

**Project**

*Nightingale Estate Community Play*

**Partners**

*Nightingale Tenants Association, Young  
Hackney, Cooperative Supermarket Dalston,  
Rich Mix*

**Funders**

*Arts Council England  
Hackney Council*



# Birthday Cake

Nightingale Community Play

April – August 2016

# Summary

Birthday Cake was performed in the Nightingale Community Hall on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2016 (matinee and evening shows). The usually dull hall was transformed into a beautiful stage and the young people performed with great energy, enthusiasm and expression. There was very encouraging feedback from audience members and the team who were extremely pleased with young people's performances. 32 young people also received AQA qualifications following the two weeks' rehearsals and three shows.

The project commenced in April with an Inspiration Day involving artists and young people and exploring cultural commonalities and differences. This was a great opportunity to see how the young people responded to different styles (spoken word, movement and a "visual discovery tool" called Blippar, accessed via mobile phones). The common thread it revealed of "birthdays" took us by surprise but in hindsight was an obvious way of exploring home versus shared culture. It also allowed us to make the production part of Immediate Theatre's own 20th Birthday celebrations.

We were also very pleased to work with 12 young people from The Challenge who worked alongside the group to create a documentary about the project. We hope to have this available for sharing in the near future.

We encountered a number of challenges with funding, meaning we had to deliver one Inspiration Day instead of two but we soon discovered that we were able to deliver the same outcomes and outputs in spite of this disappointing set back. We had the pleasure of working with 32 amazing participants from the local community and for the first time young people with significant disabilities joined the group to produce an inspiring dynamic. We would sincerely like to thank the Arts Council for this fantastic opportunity to allow our young people who come from challenging backgrounds to experience the beauty of drama and the arts.



# Background

Established in 1996 Immediate Theatre has developed a strong local and regional reputation for delivering quality arts work with hard to reach communities. We currently run nine estate based youth theatres in areas of high deprivation and have a trainee programme developing young youth arts workers. We have been working on Nightingale (since November 2012). During this time we have developed a very positive relationship with the Residents Association who supported this project.

Statement from James Mac Daid – Chair of Nightingale Residents Association

“Nightingale Estate is a large residential estate with mixed tenancies, social and private housing. With this variety of living arrangements come communities and cultures that are diverse and wide ranging, with different cultural needs and considerations. Immediate Theatre is a community project that has been running successfully on the Nightingale Estate for over three years and has helped to bring our residents together by offering children on the estate the opportunity to engage in activities that the Residents Association fully supports but cannot provide. Currently, there is an imbalance of activities and programmes for the young people on the Estate with many community group enterprises only being available for older people, (such as the Luncheon Club, and day trips away). With the Regeneration of the Estate that will add 400 new housing units onto Nightingale, upwards of 85 housing units on Downsvie Primary School and upwards of 75 housing units on Downsvie Road, there will be a significant influx of new inhabitants, undoubtedly with families, and thus more young children and people. In addition, these new inhabitants, due to the prevalence of the housing (such as the Downsvie Primary school development 100%) being for private sale, the majority of these new residents will not be from the local area. Immediate Theatre thus offers an ideal opportunity for youth and thus, community engagement, but it needs the additional funding to ensure that it has the capacity to adequately engage with the additional demands on its time and resources.

The Nightingale Residents Association is trying to work more closely with Hackney Homes (from April 2016 Hackney Council) Residents Participation Office and Southern Housing Group to engage with the Estate inhabitants to raise awareness of community projects. Immediate Theatre will help us build our own partnerships not only with local residents but with our local housing services management providers. It will help engender a closer working relationship and show to the local residents the necessity and value of not only their Residents Association but also Hackney Homes and Southern Housing Groups. Since my Chairing of the Nightingale Residents Association I have tried to encourage and build that capacity, and Immediate Theatre helps in my role to deliver engaging community projects that bring people together, an often difficult task in a city like London, where according to a survey by Churchill Homes Insurance in 2013, over a third of people would not even recognise their neighbours in person. In addition, because of the unfortunate rising levels of ephiphobia, mixed with many young people coming from diverse backgrounds, there is a demand for better understanding between the youth and elderly people of our estate. Immediate offer that by showing children and young people, being what they are, children and young people, not a group to be feared, but an integral part of our community on Nightingale Estate.”

“I have learnt how to improvise and stay in character” (Participant, 16)

# Project Aims

- to work with new artists to develop skills which communicate beyond language
- to enable our staff to learn new approaches and skills which will apply to their work beyond the life of the project
- to invest time in outreach work in the Nightingale Estate area in order to attract an older age group [there is very little provision currently in the area]
- to explore a critical theme in our world at the moment: Our World, One World – the relationship between individual’s home culture and shared social culture

# Statistics

Participants engaged	32
Number of sessions held	46
Number of Peer Facilitators engaged	2
Freelance Artists employed	3
Period of employment for Artists (days)	184
Staff Artists employed	6
Volunteers Engaged	2
Partner organisations engaged in project	3
Audience benefiting from EBYT	155

“My best memory is doing a show with the new friends I’ve made.”  
(Participant, 12)

# The Participants

The participants were aged between 6-24 years and included both disabled and non-disabled young people. All the participants came from the local area or were residents on the estate. We had a very good mix of both male and female participants which we were really pleased about given that the Nightingale group is predominantly female. We also had a number of older young people which was quite encouraging for starting a regular older group in that area of the borough. We have found this group (12-19) is particularly difficult to engage.

