



IMPACT REPORT CREATIVE IRELAND FUNDING

2019 - 2022



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017-2022



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

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I am delighted to present the following report, showcasing and celebrating Youth Theatre Ireland's partnership with the Creative Ireland programme from 2019 – 2022. This report highlights the impact of youth theatre on young people's lives and the ways in which Youth Theatre Ireland has used the Creative Ireland and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to support the development of youth theatre in Ireland.

Youth Theatre Ireland's vision is to provide access to youth theatre for every young person in Ireland and to empower young people through youth theatre. We believe that youth theatre can have a transformative impact on young people's lives, helping them to develop their confidence, self-esteem, and communication skills; improve their teamwork and problem-solving abilities; and gain a greater understanding of the world around them.

The Creative Ireland and Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth funding has been a huge boost for Youth Theatre Ireland and has enabled us to deliver on key elements of our Strategic Vision. With this funding, we have been able to:

- Develop a new national youth theatre development framework
- Provide training and support to youth theatre leaders and facilitators
- Fund new youth theatre groups in underserved areas
- Promote youth theatre to the wider public

The results of our work have been very encouraging. We have seen a significant increase in the number of young people participating in youth theatre, post pandemic, and we have received positive feedback from participants, parents, and leaders on these programmes.

Through this partnership we have helped to transform the lives of thousands of young people, making a real difference to the cultural landscape of Ireland.

We are grateful for the support of Creative Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and we look forward to continuing our work to provide access to youth theatre for every young person in Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eoghan Doyle', written over a thin horizontal line.

Eoghan Doyle

YOUTH THEATRE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction and Background

Youth Theatre Ireland is the development organisation for Youth Theatre in Ireland. The organisation's vision is to provide access to youth theatre for every young person in Ireland and to empower young people through youth theatre. The realisation of this vision requires the growth of youth theatres so that all young people have the option of accessing youth theatre provision in their own locality. There are currently 57 youth theatres in existence. Many young people are not currently served by a local youth theatre. The organisation is deeply committed to increasing the availability of high-quality youth theatre experiences. Youth Theatre Ireland is an organisation that has witnessed, over the last four decades, the beneficial impact of youth theatre participation and built up a high level of expertise in developing sustainable groups.

Realising this vision requires significant investment. The organisation offers ongoing support to existing youth theatres in addition to the delivery of a year-round programme of activities and events for youth theatres and their members. Before the support from Creative Ireland and the staff restructure, the organisation had six staff members; two of which were part-time. Currently it has seven staff members; one being part-time. There were significant capacity issues in maintaining a programme to meet the needs of affiliated groups while also ensuring emerging youth theatres received the support they required to establish firm foundations that would be conducive to sustainability. For every young person to have the opportunity to experience the impact of youth theatre in their lives requires Youth Theatre Ireland to be proactive in creating and scoping out opportunities for development nationally. As will be illustrated in this report, the resourcing provided by Creative Ireland has resulted in a significant leap forward for the organisation in its ability to fulfil the role of proactive initiator of youth theatre provision. This progress, and the approaches developed and learning from it, will be key as Youth Theatre Ireland moves towards achieving its vision.

Empowering Young People

The rationale behind YTI's vision, of all young people having access to quality youth theatre, is that such a circumstance would result in an improvement in the lives of young people. This would not only benefit the participants themselves but also their communities and wider society. The testimonies of those who have participated in youth theatre over the last 40 years is that this is what youth theatre achieves. Those involved in the organisation, many of whom have

experienced the benefits of youth theatre participation directly, are deeply passionate in this belief.

The organisation states that its mission is to support the social, personal and artistic development of young people through youth theatre. This is an extremely layered and complex statement that is indeed reflective of the richness and dynamism of the youth theatre space; a space that has been, and continues to be, transformational for many participants. This report will allude to the challenges of communicating the youth theatre experience, and its value, to the wider world. Youth theatre engagement for a young person frequently relates to the core of who that young person is and who they are becoming. To capture such a deeply human and nuanced experience is fraught with difficulty. To harness such experiences to make an argument for increased investment rarely feels like a completely successful enterprise. The use of quantitative data alone does not do justice to youth theatre. It is the quality of the engagement where the true value lies.

Every ten years, Youth Theatre Ireland undertakes Centre Stage, a comprehensive research project on all aspects of youth theatre in Ireland. The project involves the dissemination of a Census Form to each young person who participates in youth theatre. They are asked questions about their background and provide responses to questions related to their participation. The following were responses were provided by youth theatre participants and leaders to the following question:

Taking part in youth theatre has helped me...

- To improve my acting or performance skills
- To be more creative
- To improve my theatre and workshop skills
- To mix with new people and make new friends
- To be more confident and build my self-esteem
- To take chances in drama and work outside my comfort zone
- To work creatively with other young people to make new pieces of theatre
- To be myself
- To learn more about theatre and the arts
- To feel better or happier
- To escape stress and relax
- To communicate better with people
- To be more active and get involved
- To work better in a team
- To be more interested in other art forms like writing, dance, film, music or art
- To be more able to express my feelings and ideas
- To feel proud of what I've achieved with other young people
- To voice my own opinions on theatre
- To feel accepted and feel that I belong somewhere

- To contribute my own opinions and help to make decisions
- To take on responsibilities and commitments
- To explore issues and stories that matter to me
- To improve my theatre design or production skills
- To achieve more at school or in other parts of my life
- To progress to third-level theatre courses or professional theatre
- To become a Young Leader and learn new facilitation/leadership skills

These identified outcomes illustrate how the artistic, social and personal intertwine. Theatre as an artform is central to these outcomes. There is a particular dynamic between young people and theatre that promotes the development of youth theatre members in so many respects. To analyse this is beyond the scope of this report. However, it is clear that the discipline of theatre, its collaborative nature, the act of standing up and performing before your own community with your peers and using your voice to tell stories through theatre are all important factors that contribute to the overall positive experience that members get from youth theatre.

Young people are empowered by youth theatre in many respects. Increased confidence is frequently alluded to by participants as an outcome of youth theatre. They learn about the world through theatre and as a result are better informed and more proactive citizens. Many youth theatres undertake projects focused on benefitting their local communities. But perhaps the greatest empowerment young people get from youth theatre is the freedom to be themselves. The idea of 'finding your tribe' and feeling like you belong in a group of diverse peers while also being able to express your own unique identity in a safe space is what youth theatre achieves for many young people. As we are all aware, the teenage years are challenging in many respects. The increase in mental health difficulties among young people has been well documented. Youth theatre manifests many of the protective factors that help bolster a young person's wellbeing including a sense of belonging, community, a sense of purpose, being part of something bigger than yourself. The world we currently inhabit requires an abundance of such spaces for young people. Youth Theatre Ireland, working with partners and stakeholders, can provide them.

Sustainable Youth Theatre

Youth Theatre Ireland is very aware that the evolution of a sustainable youth theatre is a lengthy process requiring significant inputs of time and support. The organisation's experience is that without the groundwork to establish firm foundations, a youth theatre's longevity cannot be guaranteed and the young people in membership are not served in the best possible manner. This groundwork includes the development of governance structures, the establishment of a voluntary board/committee with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, a considered vision and mission statement, the creation of robust child protection and welfare policies and procedures, recruitment procedures for facilitators/volunteers, Health and Safety policies etc.

Many of these measures are statutory requirements and must be in place for a group to exist. Moreover, it has been Youth Theatre Ireland's experience that if these structures and policies are in place, sustainability is more likely. If a key individual(s) in the youth theatre moves on, where a youth theatre has the measures mentioned here in place, it is far more feasible for another person or person(s) to step into the role when a youth theatre's approach and way of working has been established, clearly articulated and embedded. Where this hasn't been the case, it has been observed that a youth theatre is less likely to survive the loss of a key individual(s).

Due to the importance of a high standard of practice and the necessity of sustainable youth theatre, Youth Theatre Ireland has a robust affiliation process. To become affiliated, a group must have the following in place:

- aims and objectives,
- an artistic vision,
- demonstrate a commitment to aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young people,
- a welfare / child protection policy,
- be not for profit,
- exist outside of formal education
- have a non-competitive ethos,
- have an inclusive ethos that encourages the participation of all young people,
- have recruited a group of committed young people and have plans to recruit more,
- have youth theatre members aged 12 and over,
- have a group of interested adults to run the youth theatre,
- have suitable space(s) and public liability insurance cover,
- intends to/have already started to run an annual programme including regular drama workshops and performance opportunities for its members.

Youth Theatre Ireland's affiliation process also ensures, from the beginning of a relationship with a prospective youth theatre, there is a strong and supportive relationship with at least one member of the Youth Theatre Ireland team. Indeed, the investment by Creative Ireland, and the initiatives that grew from it, have allowed the organisation to expand this early relationship beyond one staff member to other staff involved in the development work and training. All YTI staff are now viewed as having a role in informing the approach to development work and in nurturing the relationships with emerging youth theatres. These early relationships with Youth Theatre Ireland staff are often key not only to completing the affiliation process but also to the ongoing evolution of an affiliated youth theatre. Where a youth theatre has built a strong relationship of trust with Youth Theatre Ireland, they are likely to engage in programmes and seek input from the organisation in the future, for example, when they are developing a strategic plan or expanding their artistic programme. Such an engagement helps ensure the young

people who participate continue to benefit from best practice in all aspects of their youth theatre experience.

TEAM

Youth Theatre Ireland Team: Deputy Director, Special Projects Officer, National Training Coordinator, Director, National Programme Coordinator, Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer, Administrator.

KEY PARTICIPANTS

- Partners and stakeholders engaged in development work
- Participants in Youth Theatre Roadshow sessions
- Facilitators in new and emerging youth theatres
- Young people who have joined new and emerging youth theatres.

NEW APPROACHES AND INITIATIVES RESULTING FROM CREATIVE IRELAND INVESTMENT

Reassessment of Approach to Development Work and Staff Restructure

The Creative Ireland investment in Youth Theatre Ireland provided impetus and space for the reassessment of the organisation's approach to youth theatre development. The resulting re-strategising, staff restructure and streamlining has been crucial to achieving the outcomes identified below. These changes are illustrative of the organisational impact and increase in capacity experienced by YTI as a direct result of the Creative Ireland support.

Traditionally, the development remit fell within the responsibility of a single staff member (the Research and Development Officer) with other staff members contributing to elements as it lent itself to their roles. For example, the Child Protection Officer and Welfare Officer would have had a role in guiding burgeoning youth theatres in developing their child safeguarding policies and procedures. The Research and Development Officer had a wider remit including international work and took a lead on research projects such as Centre Stage. Additionally, supporting existing youth theatres, particularly those who were experiencing challenges and transitions, was also the role of the Research and Development Officer.

Youth theatre development is a core function of Youth Theatre Ireland. However, the necessity of delivering a diverse and high-quality programme of activities and events for the existing youth theatre community requires a significant investment of staff time and resources. Development work was frequently reactive. Typically, an individual, or a small group of individuals, interested in starting a youth theatre contacted YTI and the Research and Development Officer responded in a bespoke manner to the particular context and needs of the prospective youth theatre. The

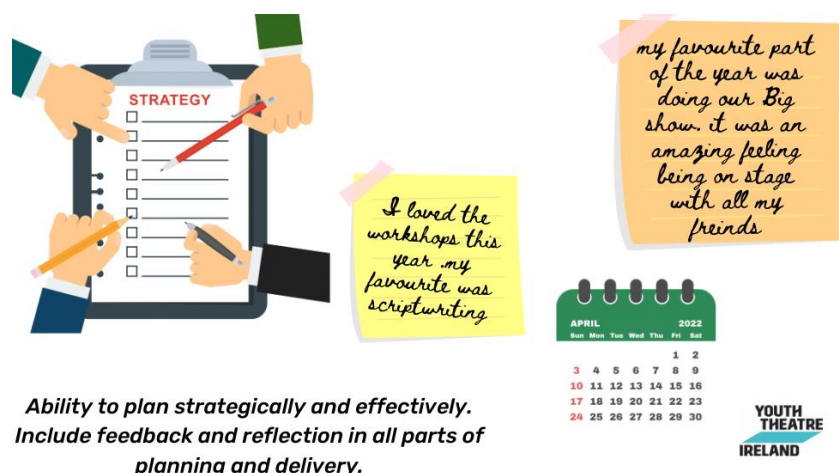
process, from the initial contact to the point at which a youth theatre affiliated, was a very involved and time-intensive one.

In 2019 and 2020, the organisation had the opportunity to reflect on the most resource-efficient and effective approach to developing youth theatre in Ireland. The role of Deputy Director, with a particular focus on youth theatre development, was created as was the role of Special Projects Officer. The Special Projects Officer has had a key role in both development and training. The organisation introduced the role of National Programme Coordinator which was indicative of the decision to advance the development work by allocating more responsibility for the organisation's artistic programme to a specified staff member. The rationale was to create more space and time for a proactive strategic approach to developing youth theatre.

Creation of role of Deputy Director

To date, this restructuring has proved very effective. The Deputy Director, Alan King, since his appointment, has prioritised development work. This new focus has allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to actively seek opportunities for the creation of new youth theatres. The Deputy Director has been pivotal in establishing new relationships with strategic partners on both a national and local level. Although some of this work has been in response to opportunities generated externally, the organisation has an increased capacity to embrace, and be active partners, in initiatives that can support an increase in provision of youth theatre.

The Deputy Director has developed strategies, approaches and tools that have helped to streamline the work of supporting the establishment of youth theatres. Alan has been key to the delivery of the Youth Theatre Roadshow. He has also developed other approaches and tools to streamline the work. These include hosting online sessions to bring together a range of individuals and agencies /organisations interested in developing youth theatre. He has also developed tools such as a Top Tips for Sustainable Youth Theatre presentation.



Employment of Special Projects Officer

The Special Projects Officer (SPO) role, directly funded by Creative Ireland, has been integral to the progress made in both youth theatre development and training. Barry Morgan, who assumed the role in 2019, has been pivotal in the alignment of these two essential elements of YTI's work. He has gained an in-depth understanding of both.

Below is a list of the outputs and outcomes achieved to date in the role:

- The Special Projects Officer has been part of the delivery team for the information sessions/taster workshops (known as the Youth Theatre Roadshow) in the regions targeted for the development of youth theatre in the original Service Level Agreement.
- Initiating and developing relationships with potential local stakeholders including those in Ballyfermot, Offaly and Westmeath. Beyond the initially targeted areas he has also been involved in fostering relationships between YTI and local partners in a number of other locations.
- Functioning as the point of contact for those who wish to pursue youth theatre development following on from these sessions.
- Identifying the appropriate individuals who should be given priority for places on the Drama Facilitation Training Programme.
- Co-facilitating the delivery of content on the Drama Facilitation Training Course.
- Assessing learners' work and leading on the accreditation of learners through QQI.
- Point of contact for graduates of the course who wish to develop youth theatre in their locality.
- Supporting emerging youth theatres who are working towards affiliation. Working with the Deputy Director to provide feedback on their mission/vision statements, child safeguarding policies and procedures etc.

- Assisting in the identification of youth theatres to receive seed funding.
- Identifying underserved communities and marginalised groups of young people where targeted interventions are required to develop youth theatre provision.
- Developing relationships and offering guidance to those who seek to develop youth theatre in underserved communities.

The role has been essential in creating the through-line, and providing consistency of support, from the information/taster sessions to the training course to the establishment of youth theatre groups. His ongoing contact with learners on the course has been instrumental in achieving outcomes related to youth theatre development. In addition to the locations identified in the Service Level Agreements, the Special Projects Officer has also been involved in development initiatives in Mayo, Kerry, West Cork and the Gaeltacht areas.

The SPO role has been a significant contributing factor in the significant organisational impact resulting from the Creative Ireland investment. The existence of this role, and the very able way it has been actioned by Barry Morgan, has allowed the organisation to develop the efficient and effective development structures and approaches alluded to in this report. Having a staff member who can act as a bridge between development and training has allowed the organisation to identify and maximise the synergy between them.

As will be described in the Training Section of this report, the SPO played a crucial role in adapting the Drama Facilitation Training Course for online delivery as necessitated by the pandemic. This was a huge challenge requiring a radical rethink and reworking. The ongoing hybrid nature of delivery which has opened up the course to a wider group of participants is also a testament to the input of the Special Projects Officer.

This report will address the effectiveness for potential partners and stakeholders of witnessing and experiencing youth theatre practice to gain an understanding of it. The existence of the role of Special Projects Officer and the increased in capacity it has facilitated has been key to YTI's ability to do this.

Evolution of Local Partnership Model

The investment by Creative Ireland has facilitated the evolution of a local partnership model for youth theatre development. Previously, much of the organisation's development work was focused on one individual or a small group of individuals in a locality who were interested in developing youth theatre. These individuals may or may not have been attached to an organisation, venue or agency. Frequently, they were not fully cognisant of other potential local stakeholders. While the advice would have been for these individuals to identify and contact potential local supports such as arts venues or Arts Officers, the effectiveness of this approach relied on the willingness and ability of these individuals to communicate the potential impact of local youth theatre provision and to build relationships.

This local partnership approach means that Youth Theatre Ireland can target potential partners and provide them with a clear and well-developed rationale on the benefits of youth theatre, how it can impact young people in their area and how establishing a youth theatre can aid them in achieving their own goals as an organisation, venue or agency.

The investment has allowed a targeting of the partners who are best placed to develop sustainable youth theatres in a community. Moreover, bringing these people together in the same room and facilitating conversations has proved very effective. Even where potential stakeholders had not considered youth theatre as an option, the programme allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to raise awareness of it as a viable and effective way of meeting the creative, social and personal needs of young people.

Accessing local knowledge is essential. Each area has a particular arts, cultural and social ecosystem. A one size fits all approach does not suffice. Rather than YTI making assumptions around the agencies best placed to develop youth theatre, inviting a wide range of stakeholders to come together has allowed a free flow of ideas and potential relationships to emerge that otherwise were unlikely to materialise.

The progress of establishing youth theatres using this approach was seriously impacted, though not halted, by COVID-19. As already stated, bringing people together in the one space to facilitate conversations is a very effective way of progressing the work. The move to online work required Youth Theatre Ireland to adapt all its programmes and supports, development work included. This fundamental change in how the organisation operates was hugely demanding on staff and other resources. Despite this necessary shift, substantial progress in relation to development work has been achieved between 2019 and 2022.

The Local Partnership Approach has been piloted in Westmeath, Dublin and Offaly as described in the original Service Level Agreement with Creative Ireland. The approach has also been adopted to support youth theatre development in Kerry, Mayo, Gaeltacht areas and in other regions of Dublin where there is low youth theatre provision.

Information/Taster Sessions - *The Youth Theatre Roadshow*

The funding from Creative Ireland has been used to evolve a very effective and cost-efficient offering to seed local partnerships and introduce Youth Theatre Ireland. YTI staff travel to a locality usually to deliver a day-long event consisting of a taster workshop followed by an information session. The offering can vary depending on the needs of local partners. On occasion, it can be an information session or a meeting involving local partners/stakeholders who have already declared an interest in youth theatre. Alternatively, it can be a weekend of workshops with information provided to participants on developing youth theatre. The *Youth Theatre Roadshow* is the collective name given to all these approaches.

Travelling to meet those who are interested in youth theatre has always been part of development work. However, the Creative Ireland investment, as with many aspects of the organisation's work, has allowed YTI to develop a more strategic and streamlined approach. The evolution of the Youth Theatre Roadshow has brought a new focus on the organisation's local visibility and its willingness and ability to deliver locally has been greatly valued by partners and stakeholders. Such an approach functions well and achieves a number of desirable outcomes. It allows attendees to gain an understanding of the work and the approach of Youth Theatre Ireland and meet some of the organisation's staff. It also means that YTI has a sense of the level of interest in establishing a youth theatre and the partners who are best placed to progress the work. To date, the sessions have been facilitated by the Deputy Director, the National Training Coordinator and the Special Projects Officer or a combination of these three. Potential partners in the development of youth theatre are brought together including individuals with an interest in theatre and/or who see the need for more activities for local young people, representatives from community organisations and other agencies and that have a remit in developing services for young people such as the those from the ETB, Local Authority, Local Creative Arts Partnerships and local Arts Venues.

In addition to an introduction to youth theatre and conversations on how to approach local provision, in most cases, attendees get to experience a workshop. This practical element is conducive to fostering open, creative dialogue and ideas but also allows attendees to get a taste of the youth theatre experience. The benefits for the promotion of Youth Theatre Ireland's Drama Facilitation Course and of attendees getting the opportunity to experience some of its methodologies will be described in the section on Training.

The Youth Theatre Roadshow has evolved since its inception so the organisation can tailor the output to the objectives of a partner as happened with a two-day session in West Cork. This was a collaboration with the Cork Local Creative Youth Partnership. This training had a focus on the design of creative programmes for young people and participants included teachers, youth workers and artists.

YTI is also visiting third level institutions to introduce youth theatre methodology to students who are studying drama and theatre to promote the practice and raise awareness of youth theatre as a potential career path. To date, sessions have been delivered to students in Maynooth and TU Dublin.

Thanks to the Creative Ireland investment, Youth Theatre Ireland has had the impetus to expand the training and practical workshop sessions it can offer to potential partners and collaborators. Every opportunity the organisation has to engage with a new audience is a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of youth theatre and promote its methodologies.

Alignment of Youth Theatre Development and Training

Another cost effective and efficient development resulting from the Creative Ireland investment has been the alignment of training and youth theatre development. Previously, there was a less coordinated and intentional relationship between the two areas of work. Some graduates went

on to establish youth theatres and/or work as facilitators in youth theatre. With the new course, and the rethink on development work, the option of establishing youth theatre provision is there from the initial contact with future learners who attend the Youth Theatre Roadshow. The presence of the Special Projects Officer, who can advise on youth theatre development, as a trainer on the course, means the learners have consistent access to information and support. Once they graduate, they can continue to link in with the SPO and/or Deputy Director regarding plans for establishing youth theatre provision in their own localities.

