



Engage East Summary Report

The East Engage was the seventh Engage event. A full report including information on findings from each event will be published on completion. However to keep our communication alive with the East region please find below a brief summary.

Training workshop: How to write a play

Ola Animashawn from the Royal Court ran a two hour workshop providing participants with transferable skills in writing. The feedback from the workshop was fantastic, participants said it was:

- All positive
- Very accessible
- Helpful and enjoyable
- I'm stealing your ideas!
- A fun way to structure the creation of characters

Participants felt that practical skills sharing and training for leaders was an important issue and as such Ola's workshop was a very welcome and positive element of the day.

Round table discussions

Chris began the afternoon session with a brief overview of his experience of working within a thriving network.

Sian then discussed the NAYT website and the events NAYT hosts. The participants played a game sharing 3 pieces of information - *1- a favourite game, 2- a concern, 3- a wish* - relating to their youth theatre. Listed here are the concerns and wishes.

Concerns

- Youth theatres use of main theatre spaces/feeling that youth theatre is at the bottom of the pile.
- How to achieve youth groups working together in the same space peacefully and with tolerance.
- Lack of funding.
- Long term funding/not project led.
- Specialist practitioners to work with people with special needs and/or offer training to youth theatre practitioners.

Wishes

- Money.
- Extending/creating a network.
- Pushing boundaries (artistically and geographically).
- Variety of work practice.

Chris Sudworth led a physical mapping exercise to establish each youth theatres geographical relationship to each other in terms of travelling time. He asked each participant to add another youth theatre they have heard off to the map. This exercise clearly showed which groups would be ideally situated to form networks and partnerships as well as highlighting the problem of travel in the East region.

The participants then took part in a statement exercise which mapped opinions and encouraged discussion of the following 5 statements.

1. **Youth theatre practitioners are recognised as highly skilled professionals.** No one believed this statement to be true. Participants said it is felt youth theatre practitioners 'just do stuff with kids', 'not trained', 'mess about', 'failed actors', and 'youth theatre audiences are not valued'.
2. **I feel confident that my youth theatre is accessible to any member of my local community.** This received a mixed response. Some youth theatres felt they were accessible through low cost, no audition process and building/location. Others found transport and inadequate training for leaders a barrier to inclusiveness.
3. **I feel supported in my work at my youth theatre.** This again received a mix response, some people felt isolated, undervalued and misunderstood.
4. **Youth theatre members shape the programme of work at my youth theatre.** This statement got the most positive outcome with all participants feeling youth theatre members truly contribute and determine working practice.
5. **High quality youth theatre practice is only achievable with consistent and significant funding.** All participants believed this to be untrue.

Participants were asked to make a '5 point action plan' that looked at how they would develop the needs of their youth theatre – anything from secure funding to 10 new chairs. The plans were then shared and discussed with the group.

What youth theatre need (taken from action plans)

- Better production team.
- Administrator
- Funding
- Stop isolation
- Access to scripts/young writers
- Staff/assistants and volunteers
- Training for volunteers and assistants
- Partnerships between youth theatres
- Mini bus and driver
- Youth theatre 'on tour'
- Space
- Development of practitioners skills
- New audiences
- Respect and understanding of youth theatre and youth theatre leaders

Conclusion

All present said they appreciated the opportunity to attend networking events such as Engage and would value a local network. It was felt by all that a practical element to future networking events would be valuable and incentive to attend. Jenny Culank, based at Classworks Theatre, may host the next meeting. It was suggested that this should be in January or February.