

20 stories high

YOUTH THEATRE

2010-11

Report



1. TIMELINE

- April 2010 *Ghost Boy* – following on from the Youth Theatre contributing to the research and Development of Keith Saha’s professional production throughout 2009, the group came to see the show at the Everyman Theatre. They created a post-show jam with the professional company and other local young people.
- April-July ‘10 *Contacting the World* – we were selected as one of the 12 CtW 2010 companies, and were twinned with 84 Theater in Tehran. The process involved the companies collaborating together to devise new pieces of theatre, which included 3 members of 20SH visiting Tehran. The companies performed their plays *Rain* (20SH) and *Magic Mountain* (84 Theater) performed their shows in their home cities, as well as at Contact in Manchester at the international youth theatre festival in July.



Sep 2010 *Outreach Workshops.* We ran outreach workshops for new participants at: St Francis of Assisi City Academy, Shorefields Technology College, Kensington Youth Inclusion Project as well as an open workshop at the Contemporary Urban Centre. After a small drop off rate over the summer term, the group was once again brought to full capacity (27 on register – our target is 25). The workshops were led by Participation Co-ordinator Eliza Brittles and supported by youth theatre members, as trainee workshop leaders.

Sep-Dec 2010 *Skills Workshops.* The autumn term involved a range of skills workshops from an eclectic array of artists, including singing with Charlie Adams, Beatboxing with Ash Murphy, Physical Theatre with Big Wow. A small group also participated in physical theatre/storytelling workshops with Sizwe Vilanski in partnership with Action Transport Theatre Company. The term's work was shared at an informal sharing for friends and family at the CUC.



Dec 2010 *Christmas Party and Evaluation* We held a Christmas party at Metal for the Youth Theatre, where celebrations were combined with evaluation activities.

Oct 2010 *Hallowe'en Lantern Festival:* Three of our youth theatre are performing in Liverpool Lantern Company's annual event, in collaboration with local free-running group AirBorn.

Oct 2010 Bola Agbaje workshop and discussions. 20 Stories High have commissioned award-winning writer Bola Agbaje to write a new play for young people. The play will explore sexual violence. Bola began her writing process with research workshops with Julia Samuels and young women from the youth theatre.



Oct 10-Feb 11 *Drama Drop In:* we ran which three one-off open workshops for those interested in joining the main group in the future, as well as for those not able to commit to a whole terms' work, and ex-members.

January 2011 *Outreach Workshops:* at St Francis of Assisi City Academy and Shorefields School.

January 2011 *Visioning Session.* As part of 20SH's Organisational Review, we brought the youth theatre together for a workshop and asked them what they would plan for the company's future, if they were the Artistic Directors. Diverse, imaginative and practical ideas have now been incorporated into our new business plan.

Jan-March 11 *Grey Areas*. Working with writer Kellie Smith and director Julia Samuels, the group spent the term improvising and discussing: exploring moral dilemmas and ethical frameworks. This led to Kellie creating short monologues, duologues and scenes which were shared by the youth theatre at a rehearsed reading in March at the CUC.



February 2011 *Dinner'n'Debate* The debates within the Grey Areas sessions were so vibrant and so heated that one of the members suggested we hold a separate debating session. A group came together for Dinner'n'Debate to explore religion, morality, violence – and put the world to rights. D'n'D is going to become a regular part of our ongoing programme.

Ongoing *Arts Awards* 6 of our group gained their Bronze Awards in July 2010. A further 8 have been working on theirs, which will be assessed in June. 4 have begun their Silver Arts Awards. Other ongoing activities included: theatre trips, youth advisory group meetings, work placements. We have also given significant amounts of pastoral support to our youth theatre members.