The introduction of the ring fencing of places for learners from areas of low youth theatre provision has been, and will continue to be, a valuable approach in targeted youth theatre development. Several youth theatres have already been established by graduates of the course. Stephen Tully (2020-21 course) has played a key role in the establishment and delivery of Ballyfermot Youth Theatre and continues to be its lead facilitator. Jay Origan and Sinéad Handy (2020-21 course) established Fun House Youth Theatre in Offaly and continue to lead it. Niamh Smith (2020-21 course) works as a Liaison Officer for City of Dublin Youth Services Board (CDYSB) and is introducing youth theatre practice to youth workers who work with young people from marginalised communities. Jo Jordan (2021-22 course) has been a key individual in the founding and ongoing delivery of Shout Out Youth Theatre (Listowel) and is its lead facilitator. Other graduates are currently involved in the delivery of youth theatre in Cork, Kildare, Louth and Limerick.

A number of current learners on the 2022-23 course are from areas of low or no youth theatre provision and were recruited for the course through the Local Partnership/ Youth Theatre Roadshow approach. From the beginning of their journey with Youth Theatre Ireland, these learners are connected with local partners and stakeholders. They are cognisant of the need and desirability of youth theatre provision in their community and, through their learning on the course, will have the skills and abilities which can render them key to progressing the delivery of high-quality youth theatre practice to young people and the many benefits that it brings. More information on the outcomes of the Drama Facilitation Training Course is provided in the Training Section of this report.

Outputs and outcomes of Development Work from Creative Ireland Investment

Outcomes as identified in Original SLA

- *Established 3 new youth theatre groups in Dublin, Offaly and Westmeath*
- *New leaders will receive accredited training in Drama facilitation and Leadership*
- *Developed strong relationships with local partners in Dublin, Offaly and Westmeath.*
- *Identified core funding for the sustained delivery of the youth theatre with an appropriate local partner.*
- *Young people without access to youth drama in the target areas have been enabled to participate regularly in quality, developmental youth theatre programmes.*
- *The youth theatres established are sustainable, locally rooted and have the capacity to continue beyond this funding investment.*

- *The youth theatres established continue to be supported and access national level opportunities through the Youth Theatre Ireland national network of youth theatres.*

Summary of Outputs and Outcomes

Activity/Approach	Outputs	Outcomes
Re-Assessment of approach to development work and staff restructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of Special Projects Officer (see below). • Creation of role of Deputy Director with focus on development work (see below). • Establishment of local partnership model for youth theatre development (see below). • Greater alignment of development and training functions of the organisation (see below). • Delivery of Youth Theatre Roadshow(see below). • Seed funding is made available for new youth theatre groups and towards supporting the inclusion of young people in underserved communities and/or those who experience marginalisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation is more strategic in its approach to youth theatre development. • Youth Theatre Ireland has increased capacity. • Greater youth theatre provision and growth in youth theatres affiliated to YTI. • The organisation moves closer to realising its vision of access to youth theatre to every young person in Ireland. • More young people are empowered through youth theatre participation and experience artistic, social and personal growth. • More young people from marginalised and underserved communities have access to youth theatre. • Greater awareness of the Youth Theatre Ireland and its work.
Creation of role of Deputy Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Director takes a lead on all aspects of development work. • Deputy Director helps identify locations for focused initiatives on creating/increasing youth theatre provision. • Deputy Director is part of the team delivering Youth Theatre Roadshow sessions. . • Deputy Director takes a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More youth theatres are affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland. • Youth Theatre Ireland partners with Ealaín Na Gaeltachta to increase youth theatre provision in Gaeltacht areas. • Youth Theatre Ireland partners with CDYSB and Exchange House to establish a pilot youth theatre project for young

	<p>lead on identifying and fostering relationships with local and national partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Director identifies and fosters relationships with organisations, agencies and individuals who work with marginalised young people. • Deputy Director helps identify initiatives to receive seed funding. • Deputy Director responds proactively to new opportunities that have the potential to increase youth theatre provision. • Introduction of new initiatives and approaches that allow streamlining of development work. • Deputy Director works with Director to identify and meet needs of affiliated youth theatres. 	<p>Travellers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective use of YTI's time and resources in relation to youth theatre development. • Increased capacity of organisation to support individuals, organisations and agencies wishing to establish youth theatre provision. • The organisation experiences an increase in local partners in more locations. • Initiatives such as Youth Theatre Costs Grant and Bursary Support Grant help sustain existing youth theatre provision and support the participation of young people who experience barriers to accessing youth theatre.
Engagement of Special Project Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects Officer contributes to the development and training function of the organisation including delivery of Youth Theatre Roadshow sessions, developing relationships with potential local partners and stakeholders, supporting participants on the Drama Facilitation Training Course interested in developing local youth theatre provision and identifying marginalised communities with barriers to accessing youth theatre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity of organisation is increased in relation to its development and training functions. • Increased alignment of training and development work resulting in improved outcomes for both. • YTI can target an increased number of locations and regions where there is no or low youth theatre provision. • More individuals apply for, and participate in, the Drama Facilitation Training Course. • Continuity of support and relationship from Youth Theatre Roadshow sessions to course participation to establishment of new

		<p>youth theatres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increased number of youth theatres, particularly in locations where there is no or low provision. • Increased capacity to identify partners and build key relationships to further the expansion of youth theatre provision to underserved communities and marginalised young people.
Establishment of Local Partnership Model for Youth Theatre Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Theatre Ireland targets specific locations for youth theatre development. • The organisation contacts a wide range of potential stakeholders and partners in the specific locations. • Youth Theatre Roadshow sessions take place in the targeted regions. • The Development Team advises local partners and stakeholders on the establishment of a sustainable youth theatre. • New youth theatres established through this approach become affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New youth theatres are established in 2 of the 3 locations initially targeted for youth theatre development; Offaly and Dublin 10. • Establishment of partnerships and collaborations between various local stakeholders and with YTI in a number of other locations including Kerry, Cork, Mayo and the Gaeltacht regions. • Discussions take place on the best approach to develop youth theatre provision locally increasing the likelihood of sustainable youth theatre provision. • Establishment of relationships between YTI staff and those interested in developing youth theatre. • Progress is made in establishing new youth theatre provision in Kerry, Gaeltacht areas and Mayo.
Youth Theatre Roadshow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 2019 and 2022, 7 information and taster sessions are delivered in locations targeted due to low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of YTI and its work. • Increased awareness of youth theatre practice

	youth theatre provision.	<p>and its effectiveness as an approach for the development and growth of young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendees at sessions participate in a workshop using youth theatre methodologies, resulting in a shift in understanding and appreciation of the practice. • Relationships are strengthened with local partners and stakeholders. • Rise in number of applications for Drama Facilitation Training Course. • Increased number of participants on Drama Facilitation Training Course. • Increase in number of course graduates who establish youth theatre and/or play a key role in their local youth theatre.
Greater Alignment between Youth Theatre Development and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Projects Officer becomes part of Development team. • Drama Facilitation Training Course trainers and Development team co-facilitate Youth Theatre Roadshow Sessions. • Increased interaction between Development team and course participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those interested in developing youth theatre provision are aware of, and have access to, high quality accredited training. • Ring fencing of places on Drama Facilitation Course for those from areas of low youth theatre provision. • An increase in the number of youth theatres established by graduates of the course and/or youth theatres where graduates are key facilitators. • Graduates are aware of youth theatre as a source of future employment and/or potential career

		pathway.
Seed Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New youth theatres receive funding to support the costs of establishment and initial delivery of youth theatre to young people in their locality. • Organisations and service providers who work with marginalised young people receive seed funding towards the establishment of youth theatre programmes. • Youth Theatre Ireland offers a Youth Theatre Costs Grant to existing youth theatres with increased expenditure as result of the cost of living crisis. • Youth Theatre Ireland provides a Bursary Support Grant to existing youth theatres to reduce the barriers being experienced by some young people to youth theatre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More young people have access to youth theatre and experience the benefits of participation. • An increase in youth theatre provision especially in contexts where provision was lacking. • New youth theatre groups are more sustainable. • Facilitators can be paid for their work in the initial delivery of youth theatre by new youth theatres. • Other costs related to delivery by youth theatre in new locations can be covered including insurance, costs of advertising, venue hire costs etc. • New youth theatres have space and time to secure future resourcing for ongoing delivery of programme. • Affiliated youth theatres can use existing resources towards the delivery of programmes for young people due to the financial support received to cover increased operating costs. • More young people from families who are struggling financially can continue to access youth theatre and benefit from participation. • Young people who had previously experienced financial barriers to accessing youth theatre can now participate.

In 2019, Youth Theatre Ireland contacted potential stakeholders and partners in the establishment of a youth theatre in Ballyfermot, Dublin 10. Ballyfermot had no youth theatre provision. An information and consultation session were organised in Ballyfermot Library with the aim of bringing people together to explore the possibilities for the establishment of a youth theatre. Among those in attendance were representatives from Ballyfermot Youth Service, Dublin City Arts Office, FamiliBase, Basement Productions (a local theatre group) and Cherry Orchard Integrated Youth Service. Several individuals who were working in delivering Arts provision locally and/or with an interest in service provision for young people also attended.

There was strong backing for a youth theatre for the area. The best approach to establishing one was considered. FamiliBase is an organisation that is well rooted in the community and has a range of existing Arts programmes for young people. They use an integrative model of support for families, young people and children offering one-to-one support, counselling and other tailored approaches for those who access its services. Arts programmes are integral to its work. They are viewed as key to empowering young people to achieve their potential and important in facilitating personal and social development. The combination of youth work methodology and Arts practice made FamiliBase an ideal partner in the development of youth theatre provision. The organisation was eager to be proactive in establishing a youth theatre and there was agreement among stakeholders that it was a well-placed organisation to take a lead.

According to the FamiliBase Arts Programme Coordinator Alan Tully:

Ensuring young people have continuity of experience and ongoing access to programmes is at the centre of what we do. Youth theatre felt like an ideal option because sustainability is at the heart of it. From the very first contact, YTI gives you a roadmap for sustainability. It is built into the approach. Collaborating with YTI allows you to reflect on the organisation's wider approach and practice. To be able to work with an organisation that is so strategic and has a long track record of developing best practice, with an overview of what is happening nationally, is so valuable and rare. It strengthens any organisation or group who undertakes a collaboration.

There is such a willingness on the part of YTI to support the delivery of youth theatre. Being able to pick up the phone and ask Barry or Alan a question is invaluable. YTI is very present during the development and establishment of a youth theatre. This support has continued beyond the early life of the group. Importantly, there is also freedom, the freedom to customise the youth theatre to the needs of the particular context in which a group is operating; the recognition that one size does not fit all.

Young people come to Familibase through different avenues; some through referrals from Tusla, CAMHS, social workers etc. Often, they have current or past mental health issues. The door is always open to all young people in the community regardless of their background or life experience. Some young people require one to one support initially, allowing their confidence and capacity to be built to a point where they are ready to take part in group activities. Members of the youth theatre came to Familibase through these various routes.

According to the Pobal Deprivation Index, Ballyfermot is considered a disadvantaged area with some areas rated as very disadvantaged. Familibase purposely addresses any potential

barriers to access. All programmes are free of charge, and as much as is feasible, there is no time restriction or age barrier on participation. There is particular emphasis on including young people who experience marginalisation; those who have not felt they belonged in other settings.

To quote Alan Tully:

So much can happen for these young people in an Arts space. You can't predict the impact engagement will have and where it will bring an individual young person - what it might spark for them.

Ballyfermot Youth Theatre had a challenging beginning as it was due to commence when COVID struck. The decision was taken to proceed with delivery as there was interest among young people and momentum behind the initiative. Approaches were found to ensure participants had an initial positive experience. When restrictions allowed, the group began to work outdoors and youth theatre members participated in a six-week media camp that allowed them to develop film and drama skills.

The seed money provided by Youth Theatre Ireland and the participation of the key youth theatre facilitator on the Drama Facilitation Training Course are identified by Familibase as integral to the success of the youth theatre. The seed money allowed the youth theatre to begin delivery and pay the facilitator while other avenues for future resourcing were investigated. The facilitator has become a key member of the Arts Programme team and his presence has allowed the enrichment of other existing programmes.

FamiliBase is committed to youth theatre long-term. Staff have witnessed the positive outcomes for members of the group which has reinforced their belief in its effectiveness:

Empowerment of young people is at the heart of the work. Young people are encouraged to question and respond honestly to what is on offer; tell us what works and doesn't work. Youth theatre is working for the participants. They are getting so much from it. You can see the impact it is having on their development in so many respects.

Ballyfermot Youth Theatre have created a video to showcase their work. You can watch it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpw2BgHVSyo>

Fun House Youth Theatre (Offaly)

An information/taster session was held in Tullamore Library on 11th November 2019. Among the organisations represented were the Local Authority, local ETB and members of the local theatre community. The major outcome from the development work in Offaly is the establishment of Fun House Youth Theatre. The group was founded by Sinéad Handy and Jay Origan and is based in Tullamore. Places on the Youth Drama Facilitation Training Course were ring fenced for Sinéad and Jay as they expressed an interest in establishing youth theatre in the county.

Membership is open to young people aged 12 - 21 in Offaly and surrounding counties. Online taster sessions for potential members began in April 2021 and as soon as COVID allowed,

workshops took place in local schools to introduce the youth theatre to young people in the catchment area. Once COVID restrictions eased, the group began to meet in-person in St. Mary's Youth Centre and continue to do so on a Tuesday evening.

The youth theatre has all the hallmarks of a sustainable youth theatre; facilitators with local roots who have strong links to the local arts and theatre community and have a network of peers due to their participation on the Drama Facilitation Training Course. The youth theatre has a clear and considered vision, a committee in place, robust child protection, recruitment, and other policies and procedures. As a result of the approach taken to establishing the youth theatre, the group has a strong relationship with YTI.

According to Sinéad Handy:

It was hugely beneficial to have Barry available to us at the end of a phone or on a Zoom call. We had lots of questions and it was great to be able to run ideas and possibilities past him. Sometimes we would talk to him a few times a week. We were starting from scratch here. There was nothing similar. The hardest part probably was trying to get a committee on board and to get people to go along on the journey with us. Barry would give us tips to engage people.

The members are consistently there every week - they don't miss it. There is something there for each of them. It's not just about being an actor on stage. It is about the friendships. It's about the trust they build up among themselves and so many other things. The group that we have at the moment they are all from different walks of life. If they were in a classroom together they might not be friends. In fact, I don't think they would be but they all adore each other because they have this thing in common.

You can see the change in their confidence with each other, how they communicate. Their ability to be able to go out to other people. We got some recording equipment so that they could capture various kinds of footage. They went to our local Musical Society, and they interviewed the production team and crew. That is not something they would have had the confidence to do when they started youth theatre.

Fun House Youth Theatre became affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland in February 2023. YTI are delighted that the group will be participating in the 2023 National Festival of Youth Theatres.

Westmeath

While an initial meeting for those interested in developing youth theatre provision in Westmeath was held on 10th December 2019, progress in this county was particularly hampered by COVID. Potential partners were reassessing how they deliver their existing services and there was little appetite to pursue new relationships and initiatives. YTI is committed to re-engaging with organisations, agencies and individuals identified in Westmeath in 2023. A participant on the Drama Facilitation Course from Westmeath who has already indicated her intention to pursue the development of a youth theatre in her locality.

In February 2023, Dave Kelly (National Training Coordinator) and Alan King (Deputy Director) delivered a session for Youth Work Midlands in Mullingar. This was a valuable opportunity to network and make introductions to potential new partners and stakeholders in developing youth theatre provision in the county.

Other Youth Theatre Development Work Initiatives

The staff restructuring and other approaches evolved due to the Creative Ireland investment have had an impact in several locations beyond the those originally identified in the Service Level Agreement.

Kerry

Kerry is a county that has been experiencing substantial expansion in youth theatre provision over the last number of years. While there was some existing youth theatre provision, the county was underserved. Youth Theatre Ireland had been in contact with some of the partners involved in this expansion previously but it was the increased resourcing from Creative Ireland that allowed the organisation dedicated focus and staff time. The existence of the Drama Facilitation Training Course has also proved an important factor in the growth of youth theatre provision in this particular county.

We spoke to Deirdre Enright, Creative Youth Coordinator at Kerry ETB, for this report. The Kerry Local Creative Youth Partnership was one of three pilot initiatives introduced in 2019 as a partnership between the ETBs, local authorities, the non-formal education sector, family support services and youth services. The LCYPs combine a wide range of human and infrastructural resources to develop and provide out-of-school creative activities for children and young people that complement and work with the formal school settings. From the inception of the initiative in Kerry, Deirdre had identified a lack of youth theatre provision and viewed increased provision as a priority of the LCYP. Her role was to focus on developing partnerships to create an environment where youth theatre could flourish in the county. The aim is that no young person in Kerry will live more than 45 minutes away from youth theatre.

Having a willing national partner like Youth Theatre Ireland made developing youth theatre more attractive. The organisation supports and advises on the rollout of the county wide initiative but also supports each local group as they emerge and grow. Youth Theatre Ireland staff being on the ground, doing the work and demonstrating the practice is essential. The existence of a national partner that can also have a local presence is key.

YTI's commitment to supporting the establishment of sustainable youth theatres was evident from the beginning of our conversations in 2019. The goal of the LCYP is to have a youth theatre within 45 minutes of every young person in the county. The Arts Office in Kerry was a willing partner from the start. The next step was to figure out who the other partners on the ground would be.

In line with the rationale behind the LCYP, the approach to youth theatre is targeted. Young people who are socially disadvantaged and less likely to access youth theatre and other drama opportunities are the priority. Places in the groups are ring fenced for these young people.

To date, the LCYP have partnered with venues such as St. John's Theatre (Listowel) and organisations who are well placed to reach young people with less opportunities such as Family Resource Centres. Kerry Diocesan Youth Service (KDYS) has come on board as a partner this year. Another collaborator is St. John of God with a particular focus on opening up access for young people with additional needs.

In early 2023, a joint initiative by the LCYP at Kerry ETB and Kerry Arts Office offered funding of €22,000 for youth theatre development.

Deirdre has been aware of the value of youth theatre since the 1990s when she was working in Dun Laoghaire Arts Office, then involved in establishing youth theatre provision there. Her experience has given her belief in youth theatre as an effective approach:

I am confident in promoting youth theatre as the practice is a proven youth work approach and a recognised way of promoting the development of young people.

One of the potential barriers to expanding youth theatre in the county was the insufficient availability of skilled youth drama facilitators. Deirdre views the Drama Facilitation Training Course as a vital ingredient in the support offered by YTI. Places have been ring fenced for potential youth theatre facilitators from Kerry. One graduate is the key facilitator with Shout Out Youth Theatre in Listowel. Places on the current course have been ring fenced for two learners from the county. Kerry ETB has covered the participation fee for one of these learners while Kerry Arts Office is funding the other one. The National Training Coordinator, Deputy Director and Special Projects Officer brought the Youth Theatre Roadshow to Killarney in June 2022 and facilitated a weekend exploring youth theatre development for 15 facilitators involved in the network of established and emerging youth theatres in the county.

Currently there are four youth theatres in Kerry; Dingle, Listowel, Cahersiveen and Tralee with an emerging group in Shanakill. Shout Out in Listowel is affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland and is participating in the 2023 National Festival of Youth Theatres. There are plans for the other groups to affiliate as they develop. Youth Theatre Ireland is very willing to support them in this process.

Gaeltacht Areas

YTI has been working closely with Ealaín na Gaeltachta, an organisation that promotes the development of the contemporary and the traditional arts in the Gaeltacht. Ealaín na Gaeltachta are actively supporting the establishment of youth theatres in Gaeltacht areas and have allocated resources to that end. Youth Theatre Ireland has been a key partner in designing the approach to be adopted in developing sustainable groups. Facilitators from Gaeltacht areas are participating on the current Drama Facilitation Training Course. The Irish speaking population has been underserved in terms of youth theatre provision hence this initiative is also facilitating

the desired outcome of increasing access to youth theatre for young people who have previously not had access to youth theatre in their own communities.

Youth Theatre Ireland delivered workshop sessions for 11 potential youth theatre facilitators for these new youth theatres at the Cuan Studio in Spiddal in September 2022.

Such is its commitment to youth theatre development, Ealaín Na Gaeltachta appointed a Youth Theatre Development Officer in March 2022. In July 2022, a call was made for expressions of interest for running youth theatre projects:

<https://ealain.ie/en/expressions-of-interests-sought-for-youth-theatre-programmesin-the-gaeltachta/>

Youth Theatre Ireland believes the work with Ealaín na Gaeltachta is hugely significant and is likely to lead to exponential growth in youth theatre provision.

Mayo

Youth Theatre Ireland has been working with Mayo Arts Office to reignite Mayo Youth Theatre and look at wider provision in the county. One of the challenges in this particular county is the difficulty in sourcing local facilitators who will be committed to delivering youth theatre. Youth Theatre Ireland in partnership with Mayo Arts Officer delivered an online session followed by an in-person taster/information session in Castlebar in May 2022.

Among those who attended were representatives from hÁras Inis Gluaire. hÁras Inis Gluaire is Ireland's only bilingual arts centre, situated in Belmullet. The Arts Centre had been considering the establishment of a youth theatre. The session allowed a wider conversation about provision in Mayo and as a result Mayo County Council is supporting the development of the youth theatre in Belmullet. A participant from the session had places ringfenced on the Drama Facilitation Training Course. The Arts Office offered bursaries to cover the participation fee for the 2022 - 23 course.

West Cork

Youth Theatre Ireland collaborated with Cork Local Creative Youth Coordinator Fiona Quinn to deliver Creative Facilitation Skills Training in Uilinn Arts Centre, Skibbereen in September 2022.