The first week of rehearsals consisted only of young participants aged 11 + years and there was a very good uptake of 24 young people and by the second week we had 32 young people working together. The group consisted of six young people with disabilities, including two deaf girls who communicated through sign language on the other hand we had three young people who are committed to developing careers in the arts, one of whom is about to start at RADA (she is featured in the photographs below).

## Case Study 1 – Patrick Okobi



[Photo 1]

We first started working with Patrick approximately three years ago. Patrick is 21 years old and has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, meaning he gets quite anxious and isn't keen on making eye contact with people or socializing much. At the beginning of the project, Patrick constantly sat in the corner, eating his packed lunch on his own. By the middle of the week, during lunchtime, he was on an elevated stage in the community hall playing a beat on the African Drum for his peers to dance to. Then by the end of the week he was in the centre of the room, having lunch with his new girlfriend that he met through the project. She would sit alongside him whilst he played the drum. The beat that he had come up with during lunchtime was used for the movement section of the final performance.

At first Patrick struggled with his anxiety – as he was one of the main characters in the play and, therefore, had a lot of lines to learn, he worried whether he would be able to remember them off by heart. Patrick worked very hard with his peers in different groups which built his confidence all round. He found one particular scene very hard at the beginning of the rehearsal process, as he had to maintain eye contact and hug another young person (see photo 1). However, this was the scene that the audience found the most amusing out of the whole performance due to the humour that he injected with the timing of saying his lines and pausing at the appropriate parts. This was also one of the strongest scenes out of the whole performance. This was a major achievement for him as he managed to push through the uncomfortable barriers that are reinforced through his disability.



[Photo 2]

## Case Study 2 – Latia Jarvis Auguste



[Latia in the middle of the shot]

Latia is ten years' old. She is partially deaf and wears a hearing implant called a Baha System. Being part of the production helped Latia a lot. During the year she attends a special needs school but during the summer, for the last three years, she has attended Immediate Theatre's summer project. Her parents say she looks forward to this all year around as she is able to mix with young people her own age who are both disabled and non-disabled.

The week before the project started Latia started to use a new hearing aid which would enable her to hear higher pitched sounds that she had not been able to hear before. We had to be very aware of this in terms of the noise levels in the rehearsal space. We also made sure to explain this to her peers with regards to shouting and also to the sound team to make sure that there was no feedback coming through the equipment. Their awareness, in terms of the noise factor, made them aware and in this way they were inclusive as a whole team.

Over the week Latia's diction became clearer and her vocabulary also improved. At the beginning of the week a friend of Latia's, who attends the same school as her and who also wore a hearing aid, would sign for her to help her communicate better. But by the end of the week Latia was asking her not to sign for her, as she had become more verbal and more comfortable with communicating verbally with her peers.

Latia also shared ideas for one of the songs that we included in the final performance. She assisted in informing the staff of some signing words that would assist with the workshops. It was very clear to us that her confidence grew as the project progressed. She choreographed a section of one of the dances and showed other young people how to do gymnastics which was also used in the final performance. During the summer production, Latia made some new friends who didn't have a disability which contributed to her confidence. This is why she looks forward to our summer

project each year and why she shows great enthusiasm in participating – it gives her the chance to meet other young people with mixed abilities who are different ages. Latia has said that she is really looking forward to our next project as she is doing gymnastics at the moment and she would like to come back and incorporate her new skills in next year's show.



[Latia on the far left]

# The Play

The play was loosely based on the Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare and written by Jonny Wright, a spoken word artist and playwright. He was inspired by our young people during the Inspiration Day held in April which kick started the project. The theme for the year was Our World, One World which got the young people talking about their culture at home compared with the culture we share together every day. The theme which reoccurred was Birthdays and how everyone celebrates quite differently – some not at all. Jonny then included a very prevalent theme which is affecting us all in the world at the moment – refugees. The story began on the birthday of twins, James and Jill, when they had to run from their home as rebel soldiers invaded their town. They travel halfway across the world to end up in the seaside town of Illyria, where Jill disguises herself as a boy to survive in this new place and James tries to stay under the radar of the authorities. This is a story of refugees, love, loss, music and comedy, in spite of difficult situations.

