comparable to providing the young people with an additional six months of educational progress. Young people's scores improved on each of the five subscales by between 5% and 13%. Evidence from five young people selected to act as case studies also found that the programme may help users to improve their artistic ability and communication skills. A range of staff observations, young people's self-reports and parent interviews were used.

2. Background

The Estate Based Youth Theatre programme (EBYT) has been part of Immediate Theatre's core offer in Hackney since 1999. During this time we have worked on more than fifteen estates and provided a ladder of opportunity for young people to develop {progress} from initial engagement to accredited training and work opportunities.

The programme aims to achieve improved emotional health and wellbeing and increased cultural capital for young people at risk of exclusion. This {change} is evidenced by measuring improved interpersonal skills, increased performance and theatre-making skills and improved community relationships, as detailed in the Theory of Change.

EBYT provides a rolling programme of free weekly drama sessions for young people living in areas of high deprivation who would not otherwise be able to access arts provision and the benefits it can offer. Immediate Theatre currently delivers nine sessions a week in six locations, with 264 registered participants between April 2015 – March 2016. Around 25% of participants remain engaged for two to three years.

Sessions are provided after school, offering constructive activities at a time when many young people are unsupervised and have nothing to do. Younger groups (8-11yrs) are provided from 4pm to 5:15pm and older groups (11-16yrs) from 5:30pm to 7pm. In response to identified need, in some areas we have adjusted the age ranges to 5-8yrs and 8-13yrs. Each term culminates in a sharing of work with family and friends. Refreshments are provided at all sessions, and one project includes a shared meal for attendees every week.

EBYT takes place in very resource-constrained areas. Young people who attend our sessions are often not attending any other youth provision. Regular attenders include a range of young people needing additional one-to-one pastoral support. All sessions are inclusive and we engage with a high number of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. One session a week is targeted at young people with significant disabilities and is delivered in partnership with a specialist provider; this caters for users aged 12-25yrs and includes transport and one-to-one care where needed. One session a week is held at Arcola Theatre and is targeted at older young people (14-19yrs) who are interested in working at greater depth but who still require pastoral support.

Sessions are structured to include:

- warm up activities - games to develop skills e.g. team working; confidence,
- a main activity - development of ideas responding to a variety of stimulus, generally working in small groups,
- show back - performance, feedback and reflection.

We also provide between two and five weeks of daytime (between 10am and 5pm) holiday activities, working towards larger productions for local community audiences. Productions are supported by additional theatre practitioners such as playwrights, designers and musicians. Work is regularly accredited, and there are opportunities for young people to see professional performances.

All sessions are staffed by at least two experienced and consistent youth arts professionals, who are supported by Peer Facilitators; trainees identified through our programmes aged between 16 and 25yrs. We expect to work with a staff ratio of about 1:5, enabling us to support young people who struggle to participate positively. One-to-one time with a named worker is provided for those with particular needs and this can lead to further contact with parents, schools and other services. The programme maintains close links with other local providers and specialist services to facilitate cross-referral and signposting.

Participants are recruited through posters and flyers distributed through schools and housing providers. Taster sessions are delivered in schools including exclusion units, and street outreach work is conducted at the outset of new projects.

Please see attached Theory of Change.

Immediate Theatre is now looking at disseminating the EBYT model to other local authorities, and as part of this journey is working to establish a clear evaluation methodology.

3. Methodology

In order to evaluate the programme, Immediate Theatre was selected to work with Project Oracle in the 2015 - 2016 Arts Cohort. This year-long programme enabled a cluster of Arts Organisations to explore innovative ways of evaluating their programmes. Organisations

were encouraged to consider approaches rarely used in Arts settings, such as staff observations.

The aim of the evaluation was to support the EBYT team in establishing a higher standard of evidence of effectiveness for the programme, providing:

- clear information for the staff team, enabling them to track young people's development
- improved evidence for both current and potential funders
- a means of accumulating information about participants over several years
- an opportunity to pilot new evaluation tools and processes.