The two-day training was open to a wide range of practitioners who use creativity in their work including teachers, youth workers, volunteers and artists. It explored best practice and practical, creative activities in work with young people to support their social, personal and creative development. The training was facilitated by YTI's Deputy Director, National Training Coordinator and Special Projects Officer. This training was different to other sessions delivered as part of

the Youth Theatre Roadshow as it introduced concepts around Design Thinking to support participants in creating a workshop programme using a drama methodology.

This training also proved a valuable opportunity to introduce youth theatre methodologies to a new audience.

Future Initiatives

In 2023, in conjunction with Laois Arts Office, Youth Theatre Ireland is planning to deliver taster sessions for potential youth theatre facilitators.

The organisation has recently been contacted by the LYCP in Sligo with a view to organising workshops for youth workers later in 2023.

Growth in Affiliated Youth Theatres/ Increased support for Existing Youth Theatres

Despite the difficulties resulting from the pandemic, Youth Theatre Ireland has witnessed a growth in affiliated youth theatres. Like all the organisation's other programmes in 2020 and 2021, development work moved online, with the Special Projects Officer, Research and Development Officer and the Deputy Director working with groups to support their affiliation to Youth Theatre Ireland. Appetite to establish new groups declined once the pandemic kicked in, but thanks to the continued efforts of the team on the online space, several new youth theatre groups were established since 2020.

The following youth theatres have become affiliated since January 2020

- The Mill Youth Theatre – Dublin
- Macnas Spectacle Youth Theatre - Galway
- Ballyfermot Youth Theatre - Dublin
- Shout Out Youth Theatre - Kerry
- Dreamstuff Youth Theatre - Kilkenny
- Flocking Arts Youth Theatre - Monaghan
- Fun House Youth Theatre – Offaly
- Wonder Youth Theatre - Cavan

As emphasised in this report, the affiliation process requires time and the full impact of the Creative Ireland resourcing, in terms of an increase in affiliated youth theatres, is likely to be seen in 2023. However, there has already been an increase in the number of affiliated youth theatres joining Youth Theatre Ireland since 2020 with 8 new groups. For reference, the number of groups that affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland from 2018 – 2020 was 4. So, this represents a 100% growth in youth theatres affiliated over a comparable period. Youth Theatre Ireland has identified up to 6 groups whose affiliation is likely to progress in 2023.

LEARNING AND CONCLUSION

The resourcing provided by Creative Ireland has impacted Youth Theatre Ireland's work in developing youth theatre provision in many respects. Not only has it created space for the organisation to re-evaluate and reassess its approach, the investment has resulted in the evolution of a variety of effective approaches and outputs to advance Youth Theatre Ireland's core mission of increasing youth theatre provision. The impact of the resourcing has gone beyond the locations identified in the Service Level Agreement.

There has been substantial learning over the period of the investment. Youth Theatre Ireland has been reminded that regardless of the approaches taken, relationship building is at the heart of expanding youth theatre provision. Over the last 3 years, important relationships have been fostered with Creative Youth Coordinators, Arts Officers, youth work organisations, theatre venues and arts organisations.

However, it takes time for potential partners to get to know the organisation and for mutual understanding to be built. It has been the experience of YTI that not every organisation or agency will be initially amenable to investing time and resources in developing youth theatre provision. Some of the partners the organisation targeted as potential partners in expanding local provision including some Local Authority Arts Offices or ETBs did not view youth theatre as a priority.

It is clear there is a need for greater advocacy at a national and local level. The organisation intends to embrace future opportunities to promote its work and the positive outcomes of youth theatre participation. YTI has had an opportunity to discern where more energy needs to be expended in promoting youth theatre. The organisation will identify possible platforms to share its key messages including generating opportunities to engage with Arts Officers and ETB Youth Officers.

Youth theatre practice is complex, dynamic and difficult to communicate. This complexity is a virtue. Youth theatre has the ability to achieve so much in a single space; the personal, social and creative development of young people. However, describing the practice in a manner that is conducive to immediate understanding and appreciation is an ongoing challenge. The investment by Creative Ireland, and the initiatives that grew from it, have highlighted beyond any doubt how essential experiencing a youth theatre approach is for engagement and the meaningful promotion of youth theatre. While not a new observation, the organisation's repeated experience since 2019 has bolstered this understanding of the necessity of active engagement and the power of witnessing the practice in action. Moving forward, Youth Theatre Ireland intends to maximise the opportunities for potential partners and stakeholders to experience the practice.

Many of the people consulted in the creation of this report have spoken of the passion of the Youth Theatre Ireland staff. Their enthusiasm and commitment to youth theatre is an important

factor in the promotion of the practice and in inspiring others to take up the mantle. Therefore, opportunities to engage with staff, particularly when they are facilitating the practice, are especially valuable and effective.

The Youth Theatre Roadshow has been a key initiative in facilitating a wide variety of stakeholders to engage with youth theatre methodologies and been very effective in seeding relationships. Where local partners and stakeholders have participated in local sessions, the feedback has been extremely positive with significant outcomes resulting. It is crucial that Youth Theatre Ireland retains the capacity to continue to deliver these opportunities for engagement. To do so requires, at the very least, maintaining current levels of staff resourcing. There are many other locations around the country where these sessions would be of benefit. Due to staff's other duties, there is limited space in the annual calendar for this quality level of engagement locally. Any decrease in capacity and resourcing is likely to have a negative impact on the organisation's ability to action what has become a very effective approach.

The opportunity to expand the development team, thanks to the Creative Ireland investment, has highlighted the necessity of increased long-term resourcing if Youth Theatre Ireland is to achieve its mission and strategic goals. Staff resources are key to the future expansion of youth theatre. The willingness and ability of staff to foster relationships, to demonstrate the practice, to offer support and advice have all been critical to the progress described in this report. Retaining the role of Special Projects Officer has emerged as essential to sustaining this progress.

Securing ongoing and future investment is also key to Youth Theatre Ireland achieving its vision for a proliferation of youth theatres. For youth theatre to be attractive to potential partners, not only do its benefits need to be communicated, but funding pathways for groups need to be mapped. This is challenging. Currently youth theatres survive on small amounts of funding from a variety of sources. It is especially difficult for groups to fund their ongoing operations. Current funding is often project based and there are no guarantees of repeat funding in most cases. Youth Theatre Ireland believes the creation of a fund at a national level that youth theatres could access would significantly advance the expansion of youth theatre provision in Ireland.

Drama Facilitation Training Course

Introduction and Background

Youth Theatre Ireland/NAYD has a long history of providing quality training. From its origins in the 1980s, the organisation recognised the necessity of skilled practitioners if youth theatre was to take root in Ireland and achieve sustainability. The training offerings evolved over decades culminating in a full-time accredited drama facilitation course; ArtsTrain. This course was government funded, initially through FÁS, and later through the City of Dublin Education and Training Board. This funding model was not the ideal fit for the course as the nature of the funding required the majority of the learners to be resident in Dublin. However, despite the restrictions, the course had a significant impact on the youth theatre sector with many graduates progressing to work with youth theatres and develop youth theatre provision.

The withdrawal of funding for the course in 2017 dealt a significant blow to the organisation and the youth theatre sector. ArtsTrain had become part of the Arts ecosystem in Ireland with graduates not only enriching the youth theatre sector but the wider Arts sector. Many established theatre artists such as Dan Colley, Shaun Dunne, Phillip McMahon, Mollie Molumby, Jacinta Sheerin, Catherine Sheridan, to name but a few, are ArtsTrain graduates. The methodologies and approaches learned on the course informed the practice of artists and makers, particularly their approach to creating collaborative work.

There was concern among those who run youth theatre as to how they could source facilitators going forward. ArtsTrain had evolved a very particular approach; a practical workshop-based learning methodology. The experiential and embodied nature of the training attracted many practitioners who's learning to this point had been largely academic.

ArtsTrain made a key contribution to the attainment of Youth Theatre Ireland's goals including the proliferation of high-quality youth theatre practice. The organisation has long viewed the existence of accredited drama facilitation training as an essential element to its work. The availability of facilitators who have been trained in best practice approaches is also an essential factor in the proliferation of youth theatre which is at the core of YTI's mission.

Moreover, having an accredited course makes an important statement about youth theatre practice. It lends it recognition and respect and promotes it as a specific artform and unique way of working. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, youth theatre facilitators and practitioners often feel their work is undervalued. The evolution of modules for the courses has allowed YTI to elucidate the elements of the practice and articulate how and why it is effective.

TEAM

National Training Officer Coordinator, Special Projects Officer, Director, Deputy Director, National Programme Coordinator, Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer. Mentors

KEY PARTICIPANTS

16 graduates completed the 2020-2021 course, 21 graduates completed the 2021-2022 course, 23 learners are currently participating on the 2022 – 2023 course.

About the Drama Facilitation Training Course

The Drama Facilitation Training Course is a part-time course QQI Accredited at Level 6. It runs one weekend per month from September to May. It is delivered in hybrid form through a combination of online and in person residential sessions. The cost to participants is €250 which covers all the training, certification and the costs of residentials. NUI Maynooth is the venue for the residential weekends.

Participants learn a host of transferable skills and facilitation methodologies used in youth theatre. The training is open to anyone over the age of eighteen who would like to develop their facilitation skills to work creatively with young people, including youth theatre facilitators, youth workers, youth arts practitioners, youth leaders, actors, artists, teachers, writers, filmmakers and musicians. For those with facilitation experience, the course is a great way to meet like-minded people, expand their network and discover fresh approaches to facilitation practice.

Schedule

Below is a sample schedule. This one is for the 2022-2023 course:

Sept	10th - Induction - In Person
Oct	8th + 9th - Leadership 1 - Online
Nov	5th + 6th - Leadership 2 - Online
Dec	3rd + 4th - Leadership 3 - In Person Residential
Jan	14th + 15th - Engaging with Drama 1 - In Person Residential
Feb	11th + 12th - Engaging with Drama 2 - In Person Residential
Mar	11th + 12th - Engaging with Drama 3 - In Person Residential
April	15th + 16th - Engaging with Drama 4 - In Person Residential
May	13th - Essay Preparation - Online

In addition to the direct contact time as outlined above, learners meet with each other and mentors to plan skills demonstrations and write a 2,500-word essay that counts towards their accreditation. Self-reflection and analysis are an important element of the course with

participants regularly updating a Skills Matrix (an in-depth analysis of skills development). They also complete Learner Records for each module which count towards their accreditation.

Trainers

The course is facilitated by Dave Kelly (National Training Coordinator) and Barry Morgan (Special Projects Officer).

Dave is author of *Laying the Foundations: A Guide to Youth Drama Facilitation*. He was part of the team that developed and delivered Artstrain, Youth Theatre Ireland's full-time Drama Facilitation QQI level 6 course, which ran from 1999 - 2017. He has extensive experience facilitating in a range of settings and was Artistic Director of Dublin Youth Theatre from 2014 - 2021.

Barry is a previous graduate of ArtsTrain and co-founder of Taitiu Theatre whose focus is on creating socially engaged interactive theatre for younger audiences. He is co-artistic director of Mosney Youth Theatre and the De Luain Players. He was a former member of Droichead Youth Theatre. Barry designed and coordinates ARTiculate, Youth Theatre Ireland's young writer's programme.

Course Learning and Content

The two accredited modules are Engaging with Drama and Leadership.

The learning on the course includes:

- Exploring facilitation practice which promotes the active participation of young people and values their voice in the planning and delivery of activities.
- Recognising and responding to young people's needs, interests, and potential.
- Planning workshops and activities which support young people's development.
- Planning an annual programme of activities which support young people's progression.
- Understanding a facilitation practice that is inclusive in ethos and supports the participation of all young people.
- Participating in Child Protection Awareness Training (Certified through the NYCI Child Protection Programme).

The following is available to learners who wish to avail of it:

- Mentorship and training on Child Safeguarding Statements & Risk Assessments and Child Protection Policies.
- Mentorship and training on Recruitment and Garda Vetting (including how to access the Youth Theatre Ireland Garda Vetting Consortium).
- 'How to Set up a Youth Theatre' information sessions.

- Mentorship and training on governance for independent youth theatres (including charity registration).
- Mentorship and training on good youth theatre management (including health and safety, liaising with parents/guardians, membership registration and consent forms, insurance, GDPR, finance etc.)
- Mentorship and training on recruitment of youth theatre members and inclusion.
- Mentorship and training on fundraising and applying for grants.

Mentors

A mentorship aspect was added to the course for the 2021 – 2022 iteration and has proved a very positive addition to date. Following the 2020 – 2021 course, particularly in response to the online delivery necessitated by COVID, it was felt a greater level of engagement and support was required for participants.

The course mentors are practitioners who are vastly experienced in youth theatre and youth drama facilitation and have established careers for themselves in the Arts, specifically working with young people. The current mentors are all currently a key facilitator with an affiliated youth theatre. Mentors are well placed to advise the learners on developing their own projects, routes into facilitation as a career and all aspects of practice.

As part of the Engaging with Drama module, each mentor facilitates a masterclass for learners showcasing their own practice. Learners are actively encouraged to engage with the mentors by asking them questions about the development of their practice and their route to a career in facilitation.

The mentors also meet with participants to guide and advise them in the planning of their skills demonstrations. For the Engaging with Drama module, learners are paired up and deliver a 2-hour drama workshop to the other course participants. Following delivery of the workshop, learners meet with their mentor to analyse and reflect on the experience and explore their learning.

Backgrounds of Course Participants

To date, participants have come from a variety of backgrounds and have a wide range of experience. These include:

- acting and performing,
- youth theatre
- other theatre-related roles such writing, directing, producing, making theatre for younger audiences and community drama,
- other arts fields and disciplines such as film, dance, music and visual arts,
- arts administration and/or arts programme management,
- speech and drama teaching,

- working with people with additional needs through drama,
- working in contexts that use drama for social and personal change such as drama therapy,
- youth work and community work.

Where participants are involved in youth theatre, they have been working as facilitators or assistant facilitators and have identified the need to upskill and increase their capacity for the practice. Others are involved in youth theatre in another capacity, such as volunteer leader or committee member, and wish to deepen their understanding with a view to expanding their involvement.

It is interesting to note that many participants were formerly youth theatre members while others were involved in drama in other contexts as a child or young person and have felt a pull to re-engage as an adult. Having the skills and knowledge to facilitate positive experiences for young people, similar to the participants' own experience is frequently mentioned as a motivating factor in applying for the course. Other motivations and goals of participation include developing new skills and knowledge, enhancing existing skills and knowledge, exposure to new material/ideas/approaches/tools, building confidence in their ability as a facilitator, meeting like-minded people, creating connections and a peer network, meeting potential future collaborators, challenging themselves, exposure to new ways of thinking and fresh perspectives, having fun and making space to focus on creativity.

Many participants have existing third level qualifications from Certificates to master's degrees, both in Arts and non-Arts related fields. It is clear the applied, practical nature of the Drama Facilitation Course is a significant factor in participants deciding to opt for the course. As is the deeply collaborative approach where participants learn on their feet together in an engaging and immersive manner. The transferability of skills and approaches beyond the youth drama facilitation space was also mentioned as a motivation in doing the course.

As will be highlighted in the Outputs/Outcomes section, the new approaches to development work, resulting from the Creative Ireland investment, have led to YTI adapting its approach to selecting participants for the course. The organisation is actively recruiting participants from areas where there is no or low youth theatre provision. The ringfencing of places, in collaboration with local partners, is viewed as a key strategy in aiding YTI in meeting its strategic goal of increased youth theatre provision, meaning more young people can be empowered through increased access to youth theatre.

QQI Engagement

In 2022, Youth Theatre Ireland began a re-engagement process with QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) as an existing provider of education and training programmes. The Drama Facilitation Training Course offers two component modules of a level 6 award under QQI.

The QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) re-engagement process for existing providers involves several key steps to improve the quality of education and training programs offered by the provider. These steps include:

- Initial consultation: The first step in the QQI re-engagement process is an initial consultation with QQI. During this consultation, the provider discusses their goals and objectives, and QQI provides guidance on the best approach to recognizing prior learning and developing new qualifications and standards.
- Needs analysis: The provider undergoes a needs analysis to assess their existing courses and qualifications and identify any gaps in knowledge or skills. This analysis helps to identify the areas in which new qualifications and standards are needed.
- Development of new qualifications and standards: Based on the needs analysis, the provider develops new qualifications and standards that meet the needs of students and the industry. This process involves developing learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and delivery methods that meet QQI's requirements.
- Validation of new qualifications and standards: The new qualifications and standards developed by the provider are validated by QQI to ensure that they meet regulatory requirements and are of high quality

The QQI re-engagement process is valuable, as it can help providers to improve their existing courses and qualifications. By recognizing prior learning and identifying gaps in knowledge, providers can develop new materials and resources that help to fill these gaps. This can help to improve the quality of the education and training programs that they offer and increase the satisfaction of students.

The process also helps providers to comply with regulatory requirements. By working with QQI, providers can ensure that their courses and qualifications meet the standards set by regulatory bodies. This can help to avoid issues with accreditation and regulatory compliance, and ensure we are offering high-quality education and training programs.

Engaging with QQI also supports the progression of learners as it allows for recognition of prior learning and provides a clear path for them to achieve new qualifications. This can help to improve student retention and satisfaction.

The Youth Theatre Ireland team met with the QQI re-engagement panel in December 2022, with a review to take place in 2023. Re-aligning and reviewing Youth Theatre Ireland's accredited QQI training has been a valuable experience. It has enabled the organisation to identify areas of strength within current training provision and also highlighted areas for improvement to enhance the learner experience.

It has become clear during the process that Youth Theatre Ireland's accredited training is of a high standard, offering value and opportunities to learners. YTI have also identified other areas within their programmes that would benefit from accredited training, which will be investigated over the coming years. They will also be aligning quality standards in our other programmes with QQI quality standards to ensure consistency across our work.

Outputs and Outcomes - Drama Facilitation Training Course

This section will address the following outcomes, actions and goals as identified in the Service Level Agreements between Youth Theatre Ireland and Creative Ireland:

Identified Outcomes from Service Level Agreement 2019

- New leaders will receive accredited training in Drama facilitation and Leadership

Identified Action from Service Level Agreement 2019

- Provide QQI accredited training in youth drama facilitation practice to local facilitators.

Identified Goal from Amended Service Level Agreement 2021

- Provide training for new youth theatre leaders

Agreed Output Amended Service Level Agreement 2021

- Provide QQI accredited training in youth drama facilitation practice to local facilitators who will lead these newly identified groups. X 2

Below is an overall summary of the outputs and outcomes:

Activity/Approach	Outputs	Outcomes
Employment of Special Projects Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special Projects Officer contributes to development and delivery of course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased course capacity: number of participants raised from 16 (2020-2021 course), to 21 (2021-2022) to 23 (2022-2023).• Course can be delivered through hybrid format increasing access.• Increased capacity of YTI to promote course particularly in areas of low youth theatre provision.• Increased capacity of YTI to roll out the Youth Theatre Roadshow.• Closer alignment of training and development functions

		<p>of organisation results in better outcomes related to youth theatre development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved outcomes, in comparison to previous facilitation courses, in terms of course graduates contributing to youth theatre provision.
Youth Theatre Roadshow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and Training team deliver Information and Taster Session in 7 locations to date. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadshow participants have direct contact with trainers and experience methodology of course. Increased awareness of course in localities where sessions take place. An increase in applications for the course. An increase in participants on the course. Attendance promotes a better understanding of youth theatre practice and approach. Increased understanding by future participants of the course of the methodologies and approaches utilised.
Introduction of Local Partnership model for youth theatre development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Theatre Ireland and local partners identify 17 course participants who have places ringfenced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From the beginning of the training, participants have a pathway to becoming a local youth theatre facilitator. Local partners are aware of potential current and future local facilitators. Relationships are fostered between local

		<p>partners and trainee facilitators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The viability of a local sustainable youth theatre is increased by having access to key trained accredited facilitators.
Greater Alignment of Training and Development work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During, and after, their time on the course a number of participants engage with YTI staff to develop youth theatre provision in their area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun House Youth Theatre is established in Offaly). • A graduate is key to the initial and ongoing delivery of Ballyfermot Youth Theatre. • A course graduate is key to developing a relationship between Exchange House and YTI which results in a youth theatre pilot programme for young Travellers. • A course graduate is the key facilitator for Shout Out Youth Theatre (Listowel, Co. Kerry). • Course graduates are currently working with youth theatres in Cork, Kildare, Louth, and Limerick. • More young people have access to quality youth theatre and the benefits that come from participation. • Based on the experience of previous drama facilitation training offered by YTI, other

		<p>graduates are likely to engage with youth theatre in various capacities in the future either as a key facilitator or in another capacity</p>
<p>Drama Facilitation Training Course 2020-2021</p> <p>Drama Facilitation Training Course 2021 - 2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37 participants receive training in drama facilitation for young people. • Participants also receive training and mentoring in other aspects of running a youth theatre including Child Protection, governance etc. • 37 participants graduate with a QQI Award at Level 6 in Leadership and Engaging with Drama 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates have developed skills, approaches and techniques for youth drama facilitation. • Graduates have developed a range of transferable skills and knowledge. • Graduates have increased confidence in facilitating drama for young people. • Graduates have been guided by mentors in developing a career path and future projects. • Graduates have increased employment opportunities due to upskilling and accreditation. • An increase in the availability of facilitators in regions around the country. • Existing and establishing youth theatres have a pool of trained accredited facilitators to engage to support the delivery of their programmes. • Graduates have a network of peers and potential future collaborators.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sustainability of youth theatre nationally is strengthened. • Based on experience of previous drama facilitation training courses, graduates will use the methodologies and approaches learned in Theatre and other Arts-related disciplines and artforms.
2022-2023 Course (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 participants currently receiving training in youth drama facilitation and working towards accreditation. • Participants also receive training and mentoring in other aspects of running a youth theatre including 	<p>Projected Outcomes:</p> <p>It is anticipated that this course will have similar outcomes for current participants to those outlined above in terms of learning including increased</p>

	<p>Child Protection, governance etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During their time on the course a number of participants engage with YTI staff to develop youth theatre provision in their area. 	<p>skills, confidence, capacity etc. Similar outcomes in terms of ongoing and future peer support are also envisioned.</p> <p>Significant outcomes are expected in relation to the participant's continued and future input into new and existing youth theatre provision due to the profile of the learners and the ringfencing of places for those from regions of low youth theatre provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants from Mayo, Westmeath and Gaeltacht areas have already identified establishing a youth theatre as a goal of their time on the course. Five participants are currently involved in their local youth theatre in various capacities and view their participation on the course as allowing them to develop skills and capacity to expand their contribution. Majority of participants have indicated they are eager to use their training to facilitate drama for young people and/or other groups in their communities. Based on the experience of previous drama facilitation training offered by YTI, other graduates are likely to
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		engage with youth theatre in various capacities in the future either as a key facilitator or in another capacity. Hence the sustainability of youth theatre nationally is strengthened.
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Special Projects Officer contributes to development and delivery of course

This report has previously made reference to the Special Projects Officer playing a key role in the alignment and connection between training and development work. Barry Morgan has been pivotal in the establishment and delivery of the Drama Facilitation Training Course. ArtsTrain had two full-time trainers. The course puts many demands on staff in terms of delivery of training, assessing the learners' work, ongoing communication with learners and mentors, and the administration required for accreditation. The Special Projects Officer to date has assisted on all aspects of the course and taken a lead on some elements including communications and assessing learners' work. The disruption and need for adaptation caused by COVID 19 required significant adjustment to the course plan and delivery for its first year. The input of the Special Projects Officer was critical in redesigning the course so it could progress in an online format.