2. FEEDBACK

Participants

Youth theatre has given me the opportunity to come out of my shell, and let me be in an environment where I can express myself in a way that I haven't done before. It has given me the opportunity to socialise with people I wouldn't usually be with. Youth Theatre is generally a nice place to be in; it makes me feel good about myself. (Catherine Coats, Youth Theatre Member)

[I enjoyed] mixing and exploring cultures. It broke down stereotypes. It has made me stereotype people less. (Bradley Thompson, Contacting the World participant)

I just loved going to Iran. I had an amazing experience. (Brodie Arthur, Contacting the World participant)

'This is the best workshop I've ever been to- the improvisation helped me not hold back.' (Drama Drop In Participant)

'I learnt how to be brave and to show who you are.' (Outreach Workshop Participant, Jan 2011.)

The placement opened my eyes up to the amount of effort that goes into making a show, booking venues and everything that happens backstage, it was like nothing I've done before and it was interesting. 20 stories High have taught me everything and they are so welcoming, I never feel stupid coming to them with questions. It was also useful learning about workshops, I love acting but this is a tool I can use in the future (Keith Rice, Work Experience)

I really admire your work and commitment, and the talent of the cast, and on top of that you were so welcoming and appreciative....I still got such a massive buzz and sense of ownership (Nina Patel-Grainger, volunteer)

Participant Case Studies

Sam, aged 17.

Sam has been with the Youth Theatre since it started back in 2008:

'Youth Theatre has helped me develop acting and performance skills I thought I didn't have but more so has built my social confidence; now I can talk to people from different backgrounds and not judge them, as well as talking to girls'

His enthusiasm within each sessions is something that is valued so much by the group and his willingness to get stuck grows with each session:

'It's great when you finish a bad day at college and know you are coming to Youth Theatre, I still get excited about it each week'.

Sam has always wanted to be an engineer but now is also interested in Theatre as part of his future:

'Acting is a part of my life that I want to carry on- hopefully, by God's grace, when I'm older I want to set up something like 20 Stories High Youth Theatre myself.'

Craig, aged 14.

Craig joined the Youth Theatre in September 2010 and since then his interest in theatre and his confidence has grown dramatically:

'I talk about drama more than I used to and now I even comment on acting in films and that.'

'I never used to like speaking in front of people but doing ensemble work with 20 Stories High has built my confidence so much- I don't really get nervous now and I even find it easier socialising with people and talking to girls'

In the future Craig hopes to do a Performing Arts course and develop his skills further.

'20 Stories High have helped me outside of the Youth Theatre as well, they got me an audition for a film which was really exciting and they have helped me to be more confidence to say what I want to say, to share my opinions and tell people what I think.'

Before coming to Youth Theatre Craig wasn't really bothered by school but now realises he has to focus on his GCSE's so he can get into college to do Performing Arts.

Catherine, aged 16.

Catherine joined us in January 2010. When she first started she said certain things were difficult:

'When I first came to the Youth Theatre I found some stuff challenging as you don't usually get the things that 20 Stories High do anywhere else, its different. But you just get stuck in and involved and it is great.'

Catherine has always been involved in music and loves bringing that into Youth Theatre:

'I've just felt so comfortable coming to sessions and they have definitely helped me at other auditions. I love how 20 Stories High encourage you to share other skills and adapt them into Youth Theatre and into sharings'

Catherine really values 20 Stories High, both artistically and personally:

'Like, you guys held a Christmas party and cooked food for us and everything, no one else would do that for us.'

Anita, aged 19.

Anita was with the Youth Theatre since it began in 2008, she also did a Placement with 20 Stories High to support her Business Studies Course at College.

'20 Stories High expanded my creative range- I came as a musician and came out as an actor and writer as well. They also helped me gain knowledge of running and business and understanding the behind the scenes.'

Last year Anita went through some difficult things with her housing and home situation, at that time 20 Stories High took a more active role in supporting her personally.

'They have been a family to me- they don't just stop at the end of Youth Theatre, they helped me in so many ways with sorting housing, listening and providing other help when I really needed it.'

Anita now runs Up&Out (Underground presence of urban talent) , based in Liverpool.