This was a rap that was devised by our Playwright, Jonny Wright. It was performed during the play by Patrick Okobi (case study above):

This is the story of James and Jill  
Running from a country where they maim and kill

Walking through the desert, one step at a time  
Clinging to each other trying not to cry

Every step of the way, people joined from far and wide  
Life in a bag with their dreams packed inside

Sand storms it's depressing  
Hand shawn of possessions

They huddle together in the cold of the night  
Sounds all around it's another gun fight

Crossing borders tired and scared  
It's a refugee camp they get medical care

Here come the heroes to save the day  
For 2000 euros the smugglers take you away

Packed tight together on an old boat  
Black night bit of a surprise the thing stays afloat

Looking at the stars night after night  
Everyone is praying that land comes in sight

Big boat appears with lots of guys on  
Will freedom see them? Nope disappeared on the horizon

Where they're going I'll never know, a storm at sea begins to blow  
Gentle at first, but then gets worse and worse and worse

The boat tossed from side to side to side  
They said it was safe, I guess they lied

'My brothers over board' someone cries

His mother dives in, both are lost with the tide

The boat rides high on the waves  
People are screaming like the storm that won't behave

Then sound of a big crack, CRACK pitch black

ALL COLLAPSE ON THE STAGE. JILL GETS UP SLOWLY AND LOOKS AROUND FOR JAMES.  
SHE REACHES DOWN AND PICKS UP HIS PASSPORT, SHE OPENS AND LOOKS UP AND  
CALLS QUIETLY. James...James...JAMES



## The Performance

The rehearsals and performance were both based at Nightingale Community Hall. Cat Rolley, our designer, transformed the dull, outdated hall into a bright theatre, using lights, backdrops and costumes. Cat welcomed all of the young participants to be involved in the creative process of designing the backdrops and sets and one young participant found her calling in set design. The cast performed a matinee on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August to a full house and an evening performance that same day. On Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> August the team moved to Rich Mix in Shoreditch to perform to another sold out theatre. This gave the young people a fantastic opportunity to perform in a professional performance venue.

In post-show feedback, 93% of the audience felt that the performance celebrated the community across cultures and generations. 86% of the audience felt the performance was Excellent or Very Good.

"I think it was both entertaining and informative. The cast did very well in performing and showed lots of enthusiasm."

"The show was so wonderful, good performance and excellent experience for the children. It tells about the current situation."

"My child enjoyed having the opportunity to express themselves through drama and the interaction with their peers during both rehearsal and production."



"It was a really good story."  
(Participant, 11)

# The Artistic Team

Directors: Tony Gouveia  
Jerome Boothe  
Gina Theodotou  
Playwright: Jonny Wright  
Movement Director: Camila Rojas Cannobbio  
Designers: Cat Rolley  
Kasia Franczak  
Assistant Designers: Leann Ngenda  
Kettia Kinkufi  
Luyanda Muraya  
Lighting: Pete Morland  
Peer Facilitators: Isla Rainforth  
Claude Gowan

# BUDGET

We did not manage to raise as much as hoped for, particularly from the Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund. We did, however, manage to get sponsorship from our local Cooperative Supermarket in Dalston who covered a large chunk of the refreshment costs for participants. To show our appreciation we presented three participants with the Co-op Award for outstanding teamwork. Our Training Coordinator held outreach training for the Peer Facilitators involved on the project which was paid for by the Talent Match programme.

<b>Income</b>	<b>Projected</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Connecting Young Hackney	11,300	14,197	
Evening Standard Dispossessed Fun	17,500	0	
via Talent Match (Big Lottery Fund)	0	3,996	used to cover outreach training and Peer Facilitators
The Jack Petchey Foundation	200	200	
Support in Kind	1,400	1,600	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30,400</b>	<b>19,993</b>	
<b>Expenditure</b>			
<b>Salaried Staff</b>			
Artistic Director	4,493	3,223	
General Manager	2,062	1,562	
Associate Director	6,590	6,590	
Training Coordinator	0	501	
Participation Officer	4,403	2,846	
Youth & Schools Development Lead	4,743	0	
Youth Drama Worker	2,800	2,140	
Peer Facilitators	2,790	3,345	
<b>Total Staff Costs</b>	<b>27,881</b>	<b>20,207</b>	
<b>Project Costs</b>			
Freelance Artists	4,550	4,550	
Freelance Technical Staff	750	750	
Sets, Props, Costumes	1,600	1,400	
Venue Hire	1,375	2,250	
Equipment - lighting & sound	300	300	
Photocopying & printing of scripts	120	120	
Volunteer Costs	190	190	
Marketing - flyers & distribution	750	350	
Staff Travel	205	197	
Mobile Phones	350	350	
DBS x 3	255	256	
Participant Refreshments	1255	700	
Trips	400	400	
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	<b>12,100</b>	<b>11,813</b>	
Contribution to Overheads	4019	2973	
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>44,000</b>	<b>34,993</b>	

# Lessons Learnt

- Engaging young people aged 11-19 during the summer term is very challenging, next year we are looking to do intense engagement post the exam period through schools
- Bringing in freelance artists to work with our regular team is an inspiration not just to the young people but also to our staff team who now feel refreshed and ready for the New Year.
- It is very exciting to work in the community environment but in order to support inclusion of young people of different abilities and ages we need better facilities.

## 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.

### **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](mailto:info@immediate-theatre.com)

**W:** [www.immediate-theatre.com](http://www.immediate-theatre.com)

All photographs courtesy of Andy Drysdale