Increased participant numbers on the course from 16 (2020-2021) to 23 (2022-2023) has only been feasible because of the presence of the Special Projects Officer. The demand for places on the course has risen and YTI's ability to meet this demand is in a large part due to the Special Project Officer's increased input of time and energy. The fact that more learners has not resulted in a sizeable increase in the course budget is testament to how staff resources are the critical factor in facilitating greater numbers of participants.

The Special Projects Officer has been key to the organisation's improved capacity to develop its approach and strategy to training and development in other aspects too including the Youth Theatre Roadshow, increased promotion of the course in localities targeted for youth theatre development and relationship building with local partners.

Crucially, the dual focus of the Special Projects Officer on training and development has contributed to the outputs and positive outcomes related to learners and graduates contributing to youth theatre development and delivery. The establishment of relationships with Barry Morgan, and the ongoing support from the participants' initial engagement with YTI to their post-course work on establishing and contributing to youth theatre development and delivery, has been cited by graduates as an important factor. Virtually every graduate we spoke to in the creation of this report referred to the difference it makes to be able to pick up the phone to YTI staff and ask a question or get advice. Barry is mentioned frequently in the context of these conversations and his support has been greatly appreciated and valued.

The Youth Theatre Roadshow

Youth Theatre Ireland held information/taster sessions from late 2019 into early 2020 in Ballyfermot, Offaly and Westmeath. In 2021 and 2022, the team travelled to Kerry, Mayo, the Galway Gaeltacht and West Cork. The Youth Theatre Development section of this report outlines the benefit of these sessions from a development perspective. For the Drama Facilitation Training Course they have proven extremely valuable.

They have been conducive to greater awareness and increased promotion of the course. The existence of a local partner who can assist with advertising the session has resulted in wider dissemination of information on the course. Knowledge of its existence goes beyond those who are in the room. The record number of applications for the 2022- 2023 course (64) is a direct result of an increase in local visibility. Developing local relationships means that Arts Officers, ETB Youth Officers, Creative Ireland Coordinators and those from other agencies are cognisant of the course and the potential benefits of individuals from their catchment area participating.

Those who attend the sessions participate in a workshop, comparable in approach to the workshops learners experience on the course. The workshop format is central to the Drama Facilitation Training Course. Both the Special Projects Officer and the National Training Coordinator commented that this was an invaluable opportunity for attendees to get a taste of the course in a more effective manner than any amount of written information. It is felt that such an engaging and animated experience fed the appetite of those present who applied. There is agreement among the YTI staff involved in delivering the course that the participants who attended the taster sessions came to the course with clearer expectations and that this has aided the very high level of learner retention to date. The opportunity to ask questions in person is also viewed as beneficial. Additionally, the approach used on the day means that the stakeholders in attendance could describe the course to others in a manner that is reflective of the learners' experience.

Local Partnership model for youth theatre development/Ring Fencing of Course Places

Another output that grew from the Creative Ireland resourcing that the organisation intends to retain is the ring fencing of places on the Drama Facilitation Training Course. This initiative relates to Youth Theatre Ireland's Local Partnership Model as described in the Youth Theatre Development section of this report. In counties targeted for youth theatre development, such as Mayo, Kerry and Laois, training and upskilling of potential youth theatre facilitators is viewed as a key ingredient in the establishment and/or expansion of youth theatre provision. A shortage of skilled practitioners has been identified in these and other counties as a barrier.

This commitment to supporting the training of local facilitators is illustrated by the fact that Mayo Arts Office, Kerry LCYP and Kerry Arts Office took the decision to offer a bursary to local practitioners to cover the participation cost for the current course.

Deirdre Enright, Creative Youth Coordinator for Kerry ETB, who has collaborated with Youth Theatre Ireland on the expansion of youth theatre provision in Kerry, views participation on the course as key to the delivery of a quality experience for youth theatre members:

The learning on the course ensures that a graduate embraces all that is good youth theatre practice, in particular, putting the young person at the centre. Youth theatre practice is a different way of doing things where the expansion of possibilities for the participants is the priority; bringing youth theatre members to a point where they want more and then being open to what they want, whether it be an opportunity to work on lighting or sound for a show or other aspects of theatre. In my opinion, graduating from the course is the equivalent of a quality mark.

On all three iterations of the course to date, in line with YTI's strategic objectives, priority for places has been given to applicants from areas where there is no or low youth theatre provision. Places have also been ring fenced for applicants who are likely to be instrumental in the ongoing development and sustainability of existing youth theatres.

To date, 17 potential youth theatre facilitators have been prioritised for places. They are from Offaly, Dublin, Westmeath, Kerry, Mayo, Louth, Galway, Laois, Donegal Gaeltacht, Galway Gaeltacht, Kildare, Limerick and Cork.

Among the positive outcomes of ring-fencing places to date has been an increased awareness among local partners of current and future trained accredited local facilitators who understand and can replicate good youth theatre practice.

The collaboration between YTI and local partners means that learners have a pathway to employment as a youth theatre facilitator. Moreover, because learners can benefit from other aspects of the course (including child protection/safeguarding training, mentoring on the development of policies and procedures, youth theatre management etc) they are well equipped to play an active role in the operation of an emerging/established youth theatre. Crucially, learners have access to the expertise of the Youth Theatre Ireland Staff and can access ongoing support from the development team after they graduate. All of these factors combine to increase the sustainability of a local youth theatre.

Greater Alignment of Training and Development work

Many of the outputs and outcomes described above have resulted from the strategic decision taken by Youth Theatre Ireland to create greater alignment between training and youth theatre development. The role of Special Projects Officer has been key in implementing this approach.

From their first contact with the organisation, learners are aware of the broader work of Youth Theatre Ireland and its goal of developing youth theatre nationally. This raises a consciousness of the feasibility, and benefits, of developing provision in their local area and the awareness they can have a role in delivering it. They become familiar with the many supports offered by YTI and the staff members who offer these supports. Youth Theatre Ireland staff have found that there is

an increased interest among participants, compared with those on previous ArtsTrain courses, in learning about how youth theatres are created and how they operate.

Since the course began in 2020, graduates and current learners have been integral to a number of important developments including the following:

- The establishment and ongoing delivery of Funhouse Youth Theatre (Offaly)
- The establishment and ongoing delivery of Ballyfermot Youth Theatre (Dublin 10).
- The development and ongoing delivery of Shout Out Youth Theatre in Listowel (Kerry).
- The establishment of youth theatre provision for young people in the Travelling community.

To date, other graduates are involved in the delivery of youth theatre in Louth, Cork city, Limerick and Kildare.

While only time will reveal the longer-term outcomes of participation on the course, the careers of graduates from ArtsTrain, illustrate how graduates from the Drama Facilitation Training Course will contribute to the establishment of youth theatres and the delivery of youth theatre programmes well into the future.

The current course has been closely aligned to youth theatre development goals. Learners have been identified as potentially key to future youth theatre provision in Mayo, Kerry, Westmeath and the Gaeltacht areas. Seven places were ringfenced for learners in these regions.

2020-2021 Course

The 2020-2021 course was hugely impacted by COVID and lockdown. In fact, it was on the day the Westmeath Information Session/Taster workshop took place that the government announced initial restrictions. The pandemic necessitated a complete revision of plans for the course. Interviews of potential participants moved online. Sixteen applicants were accepted. The National Training Coordinator and the Special Projects Officer spent a substantial amount of time re-designing the content of the course for online delivery. The course relies heavily on the workshop format which has at its core the shared experience of a group in a shared space. It was a significant challenge to translate and adapt format and content to the new circumstances. Ultimately, the entirety of that course was delivered online. This was a huge achievement by the National Training Coordinator and the Special Projects Officer.

Four places were ringfenced for learners from Dublin, Offaly and Westmeath; areas of low or no youth theatre provision.

Despite ongoing hope that some of the course would be delivered in-person, lockdown continued and it was not until the learners' graduation in February 2022 that they gathered in-person in the one space. To capture the occasion, a video was made which features

contributions from the graduates, Youth Theatre Ireland Staff and Board and Tania Banotti (Creative Ireland Director). It can be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/706072578/f93507e655>

All 16 participants went forward for QQI accreditation with all receiving distinctions.

One participant on the 2020-21 course works as a Liaison Officer for City of Dublin Youth Services Board. When asked for this report to speak about their experience on the course, they contributed the following:

The experience on the course was very intense particularly as it was during the COVID lockdown. Dave and Barry were so experienced, professional and very passionate. They took the practice very seriously. Both of them were so well informed. It was clear their approach was rooted in very developed methodologies and a very conscious considered practice. Everything we did was building on the last thing. You could see it was deeply grounded in theory.

My biggest piece of learning was probably how valuable the youth theatre approach is as a method for inclusion and equality when working with young people. I would have no hesitation in using the approach. It is so positive; pro-critical thinking, pro-confidence, pro-participation.

My background is in youth work. Each learner had different life experience and there was such a diverse range of backgrounds. The opportunity to participate together brought us into each other's worlds which meant the experience was very rich. You create a network as a group. You know practitioners you can contact for support. It's so great to be able to pick up the phone. You can't work in isolation. Graduates from the course are ambassadors for the practice; they understand the process and know it is a great way of working.

To assess the outcomes of the Creative Ireland investment for this report, among the organisations consulted were Familibase, who established and continue to operate Ballyfermot Youth Theatre. Alan Tully, the Arts Programme Coordinator, alluded to the impact of their key facilitator participating:

[participant] had a great experience on the Drama Facilitation Training Course. [Participant]'s participation and the resulting upskilling and capacity building it allowed have been key to the establishment and delivery of youth theatre here. The youth theatre facilitator also runs two transition year filmmaking groups. After the training he can bring a youth theatre methodology to these groups and that has enriched the programme and increased the benefits of participation for the young people. We intend to put forward other potential facilitators and Arts workers for the course in the future.

We also spoke to Sinead Handy, course graduate and facilitator for another new youth theatre, Fun House Youth Theatre in Offaly:

Jay Origan, [the other key facilitator for Funhouse Youth Theatre] saw the course being advertised locally and she went to the taster session. She was very enthusiastic about what she experienced. I thought this is exactly what I had been looking for. I didn't think I could be a leader but I was interested and I decided I would see where it takes me. The more we went into

the course the more myself and Jay thought we can do this and we need to do this for the town that we live in.

I was very excited to be doing the course and then COVID hit. I had been a nurse and I hadn't studied anything outside of that in 17 years. We did the whole course online. It was tough going mentally at the beginning. It took me a few weeks to get on board with it. As I said I didn't think I was capable of doing what I am doing now - which is facilitating and teaching drama six days a week. At first, I doubted learning the practice online through a computer screen was going to work. I thought I'm on the wrong course, get me out of here! I think once I let my guard down and went with the flow, which is all you could do at the time, it was fine. I let myself go there. It worked really well online. I would say it probably worked equally well online as it would have in the room. I don't know how Dave and Barry did it, created such energy.

The group was a very diverse mix of people. We were from all over the country. There were people from lots of different backgrounds. I think some were facilitating drama for younger kids. Other people were completely new to it. Different age groups too.

For me personally, it was the confidence I got from it. To be given the tools and the confidence to be able to do what I am doing now was amazing. Doing the course and hearing stories from Barry and Dave, and other people who were on the course who had some experience working with groups, the love they had for it. Dave and Barry's enthusiasm and love for it is infectious. You can see they adore their work and it rubs off on you. You need the support of your peers. It is great when you see the young people are loving what they are doing, that energises you. You need to experience it yourself with your peers and other facilitators too - you need the energy that comes from that. You can get burnt out really quickly so you do need other people around you.

2021- 2022 course

Over 30 applications were received for this round of the course with 21 participants accepted. This course was delivered in a hybrid format through a combination of in person residential weekends and online sessions.

Six places were ring-fenced for learners viewed as potentially key to the development and ongoing delivery of youth theatre provision in their local areas. These learners were from Galway, Cork, Laois, Louth, Limerick, Kerry and Kildare.

Four of the learners assumed the role of Assistant Facilitator at the National Festival of Youth Theatres in Kilkenny from 4th - 8th July. The role involved working alongside the five specialist facilitators engaged to deliver the Festival workshop programme. The Assistants got an opportunity to observe the facilitators practice, assist the facilitator as required and witness the creative journey of the participants over the four days of the Festival. They also had the opportunity to meet and connect with leaders and facilitators from the 12 participating youth theatres. Three of the learners who worked on the Festival have collaborated on a new piece of theatre for the 2023 Scene + Heard Festival.

All the participants were accredited with 19 Distinctions and 3 Merits. Their graduation took place on 28th January 2023.

To date, graduates from the course are contributing to the delivery of youth theatre in Kerry, Kildare, Louth, Limerick, and Cork. Another graduate has made links with a youth theatre in Australia and is exploring possibilities for collaboration.

Graduates of this course have become members of Youth Theatre Ireland's welfare panel; providing chaperoning duties and other supports to young people who participate on YTI's programmes.

Maev O'Shea, Education & Community Manager at the Everyman Theatre Cork and Arts Council Creative Associate, is one of the graduates from the 2021-2022 course. Maev designs, implements and delivers programmes at the Everyman to encourage the engagement of the wider community in Cork and is key to the meaningful realisation of the venue's key message: 'Everyman is for Everyone'.

One of the initiatives Maev has spearheaded is Theatre Making and Citizenship Cork; a free, fun, creative youth-led programme for 15 young people, aged 16–25 years, who are introduced to cultural citizenship and theatre through conversation, engagement and creation.

Participants are supported to become theatre makers themselves – explore writing, devising, designing, technical craft and performance as well as engaging with live theatre and performance. At the heart of this project is the role of theatre and how young people can shape the future of accessible theatre in Ireland. The programme is delivered with YMCA Cork, Graffiti Theatre and with the support of the Abbey Theatre. Young people who are vulnerable and marginalised are a particular focus for the initiative. A youth worker provides additional support to those who may need it to maximise the benefits of their engagement.

Maev's decision to become a learner on the Drama Facilitation Training Course was informed by her involvement on this programme and other work she has undertaken. She wanted to understand facilitation methodologies from the inside out, to get a greater sense of the experience from the participant's perspective and to reflect upon her own approach and practice. She found the course beneficial in many respects:

I developed a real appreciation for the expertise of others in the room - the mentors, trainers, other participants. Reflection was important throughout the course. It is about doing and learning then reflecting. It served as a reminder of the importance of ongoing reflection in my work, both at a micro and macro level e.g. from the choice of a particular exercise to the overall design of a programme.

The peer to peer learning and the collaborative experience were very valuable; particularly working with another learner to design a workshop. Each participant has a different style and approach to facilitating and it was such a rich experience to create workshops together.

The participants were such a generous group of people. I do feel I am part of a network. Some of the graduates from the course are already working together collaboratively. There was such generosity among the mentors and trainers and it was clear that any offers of future support were genuine.

Youth Theatre Ireland are currently supporting the development of the Everyman youth programme with the aim of it affiliating as a youth theatre.

The support of Youth Theatre Ireland in developing youth theatre is key. I would not hesitate to contact the organisation and individual staff members. The ongoing relationship with YTI is important. Participating on the course re-strengthened my commitment to youth theatre. I was reminded of my own experience in theatre and how it can be of benefit socially, professionally and artistically.

In her role in The Everyman, Maev is expanding the opportunities for young people to benefit from engagement with Theatre. The Everyman Young Company is a brand-new initiative for young people from Cork aged 18–25 who want to make theatre. This initiative grew from the need for provision for a cohort of young people, who have aged out of drama classes and youth theatre but wish to continue to experience the positive impact engagement in theatre has on their lives.

Another participant is currently a student on MTU Cork School of Music Bachelor of Arts in Theatre & Drama Studies. They were a member of Explore Youth Theatre in Kildare. They found the experience of being a youth theatre member to be so inspiring that she decided to pursue a career in theatre. Part of their motivation in doing the Drama Facilitation Training Course, and their other studies, is their desire to give other young people access to positive experiences like their own.

At the moment I am studying a module on Applied Drama in college. It is practical and similar to the experience on the Drama Facilitation Training Course. We are looking at Drama Therapy and that is something I am interested in pursuing. I am definitely intending to get more experience in facilitation. I would like to facilitate in the youth theatre I was a member of in the future. I may explore starting a youth theatre at some stage. I will continue to engage with Youth Theatre Ireland whenever I can and intend to participate in their programmes.

The Drama Facilitation Training Course had a really good balance between theory and practice. There was always a warmup to give us energy and focus, similar to a youth theatre warm-up, even when the session was largely theoretical. From the beginning you were experiencing techniques and exercises that would be effective when working with a group.

The biggest piece of learning for me from the course was understanding how important adaptability and flexibility are when working with any group. No two groups will ever be the same. You may have a plan but a good facilitator moves with the group and adapts their plan to meet the needs of those present. You can still reach the goal you intended. It can be easy to panic if things do go awry! The course offered so many tips and tricks on how to adapt your work.

For this participant, the hybrid nature of the course was a factor in their participation:

It was a positive for me that elements of the course were delivered online. If the course had been delivered all in person, I wouldn't have been able to participate. Travelling to attend regularly would have been a barrier. The online aspect of it opened up the course as a possibility for more people including myself.

2022 - 2023 course

An unprecedented 64 applications were received for this round of the course. The high level of interest illustrates the effectiveness of increased promotion. Selection of participants was challenging as it was felt that over 40 of the applicants were a good fit. Places were given to 23 learners. Those from communities where there is not currently youth theatre provision, or a low level of provision, were prioritised to support the strategic objectives of Youth Theatre Ireland. These areas included Mayo, Offaly, Westmeath, Kerry, Donegal (Gaeltacht) and Galway (Gaeltacht).

Participants from Kerry, Carlow, Westmeath, Mayo and the Gaeltacht areas have already identified setting up a youth theatre as a desired outcome of their participation on the course. Participants from Longford, West Cork, Offaly, Kilkenny and Tipperary are already linked with their local youth theatre and view the course as a way of strengthening their involvement and their capacity to deliver best youth theatre practice. Other participants are eager to create youth drama initiatives for young people and/or the wider community in their locality. It is clear that establishing and enhancing youth theatre provision is one of the main motivations behind applying for the course. This illustrates the beneficial impact of the strategy of aligning development and training.

Seven places were ringfenced for learners from regions where there is no or low youth theatre provision. These learners are from Kerry, the Gaeltacht region, Mayo and Westmeath.

Once again, the delivery of the course is in a hybrid format with learners attending one weekend a month. The course will run from September 2022 to May 2023.

Evaluation

Course participants are required to complete a mid-course and end of course evaluation.

Below is a summary of the responses from the evaluation for the 2021-2022 course.

When asked to rate their ability, at the end of the course, to facilitate a drama workshop on a scale from 1 - 5 (with 1 being poor and 5 excellent), eight participants rated their ability at 5, eleven at 4 while one participant rated their ability as 3.

When asked to rate the support from the course tutors, all participants rated it at 5.

When rating the feedback from the course tutors after participants delivered a workshop, eighteen participants rated it at 5 with two participants rating it at 4.

There were some challenges relating to online delivery of the course including technical issues and maintaining focus and energy for longer online sessions. Some participants would have liked more in person contact while others recognise that the hybrid nature of the course allowed their participation.

Below are some quotes from the evaluations:

I am really enjoying the course. It has provided a wealth of information and learning opportunities as a drama facilitator. I am grateful to the course leaders for their commitment, energy, and expertise.

It is so informative and inspiring and I'm learning a lot. It is essential for creative practitioners for continuous artistic development to have these opportunities for training available to them.

The [Leadership] module exceeded my expectations. We covered a lot more theory and concepts than I had anticipated. I also felt well prepared to facilitate a drama exercise with my co-facilitator. The environment established by both the group and course leaders was incredibly positive and encouraging.

It surpassed my expectations. The online workshops were so much more fun and informative than I could have imagined. Watching Dave & Barry work together is itself a masterclass. The in-person workshop was totally engaging.

I have a deeper understanding of the potential for different styles of leadership. The need for perceptive skills and self-awareness as a facilitator was made evident both through the theory covered and the practical facilitation of the workshops. I realized that my own practice as a facilitator could be enhanced through meaningful feedback, delegating to participants and focusing on the process rather than the outputs of the work.