'20 Stories High have given me confidence, tools and belief that I can do something myself and continue to create. They have helped me know how to love myself and built my self-esteem so much.'

Audiences and Partners

Good, honest theatre, unpretentious but risk taking. Beautiful (Audience Member, RAIN)

Now THAT's what I call Youth Theatre! (Director of Jamaica Youth Theatre after 20SH performance of RAIN at Contacting the World)

I'm so glad she's got this to come to, and she can have all these conversations with you and her peers. I can't talk to her about all these things myself – she doesn't want me to. (Parent of participant at GREY AREAS sharing).

The impact that 20 Stories High Youth Theatre has had on my students has been amazing. Pupils who attended workshops have enjoyed specialist drama tuition and those who were selected for the Youth Theatre have reacted so positively to the responsibility of being a member of the group. They are overwhelmed with the opportunities that they have to work with local, national and international artists and enjoy the collaboration aspect of working with others.

The young men who have attended are role models for younger students in school and this has also affected their behaviour. They are a lot more focussed and considerate and they have also taken on extra responsibilities in school. The work they produce with 20 Stories High is relevant, reflective and fresh and they are able to engage with each theme completely.

We hope that we will be able to continue to strengthen our links with 20 Stories High in the future and that more of our students are given the opportunity to create within the Youth Theatre.
(Kath Bulmer, Drama teacher, Shorefields School)

3. STATISTICS

No of regular Youth Theatre beneficiaries	31
No of other beneficiaries	1068
No of workshops	144
No of other sessions (inc. one-to-ones, placement)	26
No of public shows/ events attended by YT	18

4. SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

a) Key Successes:

- Very positive feedback about the quality of the work from participants and audiences
- Very positive feedback about the benefits of the work from participants
- Being selected as one of the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisations, and building partnerships with a range of other funders, including gaining a three-year investment from the Lankelly Chase Foundation, 15-months of funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Taking part in our first international project- Contacting the World
- Being selected as finalists in the 2010 Morgan Foundation Awards in two categories (Best Entrepreneurial Social Enterprise or Charity and the Best Business providing an Economic and/or Social Contribution in Liverpool)
- Producing a film/installation for semi-permanent display in the new Museum of Liverpool Life
- Offering a range of pastoral support to participants
- Maintaining a vibrant group over the period of time
- Continuing to reach young people from excluded communities (at present 95% of participants are from disadvantaged backgrounds)
- Responding to the young peoples' requests eg. working with a writer, providing more stretching opportunities for more experienced members
- First cohort of participants receiving arts awards
- Developing partnerships with a range of youth and education organisations
- Offering a good number of placements at a variety of levels (GCSE, FE and HE students, as well as unemployed adults)
- 20 Stories High's Organisational Development programme enabled the company to build a stronger infrastructure for a robust future, involving young people in decision-making throughout the programme.

b) Key Challenges

i. Capacity

Running 2 youth theatre sessions weekly for the youth theatre, while the organisation also produced two touring shows in the same financial year was stretching. This led us to create a new staffing structure as part of the Organisational Development, which is currently being put in place.

ii. Space

We continue to struggle with finding the right space to work. In the main, we have been using the CUC during this project. However, we find that there are often double-bookings, and we are often moved out of our preferred space, if a more lucrative booking comes in for the organisation. We also have concerns about how easy and safe access to the building/area is.

