

The Castle, Wellingborough Pilot

“Excellent Youth Theatre”

Indicator Set 2: Qualities and behaviours of creative young people

“Inclusive Youth Theatre”

Section 2: Youth theatres, recruitment and widening participation

The Castle is a theatre, cinema and arts centre serving the local community in Wellingborough and Northamptonshire. The Castle provides a varied participation programme for children, young people and adults including weekly classes and holiday projects. The Castle works in partnership with a variety of organisations to deliver satellite work and residencies, and also to produce dapa, an annual disability and participatory festival. The Castle has a 150 strong youth theatre who participate in regional and national festivals. The Castle produces a community show and a professional Christmas show each year and programmes a variety of touring work including theatre, dance, comedy, music and film.

We were keen to participate in the pilot as an opportunity to achieve a realistic view of our current practice, set targets and develop strategies to take realistic steps towards achieving higher standards.

The Castle has a youth committee that meet weekly to discuss the current programme, initiate recruitment plans, fundraise and engage in training sessions to develop skills in workshop leading, assisting, project management and stage production. The CYC are active members of The Castle Youth Theatre.

What we did:

- Redesign the indicators as a questionnaire, in first person for the youth theatre.
- Prepare the self assessment questions on individual pieces of paper with space for post-it responses.
- Set up a meeting with youth theatre staff and senior management.
- Identify a suitable youth theatre session.
- Facilitate a debate.
- Create an action plan.

Pilot session structure:

Introduce documents

We introduced the documents by reading extracts to put the debate into context.

Definition of inclusive practice:

“... to raise awareness of barriers which exclude and to be robust in ensuring provision is accessible to those who want it”

“Inclusive Youth Theatre”, page 2

Definition of excellence:

“... excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual”

“Excellent Youth Theatre” page 4

Ask questions to set the context.

We set the context: **What is youth theatre?** The responses from the senior management team were:

- Arts activities for young people
- Opportunity for young people to learn about the world of acting
- A place to create and develop an appreciation for arts
- Develop social interaction
- A place to express themselves and experiment
- Social activity

Why is youth theatre important? The responses from youth theatre members were:

- It provides a safe friendly environment where you can be yourself, find about yourself and develop life skills. CYT member aged 16
- It is different to any drama you do in school. CYT member aged 15
- It helps people build confidence and develops skills for different people at different levels. CYT member aged 15
- It has helped me gain confidence and self-belief. CYT member aged 16
- It helps build skills as a group together and learn from different people. CYT member aged 17
- Youth theatre is important because you meet new friends and build confidence. CYT member aged 17

We discussed the term “excellence” and captured interpretations from the members.

What does “excellence” mean to you? The responses from youth theatre members were:

- Working as a group to perform a great show
- To achieve what you don’t think you could have achieved
- Everyone doing something to the best of their ability
- Exceeding the expected
- To have fun and to be able to work towards something special
- Being able to have the chance to perform on the stage with a supportive cast
- Doing something well and having fun with it

- The best, there is not better. The highest standard there is.
- Every person achieving the best they can, and everyone working together to make an amazing piece of theatre

Introduce the questionnaire and self assessment questions

Participants completed the indicator questionnaire individually and anonymously.

Are you keen to explore and displaying high levels of interest?	1 - 5
Do you have high levels of confidence and self-esteem?	1 - 5
Do you feel challenged by their goals, operations and tasks?	1 - 5
Do you feel able to take initiative and find relevant information?	1 - 5
Do you feel able to interact with others?	1 - 5
Do you feel that new ideas are met with support and encouragement?	1 - 5
Do you feel able to put forward new ideas and views?	1 - 5
Do you feel able to debate within an open, prestige-free environment?	1 - 5

- Facilitate a debate
The participants worked in small groups to create two responses to each question / statement from the self assessment questions.

Example result

Section 2: Youth theatres, recruitment and widening participation			
Youth theatre members		Senior management team	
Do we and how?	Could we and how?	Do we and how?	Could we and how?
How do you recruit youth theatre members?			
Through friends Word of mouth Brochure School and friends	Open day Flyers School visits (assemblies) New funky youth website	Brochure Flyers in house Website Editorial Word of mouth Box Office YT team	Local papers Radio Street team Invitations to performance to engage and inspire

- Create an action plan

We explored how ideas and suggestions could be used to formulate an action plan. The discussion with different groupings of people; youth theatre members, senior management and youth theatre staff was a valuable platform to invite opinions and suggestions from groups who are usually receivers or reported to. We selected the statements appropriate to our theatre and discussed the concepts of excellence and inclusion. The key discoveries were;

- The youth theatre leaders need to continually be aware of individual progressions, struggles, needs and achievements.
- The participation team need to consider communications and how “we get the word out” to everyone who might possibly want it.
- The CYC need to be given more opportunities to lead and initiate action and share decision making.