It gave me the knowledge and skills required to facilitate a more well-rounded and structured workshop. I also built up my confidence in leading a group through a workshop from learning the Leadership Theory, as I felt more capable of adapting my approach based on the nuances of the group members.

The course exceeded my expectations! I learned far more than I anticipated - and the more I learned, the more I was aware of what I did not know! The facilitator trainers were brilliant. My colleagues on the programme were also an incredible, talented, generous, fun group of people. I feel lucky to know them. Equally, the mentors were excellent.

It greatly increased my knowledge about Youth Theatre facilitation, developed my skill-set and introduced me to other like-minded people with an interest in Youth Theatre. It was clearly

structured, the structure was clearly explained and followed throughout the duration of the course.

Improved my confidence in my ability to facilitate and lead young people, it improved my leadership skills and I have gained greater insight into the endless creative possibilities within youth theatre workshops.

I was blown away by the skill and talent of the course leaders. The intersection of youth work and the theatrical arts was made very special and important, it was never boring and always significant.

LEARNING AND CONCLUSION

The investment by Creative Ireland in the Drama Facilitation Training Course has allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to offer a quality training experience to participants. Without that investment the many positive outcomes detailed in this report would not have been possible, including the impact its existence is already having on the youth theatre sector. The experience of the course to date has confirmed YTI's conviction that a dedicated facilitation training course is integral to the realisation of its vision, mission, aims and objectives.

It is essential that the cost of participating on the course does not become a barrier. At the moment, with a participation fee of €250, the course is excellent value for money. The cost of delivering the course is more than commensurate with its impact. The expertise, time and energy of the two trainers and mentors are the most critical inputs. The Special Project Officer's involvement has been essential to the success of the course.

When developing a rationale for the return of the course, one aspect that was not fully appreciated was the importance of the ongoing mutual support among graduates. Repeatedly, graduates have mentioned the benefit of having connection with their peers. The Wellbeing Programme highlighted the importance such connections and relationships play for youth theatre facilitators and leaders; a role that can be lonely and isolated. ArtsTrain illustrated that it is likely graduates will continue to collaborate into the future; one such example is Giant Wolf Youth Theatre in Tallaght, a flourishing group initiated by two ArtsTrain graduates who participated on the same course.

Relationships are at the heart of youth theatre. The relationships nurtured by Youth Theatre Ireland staff with graduates have been, and will continue to be, important in future endeavours particularly relating to the establishment and ongoing development of youth theatres. Everyone we consulted for this report has spoken of the value of being able to pick up the phone to a YTI staff member.

The delivery of Youth Theatre Ireland's own programme also requires the ongoing availability of individuals who understand a youth theatre approach. Learners and graduates from the Drama Facilitation Training Course are already making a contribution to the delivery of Youth Theatre

Ireland's programme as Assistant Facilitators at the National Festival of Youth Theatres and as members of the organisation's welfare panel.

The existence of the course means there is a solid offering for those who wish to develop youth theatre but feel they need more skills and understanding to do so. The part-time nature of it and the hybrid delivery means that the training is accessible to many of these individuals as would not have been the case with the previous full-time commitment required by ArtsTrain. A clear through-line has been created between the taster workshops, participating on the course and contributing to youth theatre provision in a local area. The impact of this strategic approach is an increase in the contribution graduates and, in some cases, current learners are making to the provision of youth theatre in Ireland.

While COVID-19 seriously impacted the delivery of the 2020 -2021 course, the learning from that period has allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to build its capacity for online delivery. The hybrid model of delivery has allowed increased accessibility for those who may not have been in a position to commit to a course delivered solely in-person. The course now attracts a wider demographic with current participants aged from early 20s to early 70s. Many learners have other life and work commitments with some working in contexts that are conducive to the development of youth theatre, such as youth work. Ultimately, it is believed that the change in demographics will result in an increase in knowledge, appreciation and understanding of youth theatre, among those who might not have been exposed to it. Such a situation may lead to the establishment of youth theatres in contexts previously unexplored as possible breeding grounds.

The skills, approaches and methodologies developed by course participants are highly transferable to a variety of contexts and settings. Not everyone who completes the course will go on to establish a youth theatre but many of them will feed the arts and theatre sector and work in a range of different contexts including delivering drama to young people and the wider community. It is the experience of YTI that former participants of the organisation's drama facilitation training courses are likely to work in youth theatre at some point in their future career, if not immediately after graduation. Many former participants go on to develop specialist drama practices or focus on working with a particular age group or context. These specialist facilitators have been invited to facilitate at the National Festival of Youth Theatres as personified by facilitators such as Carol Walsh, Jed Murray, Betty Duffy, Catherine Sheridan and Dan Colley.

In conclusion, the investment by Creative Ireland in the Drama Facilitation Training Course has been vital. The impact of the course is significant. The course is key to supporting the growth of youth theatre in Ireland and, to achieving the ultimate mission of Youth Theatre Ireland, ensuring as many young people as possible have access to quality youth theatre experiences.

The organisation is committed to the ongoing delivery of the course but to achieve this commitment, long-term sustainable funding is required.

SEED FUNDING

Introduction and Background

As previously described in the Youth Theatre Development section of this report, three counties were targeted for the establishment of youth theatre provision in the original Service Level Agreement; Dublin, Offaly and Westmeath. The availability of seed money for any new initiatives was viewed by Youth Theatre Ireland as an important element in the early days of their development to support the costs of establishment and initial delivery. Establishing a youth theatre is not an easy task. There are many elements that have to be in place for a group to begin operating including a committee, policies and procedures, a suitable venue, insurance. Securing the involvement of a skilled facilitator is key. It can be difficult for emerging youth theatres to fund their initial activities as they will not have a track record of delivery or examples of previous work etc. The benefit of having an initial injection of funds is significant as basic costs such as insurance and venue hire can be covered but also, importantly, the key facilitator can be properly compensated for their work.

TEAM

Deputy Director, Special Projects Officer.

KEY PARTICIPANTS

Young people participating in new youth theatres and new pilot programmes and initiatives. Partners in developing new youth theatres and initiatives. Affiliated youth theatres. Members of affiliated youth theatres.

Outputs and Outcomes

Identified Outcome from 2019 Service Level Agreement:

Establish 3 new youth theatre groups in Dublin, Offaly and Westmeath

Identified Output

Provide seed-funding to new youth theatre groups - €7,500 in year one will be made available to each new youth theatre.

All of the new initiatives in the counties identified were seriously impacted by COVID. This meant that initially the development of the youth theatres in the locations targeted for the original Service Level Agreement was slow, halting or completely stalled. Where there was activity, some of the costs to be covered by the seed funding such as insurance and venue hire were not required or reduced due to the online nature of engagement with young people.

However, despite the barriers, Fun House Youth Theatre (Offaly) and Ballyfermot Youth Theatre (Dublin 10) did receive seed funding and this resourcing was vital in supporting their activities as they responded to the needs of young people both online and, as restrictions allowed, in person. Another potential youth theatre in Offaly also received seed money but its development was completely halted by COVID.

Westmeath was the last of the three identified locations to be visited by the Youth Theatre Roadshow. The delivery of the session took place in March 2020 just when the initial lockdown was announced. To date no initiative in the county has reached a stage where the development of a youth theatre is viable enough to warrant seed funding. However, the development team intends to re-engage in 2023 with potential stakeholders identified in the initial relationship building phase with a view to reigniting interest and energies. The inclusion of a Westmeath-based participant on the current round of the Drama Facilitation Training Course, who has already stated their interest in developing youth theatre, is also a cause for optimism.

Seed Funding for Youth Theatres and Other Initiatives Supporting the Participation of Underserved Communities

Background and Introduction

A key element of Youth Theatre Ireland's mission is all young people having access to youth theatre. Removing barriers to participation and ensuring diversity and inclusion is central to the organisation's work. YTI regularly reflects on how representative the youth theatre community is of all young people in Ireland. The Centre Stage research, published every ten years, based on research within the community, reports statistics on youth theatre membership by ethnicity/cultural background, disability status, long-term illness status, mental health experience, socio-economic background, geographical location. The findings are then compared to the latest Census figures to ascertain where young people are underrepresented. This research informs Youth Theatre Ireland's work on inclusivity and diversity resulting in a focus on targeting the growth of youth theatre provision for young people who are less likely to access youth theatre.

Youth theatre in Ireland has a long history of inclusivity and providing safe creative spaces for young people experiencing social exclusion. For example, many LGBT former and current members would attest to youth theatre being the first place they felt welcome as they are and this increased their confidence to be themselves in other contexts. According to Centre Stage +20:

[T]he number of young people who openly identify as LGBTI+ in youth theatre suggests that youth theatre is viewed as a supportive and accepting environment by LGBTI+ young people.

It is also worth noting that Centre Stage outlined that 18% of youth theatre members reported having a disability. This is 9% higher than the national average as identified by the 2016 Census. The vast majority (85%) of disabilities reported by youth theatre members were

Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Dyspraxia, General Learning Disabilities and Behavioural Disorders.

The county with the richest diversity of young people has the lowest rate of youth theatre provision to include them and this is impacting on the rate of diversity within the youth theatre membership.

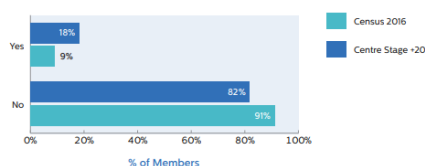
5.1.4 Disability & Long-Term Illness

Key Findings

- 18% of youth theatre members report a disability.
- Youth theatre members disclosed a disability rate 9% higher than the national average identified through the Census 2016.²⁶ The vast majority (85%) of disabilities reported were: Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Dyspraxia, General Learning Disabilities and Behavioural Disorders.
- Just under one in six youth theatre members said they had a long-term illness, with asthma being the most prevalent condition.
- Youth theatre exhibits high levels of inclusion of young people with a range of disabilities and long-term illnesses.
- Mental health disorders are under-represented in the questionnaires. Members who participated in the Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops discussed higher levels of anxiety, depression and stress than is evidenced in the Member Questionnaires.

Figure 5.4 charts the levels of disability which youth theatre members disclosed through the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaires.

Figure 5.4: Do you have a disability?



Figures are based on 588 respondents from Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaires and the 54,869 out of 616,081 young people aged between 10 and 19 who recorded a disability as part of Census 2016.²⁶ Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Centre Stage Context

This is the first time that data on disability and long-term illness levels has been gathered within the Youth Theatre Member Profile section for Centre Stage and there is no comparative data.

Disability

Nearly a fifth of members who responded to the Membership Questionnaire (18%) reported that they had a disability (Figure 5.4). This is significantly higher than the 9% of the 10–19 year old population who recorded a disability as part of Census 2016.

Seventy-one young people provided further information on their disability in the Member Questionnaires:

²⁶ Census 2016 data is drawn from www.cso.ie, Statbank E9001: Persons with a Disability as a Percentage of All Population 2011

- 85% of these members recorded a range of Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Dyspraxia, General Learning Disabilities and Behavioural Disorders, including: Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Dyspraxia, Aspergers Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Comprehension Disorder. The prevalence of young people with this range of specific challenges is common in the majority of youth theatres across Ireland and is reflected in anecdotal conversations with youth theatre leaders;
- Only four young people recorded physical disabilities such as scoliosis, muscle collapse and hyper-mobility. A further seven young people recorded sensory disabilities related to hearing and sight.

Youth theatre is very inclusive of young people with a wide range of Autism/Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Dyspraxia, General Learning Disabilities and Behavioural Disorders. However, young people with physical disabilities, including wheelchair users, are under-represented in the membership.

Long-Term Illness

Of the 586 members who completed Member Questionnaires, just under a sixth of respondents (16%) reported a long-term illness. Sixty-three young people gave some further insight into the type of illness they were dealing with:

- The vast majority of these young people reported asthma (67%);
- The remaining 33% cited kidney health and function issues, epilepsy, scoliosis, coeliac disease, type 1 diabetes and heart problems.

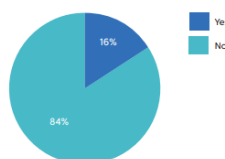
Mental Health

One young person noted that they were dealing with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and interestingly, this was the only mental health condition mentioned in the questionnaires even though the question text explicitly invited young people to include these conditions. The *My World Survey* reported that 30% of young people at secondary school had between mild and severe levels of depression; 32% had mild to severe levels of anxiety; and 19% had mild to severe levels of stress.²⁷

However, mental health was central to discussions in the Centre Stage +20 Member Workshops, where issues around anxiety were mentioned a total of 85 times by 103 members as part of a discussion on barriers to youth theatre participation. Members described a situation where their mental health and negative feelings about themselves were hindering their participation to a much greater extent than any external factors such as transport or the cost of participation (See Section 5.3.5). Centre Stage +20 data is inconclusive on the issue of mental health, but evidence from Member Workshops indicates that members are experiencing a higher level of mental health issues than they chose to disclose in the Membership Questionnaires.

Figure 5.5 charts the percentage of youth theatre members who identified as having a long-term illness through the Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaire.

Figure 5.5: Percentage of Youth Theatre Members with a Long-Term Illness



Figures are based on 586 respondents from Centre Stage +20 Member Questionnaires. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Section from Centre Stage +20 Report on Youth Theatre Members and Disability

The research found there is some under-representation of young people from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Young people from socio-economic groups likely to have lower incomes are also under-represented.

One of the fundamental characteristics of youth theatre in Ireland since its inception is its commitment to be open to all young people regardless of background, ability, life experience, financial means etc. The gathering of a diverse group of young people in a shared space is fundamental to youth theatre. While the ultimate goal is to support all youth theatre groups being fully inclusive, it is YTI's and the sector's experience that, when it comes to the inclusion of some communities of young people, targeted initiatives and programmes are required that focus solely on this group. The long-term goal is that barriers to participation will be removed and joining a local youth theatre will be an option for all young people.

It is in this context that Youth Theatre Ireland approaches its work of ensuring that youth theatre is as inclusive as possible. Its goal for its own programmes, in which youth theatre members participate directly, is that every effort is taken to remove barriers for young people who are less likely to avail of opportunities. Additional support is provided to participants should they require it.

Youth Theatre Ireland has faced significant capacity issues in its mission to promote and realise fully inclusive youth theatre. While progress was made in the past with initiatives such as Join In; a programme which focused on the inclusion of young people from more socio-economically marginalised backgrounds. The funding for such initiatives has been project based and it has proved extremely challenging to create space for ongoing focus on this work in an organisation already at capacity.

As has been emphasised in this report, the early stages of the evolution of a youth theatre are key to its sustainability. This holds true, perhaps even more so, for groups that target marginalised young people. There are reasons why some cohorts of young people are traditionally underrepresented in youth theatre. In order to ensure youth theatre is accessible to these young people, an understanding of the barriers to participation must be developed. Such an understanding grows from having conversations with members of these underserved communities (both adults and young people) and individuals and agencies who have long experience working with them. Both the Deputy Director and Special Projects Officer have spoken of how essential it is to develop relationships with key individuals who understand the needs of a community and who are well-placed to promote and progress the idea of a youth theatre within that community. Otherwise, the danger is that any initiatives will not get off the ground.

Youth Theatre Ireland is mindful of the risk of imposing a structure or approach as it will not only be ineffective but may come across as tokenistic. Meaningful inclusion work is slow paced and must involve the building of trust with YTI. Such a reality has not dampened the organisation's commitment or enthusiasm for this work. It is understood that it will require patience, adaptability and openness. Inclusivity and representation are so key to YTI's mission that the organisation is very willing to invest the necessary time and tailor the approach as required.

However, thanks to the investment of Creative Ireland, significant progress has been made on developing youth theatre provision for marginalised young people over the last two years.

Identified Goals from Amended Service Level Agreement 2021:

Support the development of new youth theatre groups in underserved areas of the community to diversify the membership of youth theatre Ireland

Provide seed-funding to new youth theatres identified by the Special Projects Officer. Seed funding in year one will be made available to each new youth theatre. Funding should prioritise core costs including space hire (if unavailable from local partner), insurance and facilitator fees over once-off project costs or production budgets.

One extremely positive development is a partnership with Exchange House and the establishment of a pilot youth theatre programme for young Travellers. This initiative and the relationship with Exchange House was brokered by Niamh Smith. Niamh is a Liaison Officer for City of Dublin Youth Services Board. Crucially, she is a graduate of the 2020-2021 Drama Facilitation Training Course. Her participation on the course resulted in an appreciation of how

youth theatre practice can be very effective as an approach for the young people she targets in her work.

Niamh contextualises her learning from the course and how she has taken it into her work as follows:

My biggest piece of learning was probably how valuable the youth theatre approach is as a method for inclusion and equality when working with young people. I would have no hesitation in using the approach. It is so positive; pro-critical thinking, pro-confidence, pro-participation.

In my role as a Liaison Officer for CDYSB developing youth theatre is definitely on my wish list. The contacts I made in Youth Theatre Ireland are so valuable. Partnering with the organisation is a natural organic partnership. I have tapped into the services and support of YTI to develop a pilot programme for Young Travellers with Exchange House which will begin in January 2023. Exploring the youth theatre approach is a way of creating new resources that youth workers can use in their work and they are quality resources. Most importantly, it is a way of creating meaningful opportunities and experiences for young people.

Such an approach is an effective way of putting an organisation's strategies, goals and policies into action. For example, it is an effective methodology to deliver on the rights of the child; to empower young people. With challenges around funding, you have to be resourceful and use evidence-based approaches which are so important. You have to find the agencies and partners that can make the work happen and ensure young people do have access to quality experiences. This work is very innovative. It will be new to the young people who participate and will help them to develop important life-long skills such as problem solving.

My role is to develop a vision. To ask what is best practice and ensure it is authentic and genuine. As a youth worker by trade, for me, it has to be about passions and skills and values. One of my roles is to promote best practice on the ground. My approach is "Let's do this together".

Without YTI's input the initiative with young Travellers would not be happening. Alan [King, Deputy Director] reached out to me to investigate the possibility of a partnership. It will start in January 2023 and run every Wednesday. Young Travellers from two different sites will participate and their participation will be supported by youth workers. An external person will facilitate the group initially.

I am confident that once the youth workers see the practice in action they will be enthusiastic and passionate about it. My vision is that they will share how effective it is with other workers who will want to introduce the approach with their groups. I see it as a passing of the torch to them. I believe it will lead to new opportunities both for youth workers and the young people they work with.

Betty Duffy was identified as the practitioner who is best placed to deliver the initial programme. Betty is well versed in youth theatre practice and has substantial experience working with young Travellers.

Another very welcome development is a new relationship between Youth Theatre Ireland and The Crann Centre, Cork. Crann provides services for people of all ages with neuro-physical disabilities. Drama practitioner Donna O'Keeney has been working with young people who access Crann services through a programme called Breaking Barriers; a creative and fun theatre group for young people with a neuro-physical disability. As well as creating performance opportunities for members, Breaking Barriers is a chance for participants to socialise and work on emotional development and communication. Donna is vastly experienced in youth theatre having worked with Activate Youth Theatre (Cork City) for a number of years. She is Inclusion Officer for Graffiti Theatre Company and has experience researching and developing best practice in inclusion in theatre.

A collaboration with the Crann Centre and Donna O'Keeney to establish a youth theatre is considered an extremely viable opportunity so seed money has been provided to support the development of the group. The Centre has existing structures and long expertise in working with young people with neuro-physical disabilities. Donna has developed a practice and approach that has been extremely effective in working with the young people who have been attending the group. It is envisaged that participants will benefit from accessing the many opportunities available through YTI's programme once the group becomes affiliated. This is a prospect that Youth Theatre Ireland is very eager to embrace.

Youth Theatre Costs Grant/Bursary Support Grant

Youth Theatre Ireland has been very aware of the detrimental effect the cost of living crisis is having on the youth theatre community. A portion of the seed money was utilised to help youth theatres manage increased running costs and the financial impact of higher living costs on young people attending. In December 2022, Youth Theatre Ireland announced two funding schemes; the Youth Theatre Costs Grant and the Bursary Support Grants. These grants were possible due to the support of Creative Ireland and the Arts Council.

The Youth Theatre Costs Grant allowed groups to apply for up to €500 to help them to absorb increased costs. The €150 Bursary Support Grant was created to enable youth theatres to offer support to a young person(s) in their community to access youth theatre who faced financial barriers to participating. It could also be used to support the continued attendance of an existing member whose participation was being impacted by the cost of living crisis. Groups could, and were encouraged to, apply for both grants. 37 youth theatres received both grants while 3 groups received a Youth Theatre Cost Grant only.

There was a single application form and it included the following questions:

- Please indicate how much your operating costs have increased by in 2022, compared to 2021
- Specify the costs that have increased most.
- Indicate any specific challenges you faced as a youth theatre this year with reference to increased operating costs.

- Highlight how you will support a young person(s) to access youth theatre who would not ordinarily, or as a result of the cost of living crisis, attend.

The responses to these questions made for concerning reading. While the majority of youth theatres experienced between a 20% - 40% increase in costs. Some groups indicated their costs had risen by up to 60%. This higher percentage increase was experienced by groups who managed their own venue and those who had experienced rent increases or were required to pay rental costs for the first time. In some cases, increased operating costs have meant a youth theatre's usual venue has not been able to accommodate them and the group had to source an alternative space at increased cost.

Groups identified a range of current financial challenges related to the rise in the cost of living. Those identified as having most impact were:

- venue rental costs,
- utility costs including light and heat,
- increased costs of employing facilitators,
- travel and transport costs.

It is important to acknowledge that youth theatres indicated they felt a responsibility to increase the payment they give to facilitators and assistant facilitators in line with the cost of living increase. It is noted that some key youth theatre facilitators have found themselves in a position where they have had to take on other work and this has meant a decrease in their availability to the youth theatre which can particularly impact rehearsal and production weeks. In some cases this has meant the facilitator hasn't been available for some workshops resulting in the youth theatre having to source external facilitators which cost more. Another factor in increased facilitator costs is the higher cost of travel and transport.

