



Information on drama projects

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Introduction

The ethos of Open Stage is to create a safe, non judgemental environment of mutual support and respect where individuals are allowed time to discover their creativity. It is through Open Stage that many of those involved take their first steps in creating theatre; this is a process that requires discipline and commitment – skills that are essential in both education and employment.

Our Offer

We are offering to run a year-long, term-time project, in the Myatts Field North Estate Community Centre, for residents of the Estate who are affected by un-employment, disability, addiction, criminality, isolation and backgrounds of chaos. We would welcome people of both sexes and any age provided they are over 18. This would be run in a similar way to the Drama Queens Project, which is discussed in more detail below.

Background

Open Stage's first production, at the George Wood Theatre in 2008, was a Showcase for the creative writing of Open Book student's. As a part of this production one young man, whose friend was murdered by a gang, wrote and acted in a monologue about gang violence. As a consequence of this he then returned to education and enrolled in an FE College.

Open Book is a project based at Goldsmiths, University of London, which works with people from chaotic backgrounds, including ex-offenders, ex-addicts and those with mental health issues, to encourage and support them to achieve their full potential through education in its broadest sense and then to progress to employment.

All of our productions are new works written, acted and produced by members of the company. Our second, in 2008, was a series of monologues, focussing on the darker reality of Christmas for many people. This was held at Greenwich University. In 2009 we staged two productions - The Dicephalus Project and Legacies - at the Greenwich Playhouse. In 2010 we moved to the Network Theatre in London for Hammer Horror, this was followed by; The Boy's Club (2011) and Block Party (2011). Most recently we presented Three Women at the London Theatre in 2012.

Alongside these productions Open Stage has run numerous workshops, ranging from one-day sessions for disengaged students, awareness raising sessions for student paramedics, workshops for anti-bullying, a four-week project with socially excluded young people, a long-term drop-in drama workshop for Open Book Students and volunteers and a year-long community project on the Loughborough Estate in Brixton. Recently, we have also become involved with teaching Post-

graduate students at Goldsmiths. Various members of the Open Stage Company work on these projects depending on the skills and experiences required.

All of these projects were evaluated, monitored and assessed by the funders. In total we have worked with almost 200 people in the last 4 years.

Early in 2012 we became a Community Interest Company registered at Companies House. We made this decision as we felt this was the type of social enterprise, which was most suited to our ethos.

Testimonials

A year after one of our workshops for disengaged students a teacher at their school recognised our drama facilitator at a different event and sought him out to tell him that, with one exception, all the girls who had attended the workshop had shown a marked improvement in attendance, behaviour and concentration and that this change was still evident and had been reflected in their work and exam results.

Following the awareness raising sessions with the student paramedics they all said that they would approach anyone who appeared drunk or drugged with a different attitude and would try to see beyond the symptoms to the person.

In 2009 one of our members wrote, "Last night I performed with Open Stage. A group of us are in the privileged position to write and stage our own work! I mean how many people get that opportunity? Last week in rehearsals there was a moment when I looked around the room at this bunch of people, people like myself, the non-traditional student who never thought they stood a chance and felt overwhelmed with gratitude. There was nowhere else I would rather have been at that moment. I'm not only proud to be a part of it, but still in awe that I am so accepted. Viva Open Book and Open Stage....you have enriched my life beyond my wildest dreams." The writer was Sue Hallissey, now a graduate, a qualified teacher, Open Stage board member and our Creative Writing tutor.

Sue's is not the only success story. Emma came, reluctantly, to see one of our plays, not realising, in her own words that "The Dicephalus Project was about to change my life. That was me in that play. Not just me, but my dad and brother as well. It touched me on so many levels. I was tearful and I spoke to some of the cast. Some gave me hugs and another invited me to come along and I was offered the opportunity to be involved in Open Stage. I had never done any drama before, but people believed in me. Two months of rehearsals, learning lines, tears, elation and panic followed but I did it. I am so proud of my achievement, which is a feeling I haven't had in years. I now know I have the ability to commit to a task and see it through to the end. It would not have been possible without Open Stage." Emma is now in the third year of her degree and projected for a first. Additionally, because of her new ability to commit and follow-through Emma supported her son to take scholarship examinations and he is now a pupil at a prestigious private school.

Errol, an ex-offender and ex-addict, who attended a number of drop-in sessions at Goldsmiths and took part in a Festival we were involved with, was offered a role in a production. He found that this more formal way of working did not suit him but it did make him evaluate his own talents and he is now a successful performance poet regularly appearing in South London.

Brixton Drama Queens

Brixton Drama Queens has been, to date, our longest project and was designed, developed and delivered by Open Stage. Those involved were Michael Mahony a trained Drama teacher. Keith Christie a resident of the Loughborough Estate and Sue Hallissey a qualified teacher. Sue's own journey, described above, has been inspirational to the people attending the project.



The original pilot project was to run for twelve weeks. However, due to Open Stage being able to secure extra funding and with the cooperation of The Metropolitan Housing Trust the initiative was able to run for the entire school year 2010/11. This funding was from AimHigher, a government initiative to encourage non-traditional learners into education.