The EBYT programme presented a number of challenges for evaluation, including:

- it engages a wide range of ages, including young people with SEND,
- it allows young people to join the programme at any point during the year, so there is often no clear 'start' point for the groups,
- external factors often result in young people dropping out of the project without notice,
- there may be no clear 'exit' point as participants often re-engage at a later point.

With this in mind, the EBYT and Project Oracle teams took a triangulation approach to the evaluation. A combination of staff observations, self-report forms for young people, and parent interviews were used, enabling a broad range of interpretations of the programme to be explored.

Baseline measurements were taken in autumn 2015, at the beginning of the EBYT year. Endline measurements occurred in Summer 2016, during the end of the EBYT cycle, as young people were engaged in end-of-year performances.

1. Staff Observations

The whole delivery team were involved in designing two structured observation matrices, enabling staff to assess each individual's progression through the programme. The observation tools were designed alongside Project Oracle, using Immediate Theatre's existing measures and research into other systems such as the National Youth Council of Ireland's Outcomes Framework¹. These matrices proved the most valuable element of the evaluation, providing staff with a systematic means of reflecting on the development of both individuals and groups, identifying where additional support is needed and where people need to be set higher goals.

¹ <http://www.youtharts.ie/sites/youtharts.ie/files/NYCIDescribingTheOutcomes.pdf>

Structured observations are rarely used by arts organisations when performing evaluations. In the course of their training, many arts practitioners become highly-skilled at noticing the nuances of young people's behaviours, and finding creative ways to respond to these. This is especially true for practitioners involved in drama and theatre. However, observations are rarely ever systematically conducted and recorded by staff. Though informal observations are often logged, they are rarely ever aggregated and used as part of an evaluation.

Enabled by work with the Project Oracle's Arts Cohort, the Artistic Director involved the entire delivery team in designing the structured observation system, recognising that this would be a rare opportunity to explore this evaluation approach with staff buy-in and expert support. In particular, the use of structured observation matrices meant findings could be analysed statistically, and the effectiveness of the programme could be benchmarked against other interventions.

Assessment is done out of the session; results are discussed in team meetings and additional notes kept to identify key points. A database is being created to log and track this information across the programme. Having initially planned to use this tool for a sample group of young people, the company have now decided to extend it to include all participants apart from young people with significant disabilities. Observations are expected to be reviewed at least termly, with initial observation taking place approximately six weeks after initial engagement.

In future, we intend to introduce an external observer to sessions to moderate the results.

Observation Framework 1: Behaviour and Self Conduct Matrix (see appendix)

To use this matrix, staff scored each participant against five characteristics:

A= Engagement and Focus,

B= Behaviour,

C= Attitude and enthusiasm,

D= Contribution,

E= Teamwork.

Each characteristic is assessed across a scale of one to five. For example:

A. Engagement and Focus,

1 = Unable/refuses to engage and focus on any task set and disrupts the rest of the group as a result.

2 = Can focus for a short period of time and then is difficult to re-engage.

3 = Can remain focused and engaged for the most part of the session, but can be distracted.

4 = Easily engaged and remains focused for the majority of the session.

5 = Always willing to engage in all activities and remains focused on the tasks set throughout.

Total scores for the tool range from 5 (lowest possible score) to 25 (highest possible score).

Performance and Artistic Outcomes Matrix (see appendix)

Staff scored each participant in the following areas:

- A= Communication,
- B =Technical Ability,
- C= Expression/Performance Ability,
- D =Artistic Confidence,
- E = Creative Thinking.

Each area is assessed across a scale of five, in the same way as the Behaviour and Self Conduct Matrix discussed above. Total scores range from 5 - 25.

2. Interviews with parents/carers.

A formal set of interview questions have been developed to improve the quality of feedback from parents, enabling us to back up information gathered through participant data and staff observation.

1. How does your child feel about coming to the estate based youth theatre sessions?
2. Do you think the project has had any impact, for better or worse, on your child?
3. Do you think the project changed their confidence and self-esteem for better or worse?
4. Do you think the project changed their behaviour for better or worse? (for example, accept instructions, relationships with peers and adults)
5. Has the project influenced their performance skills?
6. Do you think the project has had an impact on their overall life satisfaction / happiness? Where would put this YP on the ladder (this is provided on the sheet).
7. Has this changed since they joined? Why?