A significant number of youth theatres have been supporting the participation and input of young leaders/facilitators and voluntary leaders. Both have been integral to the youth theatre movement in Ireland for a long time. The cost of living crisis means that volunteers and prospective future leaders are also experiencing an increased financial burden resulting in increased pressure to prioritise paid work. Moreover, higher travel and transport costs mean an increase in their expenses which has added to increased costs for youth theatres. Some youth theatres mentioned that it was their intention to begin paying volunteers/young facilitators who have been important in the delivery of the youth theatre programme but given their financial situation such a development is now problematic.

One youth theatre, that has a long history of hosting volunteers from abroad through various European programmes, has found that the monthly allowances for living expenses are not sufficient to cover the volunteers' costs. The group has supported the volunteers in meeting these costs which has required higher expenditure than in previous years. The participation of these volunteers is key in maintaining the programmes the youth theatre offers to young people in its catchment area.

Heating the workshop space is a significant issue for many groups. A number indicated that the space has been so cold that it has affected their work which necessitated buying additional heating equipment.

Other costs indicated as problematic included photocopying, printing, stationary, insurance, storage costs, hiring of vans for set transport, purchase of equipment, general maintenance of venue, cleaning and hygiene costs, providing refreshments for members, increased costs of employing designers and technicians for productions.

Youth theatres also indicated that increased travel costs and the financial challenges young people are experiencing have impacted theatre trips and other additional activities the youth theatre would normally undertake. Theatre trips, in particular, are viewed as an important element of their programme by many groups.

Some youth theatres commented that annual budgets had become redundant with projections of expenditure underestimated. Where contingency costs were included, they did not meet the actual increase in costs.

It is concerning that some groups indicated there has been a drop in membership which they believe is related to the cost of living crisis.

From the responses on the application form, it is clear that increased travel costs are having a significant impact on young people's participation. This is true regardless of the setting of the youth theatre - rural, urban, suburban etc. However, the costs of travel in rural areas can be particularly impactful as members can be required to travel substantial distances to attend workshops and rehearsals. Regardless of cost, many areas just don't have public transport options so many are reliant on parents to facilitate their attendance. Work schedules, petrol costs etc. can result in young people not attending. It was stated that in some cases, the use of taxis is the only way some members can consistently attend. Taxi fares have increased significantly in recent times.

Some groups in urban areas indicated that members have said they can't attend consistently as they don't have the bus fare to get to the youth theatre venue. One group is using the Bursary Support Grant to create a transportation fund to top up members' Leap Cards.

Responses to the application form questions illustrate that many groups are aware of specific young people whose families are struggling financially and where the receipt of a bursary can have a significant impact on their continued participation. The average youth theatre membership fee is €122 annually. Some groups have identified young people who have complex needs and for whom youth theatre participation is particularly vital. They will use the funding to help ensure their continued participation. Youth theatres are clearly putting their ethos of youth theatre participation being accessible to all young people into practice.

The vast majority of youth theatres have been waiving participation fees for members who can't afford them. Others have been offering discounted rates. Youth theatres who have existing bursaries have found that the demand on them has increased significantly. Groups are also offering flexible payment options where fees can be paid over a longer period.

Despite the significant increase in their costs, youth theatres have avoided increasing their membership fees as their ethos is that cost should never be a barrier to participation. Some groups have never charged fees yet are finding themselves in a position where they may have no choice but to review this policy. Other groups observed that they have never raised their fees or if they have done so over their lifespan, it has not been for a considerable number of years.

While expenditure has increased, the cost of living crisis has also had an impact on income. Not only is this the result of members struggling to pay fees but also for some groups membership numbers have not returned to pre-COVID levels. It was also observed that fundraising activities do not bring in as significant a yield as they did before the pandemic.

In terms of identifying a young person or young people who could benefit from the Bursary Award and who were not currently attending, youth theatres are taking a number of approaches including:

- contacting local DEIS schools to identify a suitable candidate or candidates,
- liaising with the local ETB and local youth services and other community organisations,
- working with other community groups and agencies, such as refugee support groups, to identify young people who were marginalised and/or new to the area and would benefit from youth theatre,
- opening the bursary to all current youth theatre members so they can choose to apply.

A number of groups are committed to using the Bursary Support Grant towards the participation of young people recently arrived in Ireland who are fleeing the war in Ukraine. Some groups have already identified Ukrainian young people living locally who are interested in youth theatre, while other groups are making connections with refugee support organisations to inform young people about the possibility of joining the youth theatre. Groups are also aware that it is likely young refugees will need support with travel costs.

Other groups will use the funding to help cover the costs of trips so that no young person is excluded. Some youth theatres are providing food for members before workshops and during rehearsal periods as it has been observed that some members do not have the means to provide their own.

The large number of applications for these grants illustrates how Youth Theatre Ireland identified an urgent need among its membership for financial support. It is likely if support towards running costs had not been received, the annual programmes of youth theatres would have been impacted having a detrimental effect on the artistic experiences available to members.

Learning and Conclusion

All the initiatives described here would not have been possible without the investment from Creative Ireland. In all aspects of Youth Theatre Ireland's work that benefited from the resourcing, increased capacity is identified as an outcome. The existence of seed funding not

only expanded the organisation's capacity to cement new partnerships to expand youth theatre provision, it meant the organisation could respond in a practical manner to the needs of its own community at a challenging time.

The ability of Youth Theatre Ireland to inject seed money into emerging youth theatres and new programmes is a very positive development. Not only does it speak to YTI's meaningful commitment to support the establishment of provision with its partners, the availability of funding makes developing a youth theatre more feasible for the organisations, agencies and individuals YTI is in collaboration with. As Alan Tully from Familibase has said, the seed money received was one of the key factors in getting Ballyfermot Youth Theatre up and running. This is also the case for Fun House Youth Theatre.

YTI has made significant and meaningful progress in expanding opportunities for young people who traditionally have not benefited from youth theatre participation. The resourcing has facilitated the creation of a space that has allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to reflect on, re-assess and re-strategise its approach to this essential element of its mission. There is the strong sense of a shift having taken place in the organisation's inclusion and diversity work that will have ongoing impact and a long-term legacy.

The importance of seed funding is attested to by the new and developing initiatives on increasing inclusion for marginalised young people. Contributing financially towards the establishment and development of these programmes has been key to their rollout. It means Youth Theatre Ireland is making a solid statement of intent and support for delivery of a youth theatre programme for a community who has been underserved by youth theatre. Again, the practical advantage of the availability of financial resources is a factor. Having the ability to pay experienced facilitators and cover other costs can make the difference between an initiative being feasible or not. Moreover, it is allowing YTI to pilot some projects, and assess the viability of others, which will help the organisation to develop a blueprint for best practice moving forward. As with all aspects of its work, Youth Theatre Ireland is eager for learning from new programmes and initiatives to build the know-how and capacity of the entire youth theatre sector to progress meaningful inclusion and diversity.

The learning for YTI in establishing the relationship with Exchange House and designing the programme for young Travellers has been substantial. For example, it was identified that the best age group to work with for a programme in this context was the 10-13 age group due to the realities of the life experience of young Travellers. Groups and programmes for those aged under 12 would normally fall outside the remit of YTI. The work with Niamh Smith and Exchange House has led to an increased understanding and an impetus to examine whether in some contexts it is a more effective approach to focus on work with a younger age group. There is an increased appreciation of the plurality of the experiences of young people and the requirement to tailor responses to the needs of a community. This understanding will potentially have a significant impact on future developments for providing access to youth theatre for marginalised and socially excluded young people.

It was vitally important that the organisation could respond to the very live needs of affiliated youth theatres with the Youth Theatre Costs and Bursary Support Grants. These grants are a testament to Youth Theatre Ireland's willingness, and ability, to support youth theatres in a practical manner that had an immediate positive impact for groups in bolstering their ongoing operations and programme delivery. Moreover, these grants illustrate YTI's commitment to ensuring all young people can access youth theatre regardless of their socio-economic status. These grants were greatly appreciated by the youth theatre community. Such initiatives illustrate the far-reach of the investment from Creative Ireland.

Another important development is Youth Theatre Ireland's increased ability to identify feasible and viable initiatives. There are so many factors in play when establishing a youth theatre, there is always a chance initiatives will not come to fruition. This was the case with one of the initiatives that received seed funding in the early days of the investment. The insight gained from this experience will guide the organisation's thinking and decision-making in the future.

As will be discussed in greater detail in the section on COVID Grants, YTI having financial resources to distribute represents a paradigm shift for the organisation. For Youth Theatre Ireland to realise its vision of access to youth theatre for all young people in Ireland, it is key to be able to offer emerging youth theatres a roadmap to securing adequate funding so that establishing youth theatre is feasible and a new group knows there are sources to provide the financial support it needs to thrive. Partnerships can mean that there is initial funding injection for a group but, as some of the partners consulted for this report articulated, agencies and organisations that have funding to grant want to see sources of other and/or matching funding. Youth Theatre Ireland having ongoing access to financial resources for distribution has been identified as an effective mechanism for ensuring such funding is available.

COVID GRANTS

Introduction and Background

From the onset of COVID 19 and lockdown, youth theatres found ways to keep young people engaged online providing necessary opportunities for members to connect and continue to experience the beneficial impact of youth theatre participation at a time when it had never been more crucial. The section on the Wellbeing Programme contains reflections and input from youth theatres on the huge challenges but also the value of what youth theatre groups achieved during this period. The possibility of in-person delivery in mid to late 2021 was welcome but also raised a number of new challenges for groups. Adhering to public health requirements, while ensuring that young people had a positive return to the space, necessitated additional capacity and cost that many groups did not have the resources to meet.

Restrictions in numbers, rules pertaining to physical contact and the requirement of reorganising the group into pods etc. meant that youth theatres had to reinvent their approach. This limited the nature of the programmes and projects they could deliver. Moreover, young people were still experiencing significant challenges to their wellbeing as a result of the isolation and disconnect of the pandemic experience.

There had been a decline in members attending online youth theatre sessions. As you will read in the section on the Wellbeing Programme, there were a number of reasons for this including a wider fatigue with online engagement but also the natural cycle of young people's involvement in youth theatre. Traditional approaches to recruitment, such as open days and workshops in local schools, were not at the disposal of groups. It was the experience of youth theatres that engaging new members through online activities was challenging. Initiatives that supported youth theatres in retaining current members and attracting new ones were required.

Team

Director, Deputy Director

Key Participants

Affiliated youth theatres and their members.

Outputs and Outcomes

Identified goals from 2021 Service Level Agreement

- *Support youth theatre groups to re-engage current members and increase attendance at youth theatres while operating remotely*
- *Support youth theatre groups to re-open for in-person work following COVID-19*
- *Support youth theatre groups to increase membership*

Agreed Outputs

- *Re-opening grants for youth theatre groups*
- *Project grants for online / blended delivery*

In 2021, under an amended Service Level Agreement, Creative Ireland provided additional investment so that Youth Theatre Ireland could offer funding to affiliated youth theatres to support them with the costs of in-person delivery.

A number of funding schemes were offered to meet the needs of groups. In 2020 the Covid Relief Inclusion Grant was offered. While in 2021 two funds were opened to youth theatres thanks to the support of Creative Ireland; one to assist with the costs of reopening the physical space and another to allow youth theatres to bring in outside facilitators so that groups could still deliver high quality artistic projects and programmes to their members. The latter could be used to realise projects both in the physical and online spaces as some youth theatres did not feel ready to return to in-person delivery at this stage in the pandemic.

Youth theatre facilitators had undoubtedly gone to the very limits of their capacity during 2020 and 2021. The genuine duty of care they had for their members was evident. Often they were not being compensated financially in a manner that reflected their contribution and the time they devoted to ongoing delivery. Therefore, it was important that core youth theatre facilitators also benefited from any funding provided to groups.

INCLUDE YT - Covid Relief Inclusion Grant

In July 2020, YTI announced the INCLUDE YT Grant. It was open to affiliated youth theatres, to help them increase young people's access to youth theatre and address exclusion on social or disability grounds.

Emerging from Covid-19, youth theatres' capacity to include new members was severely challenged as they faced additional costs and extended workshop programmes in order to comply with public health measures and social distancing guidelines. This grant was designed to help youth theatres keep social inclusion at the heart of their practice by resourcing youth theatres to engage with young people who might have difficulty accessing youth theatre on

social or disability grounds. The total fund available to youth theatres through this scheme was €18,000.

Applications were assessed against the following criteria:

- The potential of the project / measures to increase access for young people facing barriers to participation on social or disability grounds and/or retain existing members who would not otherwise be able to continue their participation on social or disability grounds.
- The potential impact of the project / measures in terms of the number of young people who would be supported to access youth theatre through the grant.
- The quality and clarity of the project plans / measures.
- The feasibility of the project / measures, particularly with consideration to Covid public health guidance and the grant timeline.
- The likelihood that proposed expenditure items will support the achievement of the project / measures and outcomes

11 grants were awarded to the following applicants:

- County Limerick Youth Theatre
- Complex Youth Theatre (Dublin)
- Dublin Youth Theatre
- Galway Community Circus
- Griesse Youth Theatre (Kildare)
- Monaghan Youth Theatre
- Mostrim Players (Longford)
- Mountrath Youth Theatre (Laois)
- Playacting Youth Theatre (Kildare)
- Rusty Frog Youth Theatre (Cork)
- WACT Youth Theatre (Wexford)

These youth theatres intended to support inclusion in a number of ways including:

- increasing facilitator contact hours so that more young people could participate while numbers were limited by pandemic restrictions
- upgrading their technology so they could stream activities for young people who couldn't attend in person
- additional adult workshop assistants to support specific young people with disabilities
- increasing outreach work to underserved communities
- organising activities for young people in Direct Provision.

The participation of 329 young people was supported by this grant.

Re-opening grants for youth theatre groups

In September 2021, Youth Theatre Ireland invited applications for funding from affiliated groups to support the re-opening of youth theatres for in-person delivery of youth theatre provision. Re-opening youth theatres for in-person delivery required strict adherence to public health guidance resulting in increased costs for youth theatres to ensure compliance.

These direct grants of €1,500 per successful application, supported youth theatres to:

- re-open 'in-person' youth theatre workshops/activities or a blended activity programme (in-person workshops and online) with young people in a manner that complied with public health measures and physical distancing guidelines (e.g. running outdoor workshops / activities in pods or potentially running indoor workshops/activities in pods once allowed by public health guidance),
- maintain young people's access to youth theatre activities and maintain membership levels,
- enable youth theatres to pay facilitators / directors for any additional contact hours with young people made necessary by compliance with public health measures / physical distancing.

The application form requested the following information in relation to their in-person programmes:

- the workshops and activities planned for Autumn 2021,
- plans for addressing public health measures: e.g., choice of venue for 'in-person' activities (outdoor or potentially indoor - depending on prevailing public health measures), size of workshop groups, mix of online work and blended programming, other relevant COVID-19 response measures,
- the number of workshops / activities planned for delivery and the number of facilitators / leaders needed to run activities and cover adult to young person ratios,
- plans for including all youth theatre members in workshops groups / activities despite restricted pod sizes,
- the impact this funding shortfall would have on the planned activity programme and membership numbers for Autumn 2021.

The grant could be utilised by youth theatres for the following costs:

- facilitator / practitioner fees (must account for at least 60% of grant),
- venue rental costs,
- costs related to COVID-19 measures e.g., extra cleaning of venue, hand sanitiser, signage, insurance etc.

Applications Received/Awarded

Youth Theatre Ireland received 11 applications from youth theatres:

- Complex Youth Theatre (Dublin 7)
- Dublin Youth Theatre
- Griesse Youth Theatre (Balitore, Co. Kildare)
- Kilkenny Youth Theatre
- Making Waves Youth Theatre (Greystones, Co. Wicklow)
- Mostrim Youth Players (Longford)
- Mountrath Youth Theatre (Laois)
- Mr. Sands Youth Theatre (Bray, Co. Wicklow)
- Playacting Youth Theatre (Celbridge, Co. Kildare)
- Sligo Youth Theatre
- UCC Youth Theatre (Cork)

Grants Awarded

All 11 applications were deemed valid, and each group received their €1,500 grant in November 2021. A total of €16,500 was awarded under this scheme.

Impact of Reopening Grant

A cross-section of the youth theatres who received the grants were sent a form to help assess the impact of the funding. They were asked to describe what the funding was used for.

The grant was used to support facilitator fees for additional time with the group and supporting putting on a show. Also allowed time for Admin related to additional risk assessments and supporting delivery of workshops within Covid guidelines.

We needed extra facilitation hours and a much larger room to work within Covid guidelines.

We used this grant for purchase of sanitary equipment (for example, hand sanitiser, disinfectant wipes, gloves, and disposable masks), and towards our primary running costs (venue hire, facilitator fees, etc.)

We used the grant for venue hire to allow extra space to facilitate multiple pods.

Another group detailed how the extra facilitator hours, during the September-December 2021 term meant they could create more pods while keeping within COVID guidelines. This resulted in more young people being able to participate. In addition the facilitators could be paid for extra time spent cleaning and sanitising the venue. This group also spent money on cleaning products, signage, masks and antigen tests etc.

In relation to a series of statements provided, youth theatres responded as follows:

This grant allowed more youth theatre members to participate than otherwise would have been possible.

86% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

14% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

This grant helped us to retain members and/or attract new members by allowing youth theatre activities to continue

100% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

0% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

When asked if there was there any other impact related to this grant or other information they wish to share, responses included the following:

We had been able to offer free or reduced cost places in the Youth Theatre to members who had financial impacts to the Covid Crisis. One of our members has gone on to take part in the National Youth Theatre as a result of their participation in 2021-22.

We received masks and cleaning equipment also with the help of Youth Theatre Ireland. However the biggest impact was extra facilitation hours required and room size. This grant and other funding allowed us to not charge membership fees for one term also, which helped with retention.

This grant allowed us to re-open successfully and begin the long process of rebuilding our membership after the lockdown. Our membership has been steadily growing ever since. The buffer this grant provided was a tremendous help for us during those early first sessions in person. It gave us the confidence that we would be able to bring Mr Sands Youth Theatre back in person and continue to offer an important, vital experience to young people in Bray.

We were able to continue classes in a safe manner, give reassurances to parents that hygiene measures were being adhered to. The facilitators had been working really hard on Zoom to engage the young people and it was good to be able to support those facilitators and offer them small groups in the space. The grant was of great benefit to the group, enabling us to do the right thing and stay connected with members.

DYT was able to hire a space where 2 pods could operate simultaneously and allowed us to offer twice the workshops as normal, one in the morning and one in the afternoon so that we could get close to our usual numbers participating in-person. Members were keen to return to in-person workshops and we would have been heartbroken to have to turn them away when the

pods allowed were only 6. By doubling our workshops and having a space where we could have multiple pods safely and simultaneously meant we did not have to turn away many members which meant our engagement levels improved. We sincerely appreciate the grant and it had a clear impact on our members participation and their wellbeing by being able to participate.

The participation of 587 young people was supported under this grant.

Project grants for online / blended delivery

In September 2021, Youth Theatre Ireland invited affiliated youth theatres to apply for funding to engage a facilitator to work with their group on a particular theatre skill/project that would support the artistic development of the young people but also seek to re-engage members with a project that would appeal to them.

These direct grants of €1,500 supported the youth theatres to:

- develop, in collaboration with an external facilitator/artist, a high-quality youth theatre project for members,
- maintain young people's access to youth theatre activities, re-engage and attract new members,
- enable youth theatres to pay facilitators / directors for any additional contact hours with young people made necessary by compliance with public health measures / physical distancing.

The application form requested the following information in relation to in-person programmes:

- a description of the project, the artistic decision making behind it and the proposed outcome,
- details of the facilitator/artist the group wished to engage,
- plans for addressing public health measures: e.g. choice of venue for 'in-person' activities (outdoor or potentially indoor- depending on prevailing public health measures), size of workshop groups, mix of online work and blended programming, other relevant COVID-19 response measures,
- proposed timeline to deliver the project,
- description of how the youth theatre was to engage, re-engage, and attract new members to this project and outline how their creative voice would be included.

Applications Received / Awarded.

YTI received 12 applications for this project award from Youth Theatres across Ireland. From the 12 applications 11 received funding of €1,500 each. With a total of €16,500 being awarded under the scheme. The Youth Theatres funded were:

- Explore Youth Theatre (Leixlip, Co. Kildare)

- MAD Youth Theatre (Dundalk, Co. Louth)
- Mountrath Youth Theatre (Laois)
- POD Youth Theatre (Virginia, Co. Cavan)
- Roscommon County Youth Theatre
- Griesse Youth Theatre (Ballitore, Co. Kildare)
- Stagecraft Youth Theatre (Clonmel, Co. Tipperary)
- Waterford Youth Theatre
- Gonzo Youth Theatre (Cavan Town)
- County Limerick Youth Theatre
- Kildare Youth Theatre (Newbridge, Co. Kildare)

Impact of Project Grant

A form to assess the impact was also sent to the youth theatres who received the Project Grant.

When asked to describe their project, the following responses were received:

We used the grant to support our project called 'Act of Oblivion – Things Fall Apart'. This was a project that we did during the pandemic. It started in late 2020 and finished in the middle of 2021. The participants had a Zoom session every week and at the end of the process they devised an online performance. Throughout the process, the participants worked around the idea of the collapse of significance and meaning in young lives. There were eighteen young people from Ireland, Italy, Greece, Hungary, and Turkey aged between 19 to 24. The grant was a contribution towards the cost of this show.

We used the funding to bring in some outside facilitators with different areas of expertise, we had Emma Fisher doing shadow puppetry, we had Darren Yorke facilitating improv over Zoom, we had Aine Cahill facilitating home filming with special effects. We also used the funding to supplement and enhance our Covid sanitization methods and also to pay our facilitators for extra contact hours with our young people.