After a series of general drama workshops the Drama Queens first devised piece of theatre was a satirical and surreal pantomime entitled Goldilocks, The ASBO and the Bears. This was greatly enjoyed by everyone who attended it and gave great impetus to the project. The second devised piece was entitled Three Women and was well received by an even bigger audience. Subsequently, it was presented at the London Theatre to paying audience and was sold out every night.

The participants said that the project had helped to raise their self-esteem, confidence, literacy skills and general health. One said that attending the project made it "worth leaving her kitchen and the bottle of vodka", she also said that her children respected her more because she was "sticking at something". The sense of pride and joy at seeing their work presented on the stage is impossible to describe.

Staff

Michael Mahony, Drama Facilitator/Tutor/Director

Michael is a graduate of Goldsmiths and a qualified teacher with a wide experience in both the theatre and in teaching. He is a passionate believer in the benefits of drama to enhance and develop everyone involved and in its power to encourage people to seek education. Michael was himself a mature student having become involved in drama whilst working in Germany.

Sue Hallissey, Creative Writing and Literacy Tutor/Actress/Playwright

Sue came to Open Stage through Open Book and is now also a graduate and qualified teacher, specialising in adult literacy. Sue has worked on most of our productions and workshops and is now the Open Book Co-ordinator at Queen Mary's College as well as a founding member of the Open Book Women's Group.

Keith Christie, Assistant Facilitator and Local Liaison Worker

Keith also came to Open Stage via Open Book and took part in two productions, as both a writer and actor. Having seen the benefits of drama Keith was very keen to take it to his local community, The Loughborough Estate, and it was through his efforts that we were able to find the members and venue for the Brixton Drama Queens. Keith has recently had to give up his degree studies and step back from Open Stage due to ill health but we hope to involve him again because of his local knowledge or to find someone to take on the same role.

James Carney, Dyslexia Tutor and Front of House Manager

James, like Sue and Keith, joined us through Open Book. He too is a graduate of Goldsmiths and is now a qualified dyslexia tutor. James has been involved with every Open Stage production but prefers front of house to a place on the stage!

Janice Larkin, Company Secretary/Producer/IAG

Janice first worked with Open Stage as a funder but is now fully involved with the company and a great believer in its very real benefits. She is an experienced administrator and worked for many years in Widening Participation at Greenwich University and has maintained contacts with many educational institutions including: Goldsmiths, Greenwich University, London South Bank University, Lewisham and Lambeth Colleges and is thus able to offer Independent Advice and Guidance.

All participants can also be referred to Open Book and to the Open Book Women's Group - a safe and confidential space where women can meet to discuss anything they want. Practical help can be offered alongside emotional support in a safe and totally confidential environment. A female member of Open Book facilitates the meetings but they are lead by the members.

Costs

As a committed social enterprise Open Stage works hard to keep its costs to a minimum. All the administrative work is done on a volunteer basis and our website is maintained *pro bono* by a design company. All of the staff work on a self-employed basis and so cover their own costs. Our insurance is paid for by the profits of our productions. Therefore all the money we receive by way of grants or awards is spent directly for the benefit of those with whom we are working.

The examples below include an approximate number of support sessions; these can be adjusted according to the number of participants and their needs. Visiting an external theatre can be a very valuable adjunct to the workshops. The costs include an end-of-project production in the community centre but not a full theatre production.

Summary of payments

Staff Member	Cost
Drama Facilitator	£100 per 2 hour session
Creative Writing Tutor	£80 per 2 hour session
Local Liaison	£15 per hour
Dyslexia Tutor	£50 per dyslexia assessment or £40 per 1 hour tutorial
IAG	£40 per 2 hour session
Theatre visits	£500

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Options for project, all options are based on the project running for one year, term-time only. The project can also be run for 50 weeks of the year.

Example A

Minimum requirement, with local support.

Staff Member	Cost	Total for 40 Sessions
Drama Facilitator	£100 x 40 sessions	£4000
Creative Writing Tutor	£80 x 40 sessions	£3200
Local Liaison	£15 x 40 hours	£600
	Total	£7800.00

Example B

Addition of more local support and 15 dyslexia assessments.

Staff Member	Cost	Total for 40 Sessions
Drama Facilitator	£100 x 40 sessions	£4000
Creative Writing Tutor	£80 x 40 sessions	£3200
Local Liaison	£15 x 50 hours	£750
Dyslexia Assessments	£50 x 15 assessments	£750
	Total	£8700.00

Example C

Addition of dyslexia and literacy support plus some IAG and theatre visits

Staff Member	Cost	Total for 40 Sessions
Drama Facilitator	£100 x 40 sessions	£4000
Creative Writing Tutor	£80 x 40 sessions	£3200
Literacy Tutor	£80 x 20 sessions	£1600
Local Liaison	£15 x 50 hours	£750
Dyslexia Assessments	£50 x 15 assessments	£750
Dyslexia Tutorials	£40 x 60 sessions	£2400
IAG	£40 x 10 sessions	£400
Theatre visits		£500
	Total	£13600.00

One of the benefits of working with Open Stage is that we are very flexible and so are able to build a project that fits exactly the needs of community whilst working closely with the funders to provide a project that is financially advantageous.