Where possible interviews are conducted face-to-face, and otherwise by phone. The standardised questionnaire is providing a higher standard of evaluation, however the background of the young people we work with means that it is often hard to contact parents, many of whom struggle to communicate in English.

3. Participant Goal Setting and Evaluation forms:

These forms are completed at the beginning of the autumn term (by week 3) when most new participants register, and at the beginning of each summer holiday project. The Evaluation forms are completed after a particular event (e.g. a performance), or at the end of the year.

We aim to ensure that all new participants complete a form as part of the registration process.

The questions include what the young people want to gain from participation, covering:

- personal development, e.g. make friends; perform in front of an audience,
- what aspects of theatre they are most interested in,
- what life skills they are keen to develop, e.g. trusting others; working as part of a team.

The form also includes Cantril's Ladder, an internationally-recognised tool for measuring Overall Life Satisfaction. This tool replaced a much longer standardised self-assessment questionnaire which had been used with older participants, often with inconclusive results. We are aware that Cantril's ladder is not commonly used for young people aged below 11, however we have found that participants below this age have been able to understand how to use the tool. Overall, we have found it useful in capturing a snapshot of participants' overall health and wellbeing.

The participant Goal Setting and Evaluation forms provide data about the young people, what they want to gain from the experience, and feedback on whether they are achieving these aims. We are aware that they provide limited data regarding the outcomes of the programme, but find they are still a useful comparative document.

Copies of these forms are included in the appendix

Sample Group

Three Hackney-based EBYT groups participated in the evaluation, with young people aged 8-11yrs. Out of a total sixty-four participants who engaged in the groups during the relevant 2015-16 period, thirty-two were observed on the Behaviour and Conduct matrix, representing a 50% retention rate. This sample attrition was a result of not all young people being available during the periods when baseline and endline observations were conducted. Some young people engaged after the initial observation period, and some young people left before the period completed. This is to be expected, given the open-access nature of the programme, and the disruptive life events often experienced by target young people.

In addition to this, five young people were selected as case studies, allowing the EBYT team to pilot processes for implementing the evaluation tools. In addition to being assessed on the Behaviour and Conduct matrix, these young people were also observed on the Performance and Artistic Outcomes matrix, and using the goal setting forms with Cantril's Ladder. Interviews were also performed with a parent/carer of two of the five young people.

Criteria for selection were:

- 1) The male/female selection should reflect the ratio in the group. The relevant EBYT group was 60% female, so three young women were involved.
- 2) The age range selection should reflect the age range in the group
- 3) The length of time attended should reflect the group, e.g. if 50% have attended for over one year then 50% of those assessed should be selected from this cohort. It is important that some new starters are selected.

These criteria were successfully met.

It should be noted that we did not set criteria for selection on grounds of ethnicity, but of those selected, three identified as Black African, two as Black British and one as Bangladeshi. This is a reasonable representation of the diversity of the group.

4. Results

Overall the evaluation found evidence of improvements in the behavioural conduct, wellbeing, performance and communication skills in the small sample of young people considered in the evaluation.

Behaviour and Conduct Matrix

Across the group, young people's total scores in these observations improved by 10%, as can be seen in Table 1. This finding is statistically significant ($p = 0.012$). Based on a classification system developed by the Education Endowment Foundation, this suggests that the programme had a moderate to large positive effect on the young people (Cohens $d = 0.4$). It can be considered equivalent to offering the young people six months of additional schooling, allowing them to achieve six months more progress in their personal conduct². This is an impressive finding, though based on a small sample size and without a comparison group.