CoLYT used the Project Grant to pay for a professional stage manager, Eloise Hickey, to work with the young artists on our NT Connections play 2022, 'Variations' by Katie Hims. Having a professional stage manager in the room was hugely beneficial to both the production and the young artists. Eloise took over the L.X. & S.F.X aspects of the production in addition to being the stage manager. She took two of the members under her wing and trained them as a Deputy Stage Manager & as a Technician/Operator. Eloise has helped members develop their passion for working in stage crew and in technical roles, she added so much to the production, bringing it to the next level, and became someone who the young artists looked up to and learned from. Eloise attended 12 two hour rehearsals between January and March 2022 and performances in Kilmallock (April 2022) & in Belfast (May 2022). She brought skills that we were lacking in CoLYT and we're so grateful to have been able to have her on board thanks to the Project Grant.

The project grant was to continue the tradition of Griese Youth Theatre bringing a Christmas show to the children's ward and out patients in Tallaght Hospital. Due to Covid-19, the performance was to be professionally videoed and livestreamed to Tallaght Hospital by Eamonn MacMahon and Ballitore Young Film Makers. The cast would also be brought to a professional production in Riverbank exposing them to professional theatre. They also took part in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Athy, dressed in costume with the slogan 'Community Together Again, Valuing Our People, Our Animals, Our Climate, Connecting with each other'. The project certainly helped to keep these young people going, all of whom are still members of GYT. A number of them travelled to Cork in November 2022 for YTI's Symposium on Inclusion and Diversity, performing an extract from 'Seaborne' by C.M Tollerton. The support was timely and of huge benefit to the group.

In relation to a series of statements provided, youth theatres responded as follows:

This grant allowed the youth theatre to run activities that otherwise would not have happened.

100% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

0% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

This grant allowed the youth theatre to bring in an external facilitator which otherwise we wouldn't have been able to do.

80% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

20% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

This grant allowed our members to increase their creative skills and abilities through participation in the project.

100% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

0% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

This grant allowed us to keep youth theatre members attending and engaged which is something we might otherwise have struggled with.

100% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

0% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

This project helped us retain members/attract new members.

80% of respondents agreed that this was true for their youth theatre.

20% slightly agreed that this was true for their group.

0% disagreed

The participation of 691 young people was supported through this grant.

Case Study on Project Grants

Stagecraft Youth Theatre

Stagecraft Youth Theatre is based in Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. The group used their project grant to bring in three facilitators who have studied acting at third level to deliver a participative workshop. This project was in response to their members' desire to find out more about acting. The youth theatre invited members who had left during lockdown as a way of reconnecting. For members who had come to the end of their time in youth theatre, it allowed one last in-person experience with the group which was considered very important. The 25 young people present were divided into pods as their venue was of adequate size to do so.

The workshop allowed participants to experience 'a day in the life' of a third year acting student. Participants got a sense of the rhythm of the day and various ingredients of the acting college experience. Time was allocated for a question and answer session during which members got a sense of the highs and lows of being a young working actor.

According to one Participant:

The workshop was a nice spark of re engagement. Members got to have real true to life hands-on experience of what that process of becoming an actor is like. They got to see a route into that career and that world. It was clear they attached role model qualities to the facilitators. Young people come to youth theatre for a myriad of reasons, each one as justified as the other. You do have young people who want a career in theatre and I think it is important that they get a sense of what it is actually like. There is a perception that if you train to be an actor you become wealthy and head off to Hollywood! The facilitators talked about the reality for young actors in the industry. I think it is very important that they are aware of this reality.

Learning and Conclusion

Though Youth Theatre Ireland has a long history of offering a wide range of supports to affiliated youth theatres, the COVID Grants was the first time the organisation had funding to distribute to members. Undoubtedly this was a significant juncture for YTI representing an important shift for the organisation. The pandemic required the organisation to respond quickly and comprehensively to support the youth theatre community in an unparalleled manner.

Communicating information from government departments, sector specific guidelines and updating groups on restrictions necessitated a very high level of responsiveness and placed a heavy burden on staff and existing resources. The organisation also advised groups on adapting their approaches to practice by providing workshop plans and other material. Youth Theatre Tuesdays, a weekly gathering of youth theatre leaders/facilitators, was a valued development that fostered connection at a time of isolation.

All these initiatives were appreciated by members and helped them to navigate a very difficult period in the history of youth theatre in this country. However, thanks to the investment of Creative Ireland, having the resources to be able to offer financial assistance brought the support to a new level. Securing funding for youth theatres to operate is challenging. Most of the funding available through Arts Council schemes and other funding sources is for projects and programmes rather than core operating costs such as venue hire and facilitators fees, insurance etc. Groups can access relatively small amounts through the ETB Youth Club Grant Scheme and some Local Authorities that can be used towards these costs but often it is not enough. Fundraising and membership fees are key to youth theatres covering core costs and these can fluctuate. The impact of COVID meant that groups really struggled to maintain membership numbers and fundraising was difficult, if not impossible. Being able to access ring fenced funding was key for many groups in continuing to deliver a high quality, supportive experience for young people. It is extremely important to Youth Theatre Ireland that it was able to provide such practical support at a crucial time.

Youth Theatre Ireland is eager to pursue future opportunities, such as those represented by these grants and the Youth Theatre Costs/Bursary Support Grant, that allow youth theatres to access funding ring fenced for the sector. The organisation's experience in assessing and administering these grants has resulted in the development of increased expertise as a distributor of funding. Youth Theatres do not need substantial funding to operate. Depending on their circumstances, the average youth theatre can exist on around €8,000 a year. However, financial resources, even to this modest level, can be difficult to access. Increased living costs are likely to mean that youth theatre expenditure will continue to grow into the future requiring greater resourcing. It is essential that further investment in the sector is secured. Youth Theatre Ireland believes it is essential youth theatres receive increased financial support to maintain, and ideally expand, the valuable service they provide to young people.

The Wellbeing Programme consultation revealed that facilitators are frequently not adequately paid for their work and it is difficult to maintain a living as a youth drama facilitator. Resourcing

youth theatres to compensate facilitators properly, in line with the cost of living, so youth theatre can continue to be a priority for them is essential.

Youth Theatre Ireland is aware that for all the supports and resources it can offer to emerging and existing youth theatres, providing financial resourcing can be the most vital input for some groups at particular stages in their evolution. The possibility of providing more grants in the future is something the organisation is eager to explore at a national level with government departments and other agencies.

NATIONAL RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

Introduction and Background

This report has alluded to the detrimental effect of COVID on youth theatre in a number of respects. A fall in youth theatre membership was one of the most significant impacts on the sector. Consultations for the Wellbeing Programme illustrated that most youth theatres' participation numbers were down between 20% - 40%. This was at a time when young people required positive outlets, support and connection. It was vital for both young people and youth theatres themselves that initiatives were developed focused on engaging more young people. To this end, Youth Theatre Ireland initiated a local and national recruitment campaign.

Team

Director, Deputy Director, Administrator

Key Participants

Potential youth theatre members

Outputs and Outcomes

Identified goal from amended Service Level Agreement 2021

- Support youth theatre groups to increase membership.

Agreed Output from amended Service Level Agreement 2021

- Local and national youth theatre recruitment campaign

In November 2021, Youth Theatre Ireland launched their first ever national and local recruitment campaign, #JOINYOUTHTHEATRE

The aim of the campaign was to make more people aware of the existence of youth theatre and to highlight the benefits of joining a youth theatre for a young person. The press release to mark the launch made reference to the pandemic context and the challenges young people were experiencing:

This is a particularly difficult time for young people as they face all of the challenges of resuming social and personal interaction with their peers and participation in youth theatre is an excellent and effective way of helping them to meet new people and learn useful life skills.

*There is widespread concern for the wellbeing and mental health of young people and youth theatre is a proven way to support the social, personal and artistic development of young people. The benefits of youth theatre include *the learning of acting, design or performance skills in addition to other vital supports. Youth theatre helps to develop creativity, increase friendship circles, build confidence and self-esteem, increase wellbeing and happiness, decrease anxiety and stress, increase in fun activities and physical activity, build a sense of achievement and to develop the individual as a team player.*

**Source: Centre Stage +20, the third national study of youth theatre undertaken by Youth Theatre Ireland.*

This campaign consisted of physical and digital assets to support youth theatres to promote their work. Physical assets included badges, pencils, tote bags, A5 flyers and A4 posters, which could be tailored by youth theatres to provide their contact details. These were circulated to all affiliated youth theatres to display in their own locality.

To date, 1150 posters have been distributed to 57 youth theatres in 25 counties. They have been displayed in theatres, youth and community centres, schools and arts centres among other locations. The physical assets including badges, tote bags, pencils etc are provided to attendees at Youth Theatre Ireland events around the country.

#JOINYOUTHTHEATRE is being used by member youth theatres on their own social media posts. Here are some examples :

Mr Sands Youth Theatre

<https://www.facebook.com/MrSandsYouthTheatre/videos/837471300956154/>

Activate Youth Theatre

<https://www.facebook.com/graffiti.theatre/posts/pfbid02yTSnQrQvN315QZkZyppggwUyYjPFikAXog1bbX8CTjLXLL4eqF8zjJQXr4taQYzBI>

POD Youth Theatre

<https://www.facebook.com/podyouththeatre/posts/pfbid0dcvAbjYHadASEz3feKETwVVaZH9KA9H1E5G64gjNnxLZsZxmfeSrM9FZ2itfCMk2I>

Recruitment Campaign Video

Youth Theatre launched the national campaign on 10 November 2021 with the support of Creative Ireland Director, Tania Banotti. Below is a link to a news item from the Youth Theatre Ireland website:

<https://www.youththeatre.ie/news/youth-theatre-ireland-launch-national-recruitment-campaign>

It was decided the best approach to encourage young people to join their local youth theatre was to bring together former youth theatre members who could communicate the impact youth theatre participation has had on their lives. David Rawle (Carrigallen Youth Theatre), Lily

Bunting, (Dublin Youth Theatre) and Emma Corrigan (Monaghan Youth Theatre) were invited to participate in a photo call to launch the campaign and contribute to a promotional video. As has been referenced elsewhere in this report, communicating youth theatre and what it does is challenging. The recruitment campaign allowed Youth Theatre Ireland to examine how it might clarify and strengthen its message to the public. As it is an extremely useful tool in communicating the value of youth theatre, the video has been used repeatedly by staff in a variety of contexts. Youth theatres who have used the video for recruitment purposes have observed that young people are very engaged by it and it has been effective in delivering the message of the benefits of joining youth theatre.

The video was posted across YTI social platforms. It has received 277 views via Instagram alone with another 181 views on YouTube. It can be watched at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sc7O_lcg8g

Below are some quotes from it:

Participant One: *Since I joined youth theatre I have made friends for life, my confidence has grown massively. I have learned different ways to act and approach things. I have loved every second of it.*

Participant Two: *[Youth theatre] has completely changed my life. It has made me a more confident, open person. It has made me feel more comfortable about being myself around other people and it has given me opportunities I never thought I would get to experience.*

Participant Three: *I made lots of friends. I learned a lot about how to make Art and talk about the world through theatre. It is such a great experience and being able to do it with other people who like the same things as you, is just so comforting.*

The recruitment campaign has been a key success for Youth Theatre Ireland. From 2021 to 2022 there was a 29% increase in youth theatre membership; from 1,864 members nationally in 2021 jumping to 2,426 members in 2022. This increase is at least partly attributable to the recruitment campaign and the project grants to support youth theatres attract new members and encourage those who had left to return. A 29% increase in one year is hugely significant and signifies the importance of this sustained investment by Creative Ireland in Youth Theatre Ireland. Youth theatre membership has continued to increase into 2023 rising from to 2720 participants nationally according to statistics gathered recently.

Message of Inclusivity



The choice of branding design and imagery was purposeful and significant. The chosen design conveyed the message that youth theatre is for every young person. It is important to YTI and the youth theatre community that the sector's commitment to inclusivity is front and centre when publicising youth theatre particularly when the target audience is potential members.

Cruinniú na nÓg

While not originating directly from the Creative Ireland investment, 2022 witnessed a coordinated participation by youth theatres in Cruinniú na nÓg for the first time. This national initiative was seen within the context of the recruitment campaign as a valuable opportunity to promote and widen participation in youth theatre. One very positive outcome from this engagement was that YTI developed relationships with Creative Ireland Coordinators. The decision to dedicate resources to supporting youth theatres to take part in this important national event facilitated increased visibility and raised the profile of youth theatres in local communities across the country.

Over 50 events were organised by youth theatres for Cruinniú na nÓg. Most groups held workshop sessions open to all young people in their catchment areas. Existing members also participated so that young people, who had not engaged with youth theatre previously, could get a sense of the group and its dynamic. Experiencing youth theatre in action is critical in attracting new members. The consensus among youth theatres is that around 60% of those who participated in local workshops had not engaged with youth theatre previously. Youth Theatre

Ireland will continue to encourage, facilitate and publicise involvement by affiliated groups in the event. The feedback from Creative Youth Coordinators on youth theatre participation in Crinniú was very positive. Youth Theatre Ireland is also eager to explore possibilities around greater youth theatre involvement in Culture Night.

Learning and Conclusion

A national recruitment campaign had never been undertaken by Youth Theatre Ireland previously and branded material had never been purchased in such large quantities. Coinciding with this recruitment campaign, Youth Theatre Ireland were participating in the RAISE programme funded by the Arts Council. A central part of the organisation's involvement on this programme was around developing a clear branding message and developing a 'case for support' for investment in the organisation.

Out of this work the simple #JOINYOUTHTHEATRE message was created. Without the significant investment of funding from Creative Ireland, it would have been difficult to action this branding / recruitment message on such a large scale. The direct impact on youth theatre membership numbers is great news for the sector. The added benefit for YTI as an organisation is that the branding developed for this campaign is now used on most of its programmes.

The #JOINYOUTHTHEATRE message was central at the annual Symposium in November 2021 and the graphics developed for this programme were used on 100+ t-shirts given to participants at the National Festival of Youth Theatres in 2022. There has been an important shift in programme development around branding. Previously, branding / promotional material would have been considered as an 'afterthought' and budgetary dependent. Now branding / promotion of the organisation and the key message #JOINYOUTHTHEATRE feature prominently when planning programmes for the year. Printed and branded material has featured in all artistic programmes in 2022 and it will continue to be integrated into the organisation's work moving forward.

Engaging professionals to create high quality digital content can be expensive and is often outside the resources of YTI. Financial limitations necessitate that content is usually created 'in-house' within the existing capacity of the organisation. Finding the time to dedicate to the creation, and particularly the editing required, can be difficult considering the packed work schedules of staff. The initiative around recruitment is a great example of how the resourcing from Creative Ireland allowed the organisation to take a fresh approach to a challenge that it has grappled with for a long time, namely, spreading the word about youth theatre to those who are not aware of its existence.

WELLBEING PROGRAMME

Introduction and Background

Since its inception in the 1980s (both as the National Association for Youth Drama and later Youth Theatre Ireland), the organisation has placed young people's wellbeing at the centre of its work. Youth theatre is concerned with the artistic, social and personal development of young people. Youth theatre practice is complex and dynamic and can address all these important aspects of young people's development in the one space.

Over the lifetime of YTI, its approach to young people's wellbeing has evolved in response to changing needs and changing cultural, social and regulatory contexts. The organisation has been extremely responsive in meeting statutory requirements in relation to child protection and safeguarding, taking a leadership role by developing policy templates and other resources to support youth theatres in meeting their statutory obligations. Most importantly, all these developments have functioned to help ensure members have the safest possible experience during their time in youth theatre.

Moreover, Youth Theatre Ireland has adopted a holistic approach to welfare and child protection adopting a range of approaches, policies and procedures that extend beyond safeguarding requirements. Although the Wellbeing Programme was a direct response to a particular circumstance, the COVID pandemic, it is an initiative that reflects a long-held commitment to meeting a high standard of care towards young people who engage in youth theatre.

The investment by Creative Ireland allowed YTI to respond to the particular context of COVID and, additionally, to reflect on how the organisation can meet the needs of the community in an effective manner into the future. It has resulted in an expansion in thinking and approach. It has also helped bolster the organisation's confidence and capacity to embrace its role as a leader in young people's development and wellbeing in Ireland.

In August 2021, Youth Theatre Ireland advertised for a Wellbeing Officer to deliver a programme to youth theatres and set the following context:

Over the past 18 months, COVID19 has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of young people across Ireland. Thanks to additional funding from the Creative Ireland Programme, Youth Theatre Ireland is now seeking to appoint a Wellbeing Officer on a contract for services basis to research, develop and implement a series of wellbeing initiatives, workshops and resources to support youth theatre members and leaders across Ireland.

Furthermore, the role description stated:

Youth Theatre Ireland recognises that young people and leaders will be dealing with a number of complex issues upon the resumption of in-person services. The development of a wellbeing training and resource programme aims to support the youth theatre experience while not taking away from the key goal of delivering youth theatre practice.

Katie Martin was appointed to the role. She has over 18 years experience in working in the youth theatre sector both as a youth theatre leader and Youth Theatre Ireland staff member including over 5 years as Youth Theatre Ireland's Child Protection and Welfare Officer. Since she departed her role with the organisation she has explored a range of wellness tools and practices.

The programme ran for twelve months rather than six, as initially planned. It became clear early on in its existence there was a need for a deep engagement with individual groups and leaders/facilitators. COVID 19 had taken a significant toll on many people within the sector. Time and space were required to facilitate meaningful interactions with the Wellbeing Officer and for the programme to have any significant impact.

Despite the challenges, a huge majority of youth theatres maintained access for young people to youth theatre throughout 2020 and 2021. As referenced in the Report on Needs Assessment the main focus was on young people's wellbeing and maintaining connection. Most youth theatres continued to offer drama related activities online and many created new work. To provide a real sense of the beneficial impact of continued youth theatre access over the pandemic for members, you will find in Appendix 1 a transcription of a speech given by Explore Youth Theatre member Aoife Murphy at the 2021 event *Back in the Room: A Youth Theatre Practice Symposium*.

Team

Wellbeing Officer, Child Protection and Welfare Officer - Louise Holian (departed role in July 2022), Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer - Cathal Thornton (appointed August 2000, Director

Key Participants

Youth Theatres Leaders/Facilitators and Members. Youth Theatre Ireland Youth Board

Needs Assessment

This section of the report will address the following agreed outcomes from the amended Service Level Agreement 2021:

- Engage with leaders to ascertain their wellbeing needs that can be supported through training / resource development to run their youth theatre group and support their young people.
- Engage with young people to ascertain their wellbeing needs that can be supported through training / resource development in youth theatre.

October 2021: Consultation with Youth Theatre Ireland Staff

Initially, the Wellbeing Officer consulted staff to get a sense of the national picture and the particular challenges being experienced by affiliated youth theatres. The Child Protection and Welfare Officer, Director, Deputy Director and Administrator participated in this consultation.

November 2021- February 2022: Consultation with Youth Theatres

The Wellbeing Officer conducted conversations with 24 leaders/facilitators from 18 youth theatres between November 2021 and February 2022. The original intention was to establish a focus group of youth theatre leaders/facilitators. There was an early realisation that youth theatre leaders/facilitators needed a space to debrief and process their experiences over COVID. Rather than a focus group, it was decided the Wellbeing Officer would hold one to one or small group conversations. These conversations happened either online, by phone and a small number in-person once restrictions allowed. The interactions were crucial in assessing the needs of youth theatres, their facilitators/leaders and members and were central to the design and delivery of the programme.

The full report on the consultations is available in Appendix 2

One of the main findings from the needs analysis was the necessity of supporting the adults involved in youth theatre. There was a sense of exhaustion after the huge efforts required to ensure young people continued to benefit from participation in youth theatre during lockdown. Continued access to youth theatre required a radical adaptation of practice that even the most experienced and skilled youth theatre facilitators found challenging and demanding.

Youth theatres had been working largely in isolation, all grappling with similar issues, and focus was required on recreating a sense of community among youth theatres regionally and nationally. Youth theatre practitioners missed peer support and the sense of belonging to a wider network.

It was apparent that meeting the sector's current needs required both practical actions but also less tangible measures such as approaches to re-energising and sustaining the people who make youth theatre happen. Youth theatre leaders/facilitators were clearly very attuned to the needs of the young people who participated in youth theatre. The period of the pandemic illustrated clearly their genuine care and strong sense of responsibility towards members. Constantly responding to changing needs and conditions asked more of them than youth theatre had previously. Without their dedication, commitment and willingness to push themselves to the limits of, and often beyond, their capacity, young people would not have continued to experience the positive impact of youth theatre in their lives.

To ensure that young people continued to benefit from youth theatre, it was essential that attention was focused on the needs of the adults involved in youth theatre and supports put in place to help sustain them in their work.

It is worth noting that some participants commented that the consultation conversations functioned to help them feel validated, connected and supported and as such helped to achieve some of the objectives of the programme.

Consultation with Young People

Ideally, the programme would have engaged with young people at an earlier stage. As already indicated, it was determined priority needed to be given to supporting youth theatre leaders and facilitators so that young people could continue to benefit from ongoing delivery of quality youth theatre practice. It was deemed important that any consultation with young people happen in person, as it may have brought up difficulties and challenges young people had experienced and at a time when it felt safe after COVID restrictions ended.

Moreover, all the consultations and activities involving youth theatre leaders/facilitators dedicated much space and time to discussing the needs of youth theatre members and how they could best be met.

14th May 2022: Consultation with Youth Board

The Wellbeing Officer and the Youth Board Coordinator had an online meeting in April with two representatives of the Youth Board to introduce them to the Wellbeing programme and to get some initial thoughts on the consultation. The Wellbeing Officer attended a meeting of Youth Theatre Ireland's Youth Board to introduce the Wellbeing Programme and get their input on youth theatre members' needs and the best ways to address them. 9 young people participated, 6 in person and 3 online.

Notes from this session are included in Appendix 3.