Participation in the pilot has initiated an ongoing consultation process with The Castle Youth Committee to identify ways to widen participation ensuring that young people share in decision making and are encouraged to initiate and lead new ideas. In order to become more inclusive we need to not only open the door but invite people in. To keep our YT projects fresh and valid we must engage our participants in experiences that encourage discipline through empowerment and play.

**Excellent Youth Theatre
Participation team results**

	Indicator Set 2: Qualities and behaviours of creative young people	Score (1-5)
A	Are your youth theatre members keen to explore and displaying high levels of interest?	4
B	Do your youth theatre members have high levels of confidence and self-esteem?	3
C	Do your youth theatre members feel challenged by their goals, operations and tasks?	4
D	Do your youth theatre members feel able to take initiative and find relevant information?	4
E	Do your youth theatre members feel able to interact with others?	5
F	Do your youth theatre members feel that new ideas are met with support and encouragement?	4
G	Do your youth theatre members feel able to put forward new ideas and views?	4
H	Do your youth theatre members feel able to debate within an open, prestige-free environment?	4
I	Do your youth theatre members feel uncertainty is tolerated and risk-taking encouraged?	5
	Total	37/ 45

	Youth theatre member responses										Senior management responses						
A	4	4	3	3	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	?	4	5	4	5	4
B	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	2	4	5/1	4	?	4	4	3	4	4
C	3	3	5	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	4	?	4	4	4	4	4
D	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	5	5	3	4	?	4	?	3	4	?
E	4	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	4	3	4	?	5	5	3	5	3
F	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	?	5	5	3	4	?
G	3	3	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	?	5	4	3	4	4
H	4	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	3	?	5	5	4	4	5
I	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	?	4	5	3	4	5
Totals	32	31	36	32	37	40	38	41	39	39	34	?	40	37	30	38	29

Inclusive Youth Theatre

Section 2: Youth theatres, recruitment and widening participation			
Youth theatre members		Senior management team	
Do we and how?	Could we and how?	Do we and how?	Could we and how?
How do you recruit youth theatre members?			
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Do you withhold any places to ensure that marginalised young people who may not apply in response to traditional forms of youth theatre advertising are able to be accommodated?			
	Leave a few places and find ways to bring them here CYT Fun Bus	Is this positive discrimination?	Offer bursaries We could, but risky Should revise marketing strategy to include those considered marginalised
Do you work with external youth agencies and are they able to make referrals to your organisation?			
	Connexions could recommend us?	We have links with Connexions and voluntary organisations	We could develop partnerships to recruit members and market our opportunities for young people

What are your drop-out rates like? Do you monitor who drops out and why?			
Very low, closely monitored.		They are low and monitored Low and followed up Actively asked	
Can you describe any particular strategies your staff use to retain engagement with young people?			
Games Working towards performances Watching performances Different each week Keep doing different things		Drama games YT forum / committee Festivals Maintain quality of output Encourage senior members to become YT assistants CaST standby ticket scheme YT leaders are aspirational	Create own space to have ownership and be creative Free opportunities - watch theatre? Work with other YT groups to compare and share strategies Deliver Arts Award
Have you obtained any feedback from your referral partners? Do you ask them how accessible they think your organisation is?			
?	?	?	?
Do you currently have active strategies to manage transition within your organisation? If you've not felt the need to develop strategies in this area, why do you think this is?			
?	?	?	?
What have been your experiences of trying to assimilate young people from community-based or outreach youth theatre projects into any long term established groups your organisation runs?			
	We could tour a performance to demonstrate what we do		
Do you operate an integrated model... where groups from the outset are drawn from diverse communities of young people?			
?	?	?	?

Is your youth theatre able to support both self-motivated and young people and young people who thrive best in environments where they are offered clear and appropriately pitched support, which ensures they feel both listened to and responded to?			
		We offer a variety to accommodate different levels of engagement The YT assistant structure helps to achieve this	
Do you have structures in place to consult with individual youth theatre participants regarding their ‘journeys’ or personal trajectories through your youth theatre? <i>Specifically, do you ask them what they think will best suit them in terms of moving on to work as part of different groups, workshops or productions?</i>			
?	?	?	?
How do you support your staff with this challenging area? <i>Do you ensure that where appropriate staff are able to co-work and employ additional support members of staff as is appropriate?</i>			
?	?	?	?