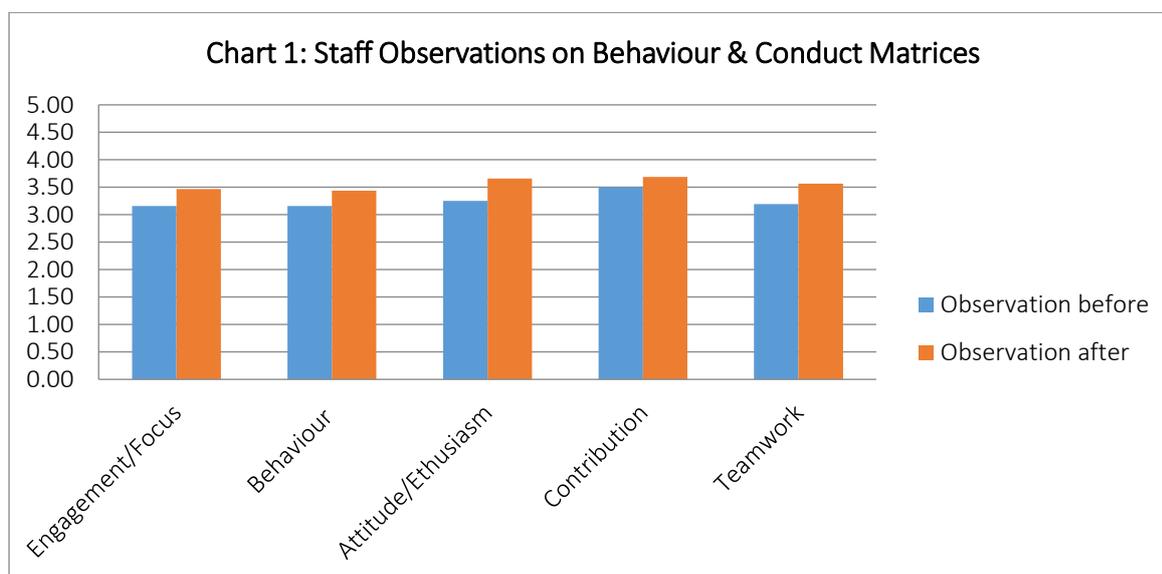
Table 1: Behaviour and Conduct Matrix results

Characteristic observed	No. participants	Average beginning score	average end score	% improvement	P value	Significance (p<0.05)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Engagement /Focus	32	3.16	3.47	10%	0.048	sig.	0.27
Behaviour	32	3.16	3.44	9%	0.071	ns	0.28
Attitude	32	3.25	3.66	13%	0.003	sig.	0.48
/Enthusiasm	32	3.50	3.69	5%	0.110	ns	0.24
Contribution	32	3.19	3.56	12%	0.062	ns	0.33
Teamwork	32	3.19	3.56	12%	0.062	ns	0.33
Total	32	16.16	17.81	10%	0.012	sig.	0.39

Young people's scores also improved on each of the five subscales by between 5% and 13%. The largest improvements were seen in attitude and enthusiasm, followed by teamwork. This is shown in Table 1 above and Chart 1 below.

² For an interpretation of effect sizes, see EEF Teaching and Learning Appendices, technical appendices (Higgins, 2012)

[https://v1.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Technical_Appendices_\(July_2012\).pdf](https://v1.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Technical_Appendices_(July_2012).pdf)



These findings were echoed during the two parent interviews conducted. One of the parents commented on the improved behaviour of her child, noting that working regularly with “firm and fair staff” was helping her son to become more disciplined. Engaging in performances with moral themes were also helping him understand “what’s fair and what isn’t”.

The goal setting forms and wellbeing scale completed by the five young people in acting as case studies provided further insight into these findings. All of the young people wanted to improve in behaviour and conduct related outcomes. At the end of the programme, young people were more mixed in the extent to which they felt they had improved. Two of the five felt that they were doing better after participating in EBYT, one was unsure, and two did not feel like they had improved.

Young people providing case studies were also asked to rate their wellbeing using Cantril’s ladder, scoring their overall wellbeing from 0 - 10. An average score is 5 - 6. Scores above 7 are considered high, or ‘thriving’. A score of 4 or below represents young people who are ‘struggling’ with low wellbeing.