In addition, we faced real challenges about the storing of our equipment/materials. We have since moved offices to Toxteth TV, which is improving this situation. In the long-term we are trying to secure a regular participation space.

iii. Fundraising

We were unsuccessful in a three year application to BBC Children-in-Need, and did not quite meet our fundraising targets. However, we chose to trim our budget slightly, and we delivered our entire programme as planned.

iv. Second Group

We had originally planned to start a second regular group in April 2010. However, due to being involved in various projects, we had effectively been running an additional group from autumn 2009, and we were feeling very overstretched. It did not therefore seem like the right time to launch a second larger group as intended. As part of the Organisational Development process, we are now planning to start a Junior group in 2012, as well as a Young Writers Group and a Young Digital Group.

v. Pastoral Support

As an organisation, we offered a significant amount of pastoral support to individual youth theatre members throughout the project. We recognise that working with our target-group, there are a wide range of issues which come up, which we are committed to supporting them through. On one or two occasions this year, we felt that the nature of the issues we were dealing with was outside our area of expertise. In dealing with such situations, we made links with local organisations such as YPAS (Young People's Advisory Service) and OKUK (a local counselling organisation). We would like to further develop such partnerships, and explore how we together we can make a more comprehensive offer of support in the future.

5. CO-ORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

a) Staff Team

Co-Artistic Directors Julia Samuels and Keith Saha led the youth theatre programme, artistically – and oversaw the ongoing management of the programme.

They were supported by Participation Co-ordinator Eliza Brittles and Administrator Natasha Selden, as well as the 13 freelance artists and 3 volunteers

b) Funding Partners

- Arts Council England (as part of a 15 month grant until Sept 2010)
- Liverpool City Council (as part of regular funding)
- Lankelly Chase Foundation (as part of a two-year grant 2010-12)
- The Hemby Trust
- LCVS
- Novas Scarman (support in kind)
- Metal (support in kind)
- Liverpool One Foundation

c) Other Partners

Contact Theatre, Manchester	AirBorn Free Running Company
84 Theater, Tehran	Action Transport Theatre Company
National Museums Liverpool	Merseyside Access to Play
LIPA	MPAC
Liverpool Hope University	Unity Theatre
Liverpool Lantern Company	Everyman Playhouse
The Black-E	Whitworth Art Gallery
St Francis of Assisi City Academy	Zion Arts Centre
Shorefields Technology College	Chinese Arts Centre
Edge Hill Youth Club	
Kensington Youth Inclusion Project	

20 Stories High is an active member of several networks: COoL (Cultural Organisations of Liverpool), ENYAN, NAYT, Sustained Theatre and the ITC.

6. THE FUTURE

Although we are in challenging economic times, we are excited and optimistic about the next phase of the youth theatre's development.

a) Creative Plans

Include:

- Devising a new show, directed by Co-Artistic Director Keith Saha – *The All New Interactive Urban Cabaret* – to be performed in summer/autumn 2011
- Artists from Tehran's 84 Theater will return to Liverpool in May 2011, working with the youth theatre on the creation of a new collaborative show
- A continuing involvement in the development of Bola Agbaje's commission
- Skills workshops in autumn 2011
- The launch of the Museum of Liverpool Life in summer 2011, with our installation/film
- The launch of our new Young Writers Project, Young Digital Group and Junior Youth theatre Group.

b) Organisational Plans

i. Organisational Development

We are concluding our Organisational Development Programme, interrogating all aspects of the organisation. Parts of this process which will directly impact the youth theatre include:

- Creative development of new projects
- Researching and building future partnerships
- New Premises
- Digital Development

ii. Staffing

- Our new Participation Manager and General Manager will be in post by June 2011.
- A part-time Youth Worker who will be responsible of the day-to-day pastoral support of the young people will be in post by Sept 2011.

iii. Funding and Partners

- We have secured regular funding from Liverpool City Council until March 2012, and from the Arts Council 2012-15. We also have funding from Lankelly Chase Foundation running until March 2013 and from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation until March 2012.
- We are seeking additional funding from a range of trusts and foundations, as well as funding opportunities to earn our own income and attract donations and support-in-kind.
- We are continuing to build a range of partnerships from across the arts sector, which will allow us to create exciting collaborations and share our practice nationally
- We are also building relationships within the youth, education and private sectors in order to ensure 20 Stories High is a sustainable, collaborative and outward-looking organisation.

Julia Samuels, Co-Artistic Director, April 2011