



# Engage West Midlands Summary Report

The West Midlands Engage was the eighth 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 West Midlands 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 very positive, participants said it was:

- Great interactive workshop – good techniques for engagement without putting people on the spot.
- Generating creative juices to assist and improve peoples writing skills.
- Great ideas, great fun. If there had been time I would have liked to explore bringing another character in – creating dialogue.

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 experiences of working within a thriving network.

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.

### **Concerns**

- Space and time.
- Funding.
- Progression of youth theatre leaders/professional career
- Safety/child protection.

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 West Midlands 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.** Most disagreed with this statement, 'people don't know what youth theatre is/means', 'are all youth theatre practitioners skilled professionals?', 'freelances not paid for meetings etc shows a lack of respect'.
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. One youth theatre felt they were accessible to all but were they reaching everyone, how do you reach those young people where parents aren't the driving force to attend initially.
3. **I feel supported in my work at my youth theatre.** This received a fairly positive response however some people felt isolated, undervalued and misunderstood.
4. **Youth theatre members shape the programme of work at my youth theatre.** This statement was discussed with over half the group feeling that young people did shape the programme of work.
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 theatres need (taken from action plans)**

- Funding (project and core funding)
- Space
- Collaboration- joint projects, exchanges, adult and youth theatre partnerships.
- Publicity/marketing
- Plans/structure/systems
- Annual main stage shows
- YT mission statement
- Equipment
- Programming of children's and young people's theatre
- Training for youth theatre leaders
- Working with professional artists (musicians/dancers/designers etc.)
- A creative network (to develop larger pieces of work)
- Touring youth theatre groups
- Database of local practitioners
- Knowledge of legislation/policies
- Scripts (where to find them/quality)

## **Conclusion**

All present said they appreciate the opportunity to attend networking events such as Engage and would value a local network. It was felt by all that a practical/training element to future events would be valuable and incentive to attend. Rachel Veazey, based at the Crescent Theatre, offered to host the next meeting, possibly at the end of January. Other delegates would like to host future meetings.