Two of the five children expressed marked improvements in their wellbeing, moving from the ‘average’ range of the wellbeing scale to the ‘very high, thriving’ range. One child had high wellbeing throughout the period. Two of the children showed reduced wellbeing, moving from average and high scores to low scores on the scale. Interestingly, the two young people whose wellbeing declined were also the two who felt that their behavioural performance had declined. Discussions with EBYT staff revealed that both of these young people had experienced significant personal and family distress around the time that the endline measurements were conducted, which might explain their declining scores.

Staff observations were similar to the self-reports of the young people. The two young people who reported the greatest improvements in wellbeing and self-conduct also had the most significant

improvements on the observation matrices. The young people who felt that they had declining wellbeing and behavioural abilities had stable or slightly increasing scores on the staff observation matrices. The carer of one of the young people also noted that his behaviour and performance abilities had improved over time, which she associated with his improved ability to communicate with staff and peers, as a result of practising theatrical skills.

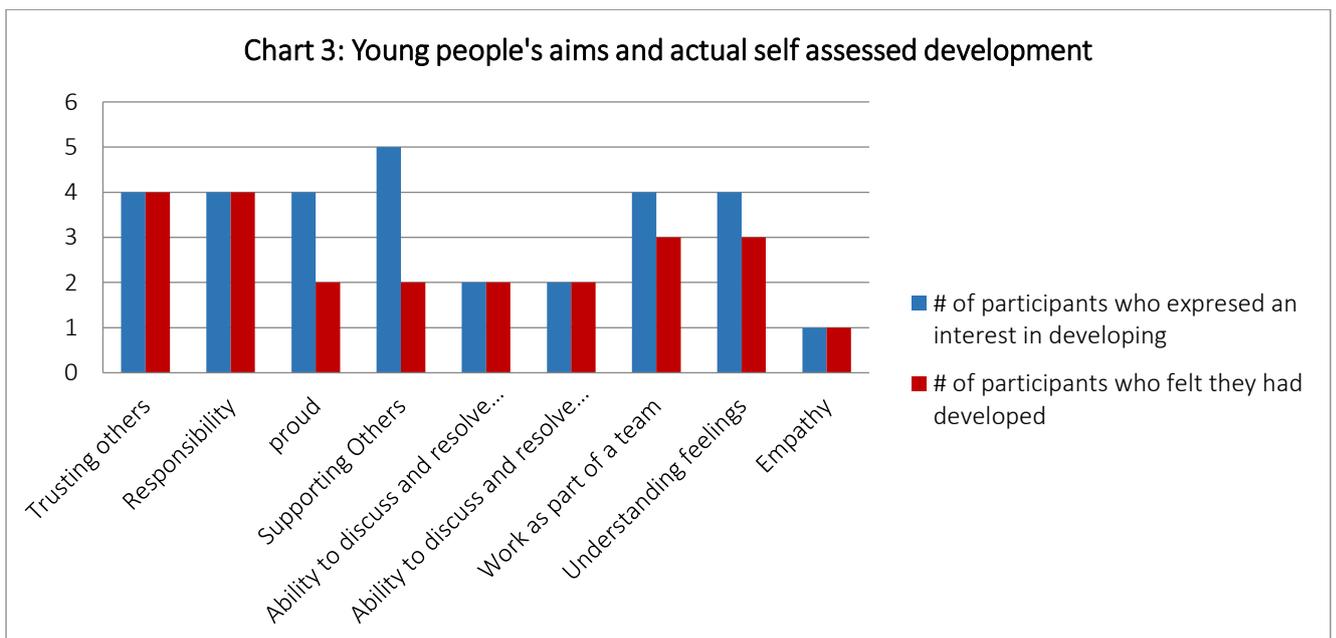
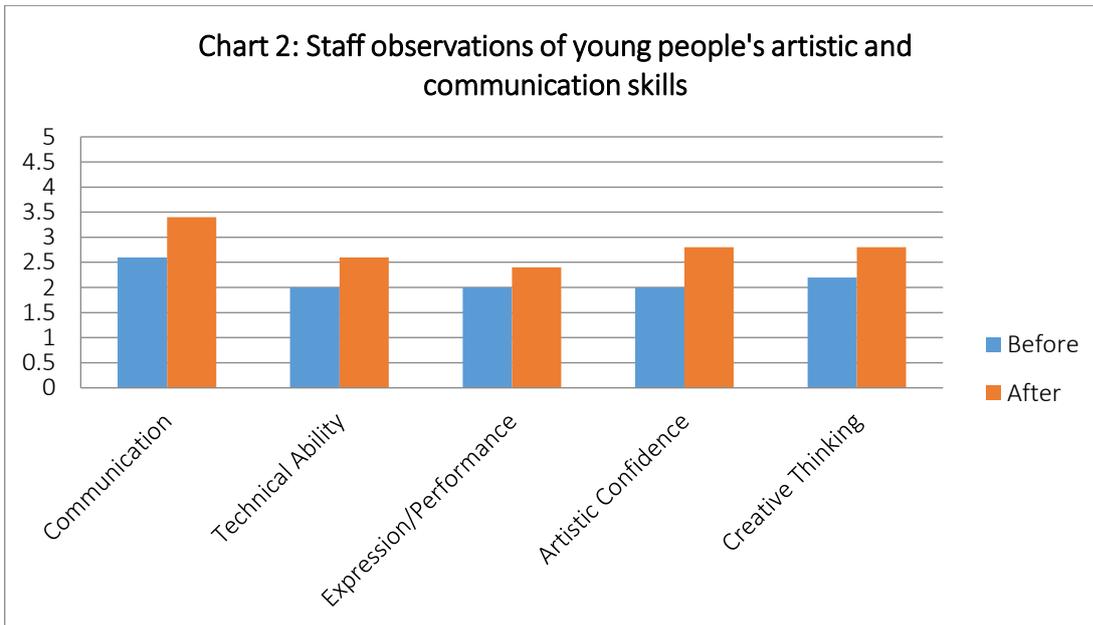
The relationship between the staff observations, parent observations and young people's own personal perceptions is illuminating. It may be that staff and parents were able to make a more holistic and long-term judgement of the behavioural capacities of participants. Thus staff may observe improvements in a young person's behaviour and artistic abilities, even when the young person is impacted by negative life-events, and doubts their own abilities.

