



Engage North East Summary Report

The North East Engage event was held at the Arts Centre, in Darlington on 26 September 2007.

The North East was the sixth 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 North East region please find below a brief summary.

Training workshop: How to write play

Ola Animashawn from the Royal Court ran a two hour workshop (morning and afternoon) providing participants with transferable skills in writing. The feedback from both workshops was excellent, people found it inspiring and useful. At the close of the day delegates raised the importance of, practical skills sharing and training for leaders, appreciating a practical element to Engage.

Round table discussions

Participants were asked to share three pieces of information relating to their work in youth theatre: A favourite game, a concern and a wish.

Concerns

- Funding.
- Pressure to produce projects in a new theatre.
- Transition from group member to group leader.
- Putting new groups together for project based work.
- Too much talking and not enough action. Not enough time for professional development.
- Youth theatre given low status, budget and prestige.
- Shortage of boys in youth theatre.
- Being secondary to the main house which means staff are less accommodating.

Wishes

- Better funding.
- Partnership between large and small youth theatres.
- Raising the quality and profile of youth theatre.
- Develop inclusiveness.
- To have own youth theatre space and make your mark.

- To form a partnership between organisations to stop people reinventing the wheel in different ways.
- That youth theatre could have a higher status as poorly regarded by main house or arts centres in which they situated.
- To be able to be a decision maker.
- To have a block of time to complete funding applications.
- To be able to get good quality practitioners quickly to assist with youth theatre.

Chris Sudworth led a physical mapping exercise to establish each member's geographical relationship to Darlington and to each other in terms of miles and /or travel time. This clearly showed which groups would be ideally situated to form networks and partnerships with each other.

Chris spoke of his networking experiences in the North West and suggested ideas that could be used in the North East. Jill Adamson asked what benefits could be obtained from networks and what was meaningful. Discussions grew around the need for youth theatres to work together to support each other. The ability to obtain bigger pots of funding as a group's status is raised or partnerships are formed was considered. It was also felt that leaders delivering continually need to 'feed themselves', as well as the young people. Opportunities for leaders to do workshops and training could be implemented into the North East network.

Richard O'Neill gave a 30 minute presentation on the use of the NAYT website.

Participants were asked to make a '5 point action plan' that looked at how they would develop the needs of their youth theatre. These were then shared and discussed with the group. Many similarities were found between each youth theatres needs. Please find below some examples;

- Administration support
- Storage space
- Ongoing funding
- Diversity
- Training for older youth theatre members/separate training for people to become volunteers
- Professional artists to work in youth theatres
- Regional and national links to other youth theatres
- Staff development - leaders/assistants/volunteers and any staff in the building where a youth theatre is held.
- Sharing of work between youth theatres
- Raise profile of youth theatre

There was a broader discussion of the current aspirations and needs of youth theatre. Jill Adamson (CEO) suggested that youth theatres would benefit from strengthened networking and the ideal would be for youth theatres to be recognised and given status, not to be working in isolation. The group said

that being given the chance to talk to one another at an Engage event was beneficial for exchange of ideas. Different models of practice could be compared, rather than the tendency in youth theatres to feel isolated and precious about one's own methods and productions. It was felt that other groups could be categorised within youth theatre eg stage schools which at the moment do not seem to be included within the youth theatre umbrella. Chris Sudworth suggested that we should not leave any organisations out of the loop and no one should be outcast. Everyone in the group felt that time was a barrier to adequate networking.

It was suggested that young people should be able to network with each other and that a website forum to talk things through with each other would be a good idea. A youth theatre committee to drive this forward would be ideal and then it would be specific to youth theatre rather than My Space or Face Book.

Conclusion

All present said they appreciated the opportunity to attend networking events such as Engage and would value a local network.

The need for, and willingness to accept, support from each other was clearly established. It was felt by all that a practical element to future networking events would be valuable and incentive to attend.

Lyndsey Middleton from Darlington Arts Centre offered to host the first network meeting, (NAYT offered help to co-ordinate this) participants should be notified of the time and date soon.