

Tank Theatre Company



Project Report

2013



Contents

Introduction.....	3
Target group.....	3
Key aims.....	3
Outcomes and achievements.....	4
What worked.....	5
Who benefited.....	5
Learning.....	5
Participants' feedback.....	6
Reviews	6
Conclusion and next steps.....	7

Project funded by:



Introduction

The Tank Theatre Project was funded by Ernest Cook Trust, with subsequent support from The Avon and Somerset Constabulary Trust, to establish an inner-city theatre company for young people of Bristol aged 15-26.

The company worked to update and modernise Shakespeare's *Macbeth* teaching young people about scriptwriting and performance theory, to help them develop an appreciation of the classical work. The group took part in a series of acting workshops, leading up to a final full-scale, professional production at the Trinity Centre, entitled *M.C.Beth*.

Target group

The project targeted young people classed as 'hard to reach', predominantly from black and minority ethnic communities. Outreach was focused in the wards of Easton, Ashley. The aim for the project was to engage young actors from inner-city communities who may otherwise not engage with mainstream provision and theatre in order to improve representation and participation in these areas.

Key aims

- to deliver a series of acting and theatre sessions around Shakespeare to change the young people's perceptions that 'it's not for us' and increase understanding and appreciation of classical texts
- to raise the self-esteem, confidence and skills base of young participants
- to build links with other Bristol performance venues including Bristol Old Vic, Tobacco Factory, Bristol Brewery, Alma Tavern and Colston Hall
- to ensure the ongoing engagement and participation in theatre of the young participants and encourage them to attend and learn from other productions
- to attract new audiences to theatre



- to offer a creative and inspiring learning environment for young people and provide a positive working relationship with adults and project leaders, to improve young people's perceptions of authority figures.
- (specifically through the partnership with the A&S Constabulary) to aid restorative justice in communities and improve relationships between young people and law enforcement agencies.

Outcomes and achievements

We engaged with 19 individuals in the project aged between 17-26. 13 of the cast took part in the final performance, and performed in front of an audience totalling 287 across a three-night show-run.

When asked on arrival, 69% of the audience who attended had not been to a theatre performance before.

90% of the cast had never performed Shakespeare before, yet the difficult words of the bard were spoke with authority and intent.

The cast have all said in their feedback how this has made them feel like they can become major successes in the theatre world .

50% of the cast have never been to the theatre before now they all want to go (and this is something that we have incorporated as an activity at the end of the project).

Representatives from The Police, The Colston Hall and The Tobacco factory attended the performance and all fed back positively.





What worked

- The combination of Shakespeare's words and local street dialect worked well.
- The young cast now feel like they are part of a family that can support and nurture each other onto greater things.
- The performances were incredibly well received and attended.
- The feedback from industry professionals has been outstanding and all recorded audience feedback was brilliant.
- The project leaders were given respect, authority and well liked by the cast, which helped in order for them to feel a sense of achievement and ownership of the project.

Who benefited

All of the partners, individuals, professionals, performers and actors who took part in the project:

- Trinity benefited by having a truly representative audience from the community.
- The young actors benefited immensely from interactions with professionals and each other.
- The project leaders benefitted by working with such passionate young individuals and by getting to showcase their skills.

Learning

- We found it hard to find young actors for the project at first.
- Communication issues and clear understanding of roles.
- Time-scales and external commitments meant the co-writing experience was not as beneficial as it could have been
- We wanted to do arts awards for the young actors but due to cuts in the budget, we were unable to do this.
- Should have bought a producer earlier.



Participants' feedback

Sarah: “I had rarely gone to theatres or shows and since being involved in this play it has really pushed me to see other companies and shows happening in the area...I never felt like I wanted to miss a session because I look forward to our rehearsals and I'm going to miss it when it ends!”

Jasmine: “I think I would like to see more theatre...it has been really great to have a project to focus on and be part of something.”

Scott: “It's great to be part of a theatre company in my community...Tank Theatre is one of a kind in Bristol.”

James: “More shows and performances – I feel the audience that came were diverse and benefited from the experience.”

D: “It makes me believe anything is possible if you dedicate enough adequate time talent and feeling for an aspiration.”

Reviews

“I was blown away (no pun intended) by the power and intensity of this production, the actors were so professional and seemed so focused and dedicated in their portrayal of 'Macbeth'. I was amazed by the production's ability to demonstrate tragedy and comedy in parallel, making me laugh out loud and feel close to tears within the same 5 minutes of prose. The adaptation worked so well, it fitted and the use of Shakespearean prose alongside urban hip hop culture worked seamlessly. In short, I loved it, and think the concept of a theatre company that uses a young diverse cast from the local community is inspired and I wait with bated breath to see the next production that this company do. It was also wonderful to be in amongst an audience that was truly integrated and represented the people of the real Bristol community.” **Clara Chiller, Blogger**

“I was glad to get to 'M C Beth (it was very worthwhile)...M C Beth communicated very well and deserves a 'longer life'. I was delighted to see how many men were involved. Of course Shakespeare is very mean to women actors...The rapport between cast and director was heart-warming.” **James Gibbs, The Gibbs Trust**

“I wanted to write to share how impacted I was by M.C Beth. It was powerful, moving, humorous, provocative and thought provoking performance shedding light on the reality of Bristol's generational gang issues and the challenges that our young people are faced with in today's society.

I am a senior manager for an organisation that works with vulnerable and hard to reach young people, I have been delivering in the community for many years and have good relationship with many of the young people on the streets. I was very impressed and proud to see so many of the young people we have or are currently working with committed to such a project. It proves that Tank Theatre must be providing high quality, stimulating engagement that young people feel they can really relate too and truly feel empowered by.

Big Congratulations on such a successful production. You must take this further and create a legacy.” **Nadine Bourne, Creative Project Manager, KIDSCOMPANY**

“Hi guys, just had to say that I LOVED M.C.Beth. You are a seriously talented group of young actors and I couldn't believe it when I heard many of you have not acted before. The show was full of raw power and energy and I thought the idea to bring Macbeth to the streets of Bristol was inspired. There was some seriously slick MCing and beat-boxing going on, and Lady B you just



owned it. You guys brought an amazing tale bang into the present and it was so fresh and new and unexpected. I also thought it was very innovative to surround the audience with your stage layout and completely immerse them in the midst of all the action. I've been raving about it to all my friends and I look forward with bated breath to see what you bring to us next.....still.”

Fran McDogle, Liverpool University

“Congratulations on a job well done, you should ALL be unreservedly proud of what you've achieved!! Nuff respect to the young people involved, they saw an opportunity and ran with it fully making it their own!! Your passion, hard work, commitment and dedication reaped the rewards you all so obviously deserve.....standing ovation no less!! I hope this isn't the last we see of this production or these natural born Thespians!!!. Hugely entertaining and highly recommended.....Big performance STILL!!!!!!” **Jeremy Atoo, Youth Worker**

Conclusion and next steps

From the feedback from the young actors, parents, Police and audience we have identified a clear need for this project to continue.

We are evaluating our options and focusing on the next phase of the project. We would like to run an extended programme, have more opportunities for young people to engage with and experience other theatrical performances and genres and develop opportunities for young people to take their performances to other theatrical venues in the city.

Our aim is to develop a wider project programme of activities and seek funding through agencies such as the Arts Council Grants for the Arts in order to enhance the scope and reach of the project.