Performance and communication skills

A sample of five young people were also observed by staff to assess changes in their performance and communication skills. Across the group, young people's scores improved by 0.4 – 0.8 points on the 5-point scale, suggesting a small to moderate improvement over the eight month observation period. The largest improvements were seen in communication skills, followed by artistic confidence. This is shown in Chart 2.

These findings were echoed during the two parent interviews conducted. Both parents commented that participating in EBYT had enabled their children to speak more confidently. Parents noted that by learning how to impersonate new characters, children found new ways to express themselves, and were thus more confident about expressing themselves in new situations. Learning through performance was especially useful for children with English as a second language, as it exposed them to new vocabulary. Interestingly, parents tended to see improvements in the artistic ability of young people as being directly linked to changes in their broader behaviour and communication skills, beyond engagement in the theatre. Thus parents felt that the programme was widely influencing the young people's lives.

As shown in Chart 3, four of the five young people surveyed at the end of the observation period also felt that their artistic confidence had improved as a result of participating. Similarly, four of the young people felt that they were more able to trust others and to work effectively as part of a team. Smaller proportions of the young people felt they had improved their ability to support others, and resolve problems with staff and peers. Both young people that felt they had improved in 'supporting others' have been a part of the group for over two years, and have been supported with one-to-one check-ins with staff through which they have developed very positive relationships. Staff commented that these particular young people are now able to help new participants who are less confident, leading to the feeling that they can support others



5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The five young people who were chosen to act as case studies to examine the effectiveness of the EBYT programme are a clear representation of the success of the EBYT programme .

The Estate Based Youth Theatre (EBYT) programme was established with the aim of engaging disadvantaged young people across the Borough of Hackney, who live in areas of high deprivation and would not otherwise be able to access the benefits that arts provision can offer. Additionally, this programme targets young people who are at risk of exclusion due to their challenging behaviour and personal conduct, and to support these young people in developing and improving their emotional health, wellbeing, interpersonal skills and artistic abilities.

Through the case studies and observations, it is clearly demonstrated that this programme achieved improvement in all of the above areas. There was a 5-13% development across all five skills that were targeted, which were focus, behaviour, attitude, contribution and teamwork. The largest improvements were seen in attitude and enthusiasm, followed by teamwork. There was a 10% overall improvement across the board. This demonstrates that the aims of behaviour and personal conduct were successfully achieved. Moreover, the interviews that were conducted with the parents demonstrate the skills that were developed during the programme are transferrable, as young people were able to apply them in a positive manner to other areas of their lives. Four of the young people also felt they were able to trust other people more.

The young people rated their wellbeing on Cantril's ladder after the programme and it showed that two navigated from an 'average' range to a 'very high, thriving' range, one remained at a high range throughout the programme and two declined due to negative events that happened in their lives during that time. However, staff observations of these young people concluded that there was improvement in both their behaviour and their artistic confidence, despite their own perceptions. This shows that the programme helped the two young people focus and participate in spite of the negative events that had occurred. The programme acted as a positive activity for the young people to engage with, directing their energy and focus into productive outcomes.

This programme is extremely significant and necessary, as it encourages young people to explore contemporary themes and issues relevant to their lives and environment in a safe and trusting space. This enables them to reflect on their choices and attitudes towards a diverse range of situations and events that they are either currently experiencing or may encounter in the future.

Overall, this evaluation has found some initial evidence that the EBYT programme is helping young people improve their behavioral conduct, wellbeing, performance and communication skills. Sizeable improvements were seen in the behavioral conduct of young people, with their ability to work in teams and engage in sessions with enthusiasm significantly improved. Parents linked improvements in the artistic abilities of young people to broader communication and behavioral improvements in the young people's lives.

The sample of young people and parents featured in this report was very small, reflecting the desire to explore whether the newly designed evaluation tools are effective. In the future, in order to demonstrate the full potential and the effectiveness of the programme, a larger sample of young people across all EBYTs should be observed and evaluated by all staff members working within each of the EBYTs. Additionally, evaluation should examine what other areas of young people's lives the programme has benefitted. Furthermore, data collected can be used to improve and develop the programme itself, and to improve future staff training.

Also, in-depth interviewing with more parents should be conducted in order to obtain a larger and more detailed report on the effect that the programme has on young people in other areas of their lives.

In future

- Use with a larger sample of young people / across multiple sites
- More in depth interviewing with parents

Reflections on performing the evaluation

Working with the Project Oracle Arts Cohort was very useful. It helped the whole organisation to focus on our approach to evaluation and ensured that we made maximum use of the process. Working alongside other organisations was very helpful, allowing us to compare and learn from each other's practise. The seminars brought new areas of learning to the organisation, particularly the use of "triangulation", making use of several pieces of evidence to create both more substantial data and a narrative for the progression made by both groups and individuals, where previous evaluation evidence had been viewed in isolation.

We were keen to formalise processes that staff were already using to provide evidence of progression. There was initial resistance to completing the observation matrix despite the significant involvement of the whole team in creating the tools. However, once staff started to use the matrix, they quickly appreciated how this helped them to reflect on the overall development of the group and to identify where individual young people required additional support. We now review this data termly and it enables us to deploy resources effectively. We have already been able to appreciate how the process can improve our work.

The information gathered has already proved useful in making reports and applying for funding. The data has enabled us to write succinct reports, demonstrating the impact of our work in ways that were simply not possible in the past. We can also predict the impact future programmes will have.

We are now using the standardised tools across our Estate Based Youth Theatre Projects and will have a significant amount of data by July 2017. In order to be able to support the data with interviews, we are looking to engage a student placement, as well as possibly working with business sector volunteers to increase the level of feedback from parents.

6. References

E.g. Smith, A. (XXX). Evaluation Research.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 The theory of change diagram.
- 7.2 Example surveys, questionnaires etc.
- 7.3 Any other relevant documents as required.