Outputs and Outcomes

This section will address the following agreed goals as articulated in the Service Level Agreement 2021 in relation to the role of the Wellbeing Officer

- Develop training / resources with internal and external partners to support the needs identified by leaders and young people
- Lead the implementation of these resources with leader training / workshops for young people etc.

- Support each youth theatre with a localised resource of organisations etc. that can support issues that may arise within youth theatre groups that cannot be adequately dealt with by leaders.
- Extend Youth Theatre Ireland's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to leaders

1. Presentation by Wellbeing Officer at Youth Practice Theatre Symposium, November 2021

The Wellbeing Officer gave a presentation on the programme at the annual Youth Theatre Practice Symposium in University College Cork on 26th November attended by over 60 youth theatre leaders and practitioners. It served as a call to participate in the programme.

2. (Re)Creating Our Space Workshop at Youth Practice Theatre Symposium, November 2021

The Wellbeing Officer facilitated two workshops at the Symposium. The workshops provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their own energies and values. It also explored the demands required from adults to maintain the youth theatre space. It encouraged participants to think about what they need to sustain themselves as youth theatre practitioners and maintain their own wellbeing and energy.

The content was adapted from the RISE course created by Wellness Coach and Speaker Jack Kavanagh who guided the Wellbeing Officer in developing the workshop.

3. (Re)Creating Our Space: How Are Your Members Doing? - Online Sessions 31st March 2022

Two online sessions took place in March to provide youth theatres with the opportunity to discuss their experiences of the return to the physical space to date and, in particular, the needs of youth theatre members. It was an opportunity to identify effective approaches and solutions and receive advice/support from peers and the Youth Theatre Ireland team. Thirteen youth theatres attended. **Notes from these meetings are included in Appendix 4.**

4. Wellbeing Programme Day - Planned for May 2022

An in-person day to bring youth theatre practitioners together was planned in May in Dublin. It was to feature a training session with LGBTI+ youth organisation BeLonG To and a fun drama workshop facilitated by a very experienced youth theatre facilitator offering leaders/facilitators the opportunity to play. However, the bookings were low and the event didn't go ahead. Finding a date and time for in-person meet ups has proved challenging throughout the programme. Youth Theatre leaders/facilitators have many pulls on their time. Youth Theatre Ireland will

continue to consult affiliated groups on the format and timing that works best for them. The LTBTI+ workshop with BeLonG To was delivered online in October 2022.

5. Extension of Employee Assistance Programme to youth theatres

Youth Theatre Ireland had developed an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for its own staff in 2020 with Laya Healthcare. In 2022, this programme was extended to all adults involved in youth theatre. The EAP provides access to professional counselling. It can also help with a wide range of practical day to day issues, providing individuals with access to a wider team of experts in a variety of fields including financial advisors, legal professionals, career counsellors and more. The service is accessible 24/7, 365 days a year.

6. Development of Regional Hubs - June 2022 - Ongoing

From early on in the conversations with youth theatres, it became apparent that many groups were experiencing similar issues but felt like they were tackling them in isolation. The pandemic exacerbated this sense of working alone. Initiatives to bring people together and create a sense of community were essential. The pressures on the time of the adults involved in youth theatre meant that any initiatives would need to consider how to do this effectively and efficiently. The sense was that regional and local worked best. A call went out to all youth theatres to attend an introductory session on the development of Regional Hubs. 26 youth theatre leaders from 21 youth theatres attended. **Full notes from the session are included in Appendix 5.**

Four Regional Hubs (East, South, West and North) have been created with membership allocated according to geographical proximity of youth theatres and other factors, including existing connections and relationships.

The youth theatre community is rich in expertise and knowledge. One of the characteristics of youth theatre in Ireland is a generosity and willingness to share. The Hubs offer a mechanism for plugging into the vast creativity of the community to increase everyone's capacity.

Moreover, the Hubs can have an ongoing impact on leaders'/facilitators' wellbeing. Being an adult working in youth theatre is not easy. Their work and contribution isn't always valued as it deserves to be. There is a resilience and strength in community and leaning on each other a bit more. The Hubs can foster closer relationships between individuals and groups. Moreover, they can provide facilitators and leaders with a space for reflection and self-care; a space where they can reflect on their work and their own growth.

An invitation has been extended to all adults involved in youth theatre (paid facilitators, committee members and other volunteers) to get involved. Youth theatre members will benefit directly from the Hubs through participation in events and activities and, in so doing, will get a sense of belonging to the larger youth theatre community.

The Hubs also provide an opportunity to address issues such as the identified need for relief facilitators. For Youth Theatre Ireland, they can provide a focus for training and tailoring customised responses to the needs of youth theatres in a particular region.

Youth Theatre Ireland staff and the Wellbeing Officer discussed a number of developments that would support the initiation of the Hubs including the extension of the GO SEE YT fund that supports youth theatres attending performances of each others' work. Additionally, it was decided to allocate a fund for each Hub to hold an initial activity/event for each region.

Initial meetings have taken place of all four Hubs and each Hub has either had an initial activity or will be organising one over the next while. For example leaders from the East Hub region travelled to Newbridge for a day of conversations and networking hosted by Kildare Youth Theatre. On completion of the contract of the Wellbeing Officer, the Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer became the point of contact in Youth Theatre Ireland for the Hubs.

7. Mindfulness Session for Leaders at National Festival of Youth Theatres, July 2022

Máire O'Higgins is a Youth Theatre Ireland Board Member and Assistant Secondary School Principal. In addition she is a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction – MBSR – Educator who trained with the Institute for Mindfulness Based Approaches. At the National Festival, she led a 90-minute wellbeing and creative engagement training workshop for youth theatre leaders, to help them to develop and strengthen their capacity for leadership, through the practice of key skills in stillness, mindful movement, and mindful inquiry. The feedback was very positive and leaders who attended voiced their desire for similar sessions in the future. 24 youth theatre leaders/facilitators attended this session.

8. Articles for Youth Theatre Ireland Magazine 2021

The edition of the *Youth Theatre Ireland* magazine covering 2021 includes a number of Wellbeing related articles. Included is a piece describing recent research into the teenage brain which indicates the importance of positive creative experiences, such as those provided by youth theatre, at this crucial time in the development of the human being.

Jo Quinn, wellness practitioner and youth theatre facilitator, has created an article advising youth theatres on practical approaches to enhancing the youth theatre space so that young people have an even stronger sense of ownership and safety.

9. National and Local Signposting Resources for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

A collection of Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Signposting Resources were created. One of these resources includes a listing of national support organisations (**see Appendix 6**). 26 individual county resources were developed listing regional and local support organisations and will be available soon.

The Wellbeing Officer became aware early on in the evolution of the resources that such a comprehensive listing of supports does not exist elsewhere. While there are sources of information including listings of mental health supports for some counties, this Youth Theatre Ireland initiative is unique in its scope and its sole focus on youth mental health. As a result, the organisation has taken the decision to make these resources open access so individuals and groups beyond the organisation's own membership can benefit from them.

Since the national resource was launched, Youth Theatre Ireland received an email from the Principal Clinical Psychologist, General Paediatrics Children's Health Ireland (CHI) at Connolly Hospital stating:

I just wanted to pass on a thank you for the amazing resource your organisation has put together on mental health supports. It is excellent – comprehensive, user friendly, clear and engaging. I work with children and young people from a number of geographical areas and it is an ongoing challenge to locate services for young people and their families. And given how challenging it is for me, as a professional navigating these services, it is even more challenging for parents and young people.

The support of Creative Ireland has allowed YTI to create an innovative programme with an impact beyond the youth theatre community. The fact that it was Youth Theatre Ireland that took the initiative to develop these resources pays testament to the organisation's commitment to young people's wellbeing but, moreover, speaks to Youth Theatre Ireland's role as an organisation which offers national leadership in this respect.

10. BeLonG To Training - 11th October 2022

BeLonG To delivered online training to a group of youth theatre leaders and Youth Theatre Ireland staff members. BeLonG To Youth Services is the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland. The session offered participants the following learning:

- Know the challenges faced by LGBTI+ people in Ireland
- Develop confidence in responding appropriately if a friend, family member, colleague or young person comes out to them.
- Understand language and terminology relating to sexuality and gender identity.
- Know the necessary steps to take to make their space more inclusive for LGBT+ people.

Time was also given to questions which allowed exploration of some of the more specific aspects of working with LGBT+ young people in a youth theatre context.

17 youth theatre leaders and Youth Theatre Ireland staff participated. The session was recorded and disseminated to a number of youth theatres who requested access and it will continue to be available. A workshop session *Youth Theatre – A place you Belong To!* was facilitated by Barry McSkeane, National Network Coordinator for Belong To and Youth Theatre Ireland Board member, at the 2022 Youth Theatre Practice Symposium entitled *Supporting Inclusion In Youth Theatre* which took place in UCC in November.

11. Collaboration with Creative Brain Week

The Wellbeing Officer attended the inaugural Creative Brain Week in March 2022. The initiative is a collaboration between Trinity College, the Global Brain Health Initiative and Creative Aging International. The event was an *exploration of how brain science and creativity collide to seed new ideas in social development, technology, entrepreneurship, culture, wellbeing, and physical, mental and brain health across the life cycle*. Featured were some of the world's leading experts on neuroscience and creativity.

It was apparent there were many points of intersection between the programme content and the work of Irish youth theatre. Youth theatre consciously and purposefully cultivates creativity at an important stage in the evolution of the human being. Over the last 40 years, youth theatre in this country has helped produce a significant population of creative thinkers who are enriching a wide range of fields from the arts to business to politics to the nonprofit sector.



CreativeBrainWeek @Crea... · 07 Mar

We are so happy that @youththeatreirl are working with the attendees of creativebrainweek.com as part of the Living Labs programme. Great energy. [#differentwaysoflearning](#) [#BringYourBrain](#) @GBHI_Fellows @tcddublin @atlanticfellows @CreativeAgeIntl @creativeirl @WHO @j_artshealthlab



YouthTheatreIreland @... · 07 Mar

Dave and Katie were at @CreativeBrainWk at @tcddublin today delivering workshops and meeting like-minded people. [#creativebrainweek](#)



Youth Theatre Ireland delivered two workshops during the Creative Brain Week event in March 2023 as part of the Living Labs strand of the programme. A presence at an event of this nature makes a strong statement on the impact the organisation, and the youth theatre community, has had on the lives of many individuals but also its contribution to wider society, especially at a time when creativity is increasingly being seen as an essential trait in the 21st century.

Conversations on future input and collaborations are planned with the organisers of the event.

Ongoing and Future Plans

The response to some of the requested supports and actions, originating from the needs assessment and other activities of the programme, are still in progress, for example, a relief panel of facilitators and support with the development of committees and boards. Both have been discussed and are being addressed within the scope of the Regional Hubs. Recognition of the value of the role of youth theatre leaders/facilitators is hugely important. Youth Theatre Ireland will seek opportunities to promote an increased understanding and appreciation of this role. The identification of solutions to some of the issues raised by the Youth Board around supporting young people with difficult and triggering content/roles is also underway.

Learning and Conclusion

Learning from the Wellbeing Programme has been significant. Wellbeing has become more embedded in the organisation. There has been an expansion of thinking for Youth Theatre Ireland. While the additional staff resources were only short-term, the Wellbeing Programme has resulted in an increased appreciation of the necessity of nurturing the wellbeing of the youth

theatre community and provided effective tools and approaches for future use. The change of title of a core staff member to Child Protection and Wellbeing Officer is one concrete illustration of a renewed and more defined commitment. In programme planning the organisation will be mindful of creating space for self-care and reflection. This has already been shown by the inclusion of a mindfulness session at the National Festival of Youth Theatres.

Youth Theatre Ireland will continue to support the evolution of the Regional Hubs. They can provide a focus for Youth Theatre Ireland's support for existing youth theatre, in addition, they can provide a path for the future growth of the organisation. For many years, Youth Theatre Ireland has had the desire to increase capacity for developing and promoting youth theatre on a regional level through the existence of Regional Development Officers. The Hubs provide the organisation with fresh impetus and can help it establish a rationale and initial framework.

Youth Theatre Ireland has employed a Child Protection and Welfare Officer for many years. The person in this role has taken a lead on all matters child protection related and also been a key individual in all matters related to the wellbeing of youth theatre members and the young people who participate directly on Youth Theatre Ireland's programmes. The change of title is reflective of a change in emphasis in the role. The move from 'Welfare' to 'Wellbeing' signals a more positive approach to the wellbeing of young people involved in youth theatre but also an ongoing commitment to supporting the wellbeing of youth theatre leaders and facilitators. Rather than having a focus on supporting young people and adults with issues and challenges, there will be a greater emphasis on promoting positive mental health and wellness.

The Wellbeing programme allowed a deeper engagement with the youth theatre community than otherwise would have been possible. The one-to-one and small group conversations, facilitated by the Wellbeing Officer, proved valuable in many respects allowing an open and honest discussion of needs, an acknowledgement of the huge challenges and the toll taken by the pandemic and it brought to light the necessity and benefit of a listening ear and re-connection.

The programme has led to an increased awareness of the expertise within the sector. The consultations, while revealing the challenges experienced by youth theatres over the last few years, also shone a light on the problem-solving ability and resourcefulness of those who make youth theatre happen around the country. There is immense knowledge and experience among the youth theatre community. One of the motivations to create Regional Hubs was the desirability of harnessing these abilities and providing a mechanism for sharing them for the benefit of the wider sector. The Hubs have real potential to strengthen the capacity of the sector in many respects.

Youth Theatre Ireland is a busy, dynamic organisation with a broad work programme and limited staff resources. The Wellbeing Programme and the appointment of a Wellbeing Officer, be it on a short-term contract, has illustrated the value of bringing in external individuals who can focus solely on one element of the organisation's work. Such an opportunity can facilitate the creation of a space for reflection on the bigger picture in relation to a particular aspect of

YTI's practice. New opportunities can be identified that may otherwise have been missed, as illustrated by the collaboration with Creative Brain week.

Importantly, the organisation, and wider youth theatre community, has had an opportunity to acknowledge and name its own good practice in relation to young people's wellbeing. Youth theatre is a complex entity that evades easy description which can impact confidence and clarity when promoting it. Placing it within a wellbeing context, augments understanding and may be useful in delivering the sector's message to the wider world. Plugging into a wider narrative on creativity may also facilitate a greater recognition and appreciation of youth theatre. As a result, the investment by Creative Ireland has positively impacted the organisation's ability and capacity to promote its work.

Participation and Public Engagement Outcomes

Participant Engagement

The investment by Creative Ireland in Youth Theatre Ireland was substantial in terms of its reach. The funding provided had an impact across the country from Donegal to Kerry, from Dublin to Mayo.

In terms of participation, the full impact is difficult to assess at this moment in time. Some initiatives are still at an early stage in their evolution. For example, the work being undertaken to increase the participation of marginalised young people is in its early days so it is difficult to assess how many young people will be impacted. The nature of this work means that it is preferable to keep group numbers small so that each participant gets the support they require. YTI intends that the experience of building relationships and delivering programmes for underserved communities of young people, that grew from the investment, will result in more initiatives in the future. The organisation is committed to creating an environment which will be conducive to a significant increase in participation by young people who have not been accessing youth theatre.

As a result of the investment, more young people are participating in youth theatre. This growth in access is not only attributable to the existence of new youth theatres but to other initiatives such as the National Recruitment Campaign and youth theatre participation in Cruinniú na nÓg. Youth theatre membership has continued to increase into 2023 rising from 2426 in 2022 to 2720 according to statistics gathered recently. While the number of young people currently participating in the youth theatres established under the investment are relatively small as is usually the case for new youth theatres, these groups are likely to exist well into the future offering the opportunity for many young people in their localities to benefit from youth theatre.

The establishment and early development of a youth theatre to the point where they can affiliate to YTI is frequently a slow process. The organisation is very optimistic that the groundwork undertaken over the period of the investment will result in more youth theatres. The resourcing allowed YTI to reach new potential partners and stakeholders. Some of these relationships have already proved productive in expanding youth theatre provision. Others will take time to nurture and develop before they yield solid outcomes.

New initiatives that were impacted by the investment, such as the collaboration with Ealaín na Gaeltachta, are likely to result in significant growth in youth theatre provision and more young people accessing quality youth theatre experiences. Ongoing work in Mayo, Kerry, and several regions in Dublin make it likely that there will be growth in the number of youth theatres affiliated to Youth Theatre Ireland over the next year.

Youth Theatre Ireland is very pleased with the level of engagement by existing affiliated youth theatres with initiatives that grew from the Creative Ireland resourcing. From the current membership of 57 youth theatres, 48 engaged with at least one element of the programme. The youth theatre community has been strengthened by the investment. The funding provided under

the COVID Grants and Youth Theatre Costs Grant was important in ensuring groups could meet their costs and continue to deliver quality programmes for members during a very challenging time. The support provided by the Wellbeing programme helped sustain youth theatre leaders and facilitators with its impact continuing to be felt through initiatives such as the Regional Hubs and the Youth Mental Health Resources.

Participation Numbers

Below are details of participation numbers as they relate to various aspects of the investment:

Youth Theatre Development

Number of young people currently accessing new youth theatres developed under the investment: 118

Drama Facilitation Training Course

Graduates: 37

Current Trainees: 23

Seed Funding

No of youth theatres in receipt of Youth Theatre Cost of Living Grant and Bursary Support Grant: 42

Membership of these youth theatres: 2120 young people

COVID Grants

No of youth theatres who received grants: 24

Membership of these youth theatres: 1607 young people

Wellbeing Programme

Number of youth theatres participated: 36

Membership of these youth theatres: 1895

Youth theatre leaders/facilitators impacted: 220

Public Engagement

The investment by Creative Ireland created new opportunities for Youth Theatre Ireland to promote its work and engage with new audiences. The local emphasis of youth theatre

development work has been conducive to increased awareness and understanding of youth theatre in a number of areas around the country.

The collaboration between Youth Theatre Ireland and Creative Brain Week grew out of the Wellbeing Programme. This engagement is allowing the organisation to plug into a wider narrative and advocate for youth theatre as a nurturing space for the development of creativity that benefits wider society.

Having the capacity to embrace opportunities to amplify key messages about the positive impact of youth theatre is important. It is vital the organisation continues to reach new audiences, potential partners and collaborators not only to raise the profile of youth theatre in this country but also to build greater recognition of the value of the work. This recognition is key to strengthening the case for a level of investment in youth theatre that will facilitate access for substantially more young people to the many benefits of participation.

The screenshot shows the Mayo County Council website. At the top is a dark navigation bar with the Mayo logo and links for 'VISIT MAYO', 'INVEST IN MAYO', 'LIVING IN MAYO', and 'YOUR COUNCIL'. On the left is a sidebar menu with links to various services: 'Decade of Centenaries Writer in Residence', 'Arts Act Grants', 'Mayo Artist Bursary', 'Culture Night Event Fund', 'National Mentoring Programme', 'Tyrone Guthrie Regional Bursary', 'SPEAK Ireland' (highlighted with a red button), and 'Upstart Awards'. The main content area features the title 'Youth Theatre Ireland Drama Facilitation Training Course 2022-2023 Bursary'. Below the title, it states 'Applications are now open for Youth Theatre Ireland Drama Facilitation Training Course 2022-2023.' and provides details: 'This is a QQI accredited Course, beginning September 2022 which is aimed at people working in the arts/people working with young people/people looking to learn more about leadership and how to engage others in the creative process.' A link for 'Course Information and Application' is provided. At the bottom, it mentions a free taster workshop on 29th of June from 4:30 in The Lab, Dublin. On the right side of the page, there is a vertical 'Popular Services' widget with a gear icon and an upward arrow.

Image taken from Mayo County Council website

Below are details of some of the online and social media output in relation to various aspects of the investment:

31 March 2021, Article on Fun House Youth Theatre

<https://www.offalyexpress.ie/news/home/621151/offaly-duo-s-youth-theatre-dream-set-to-become-reality.html>

13 February 2020: Barry Morgan, Youth Theatre Ireland's Special Projects Officer spoke on Midlands Radio 103.

Barry spoke about the Creative Ireland investment and its support for the development of youth theatre provision in the Midlands. He promoted the upcoming taster workshops in Offaly and Westmeath.

10 November 2021, Drogheda Life – National Recruitment Campaign

<https://droghedalife.com/news/youth-theatre-ireland-launch-national-recruitment-campaign>

05 January 2023, Article in Killarney Advertiser announcing fund for youth theatre development:

<https://killarneyadvertiser.ie/news/youth-theatre-grant-scheme-open-for-applications/>

04 May 2022, Social Media Post on Tralee Town and Country Facebook Page: Youth Theatre Ireland Comes to Kerry

<https://www.facebook.com/traleetownandcountry/photos/a.114299563349979/719572039489392/?type=3>

11 May 2022, Call for participants for information and taster sessions in Mayo

<https://www.mayo.ie/en-ie/news/youth-theatre-%E2%80%93-workshop-opportunities>

Announcement of Bursary opportunity for Drama Facilitation Training Course

<https://www.mayo.ie/en-ie/your-council/services/arts/arts-funding-opportunities/youth-theatre-ireland-drama-facilitation-training>

05 March 2022, Youth Theatre Ireland Celebrates New Graduates at a Ceremony in Dublin

<https://dublingazette.com/dublinlocalmatters/news/youth-theatre-ireland-56423/>

March 2023: Youth Theatre Ireland included on programme for Creative Brain Week

<https://creativebrainweek.com/event/wednesday-8th-march-theme-of-day-imagination/>

Youth Theatre Ireland's Website and Newsletter

A number of articles appeared in Youth Theatre Ireland's own e-Newsletter *Intermission* linking to the news item on the organisation's website. *Intermission* has a circulation of approximately 1,600 recipients which includes youth theatres and other stakeholders, funders, arts and theatre organisations and any member of the general public who signs up to receive it. The newsletter has a 30% open rate which means approximately 500 people read the content each month.

The articles relating to the Creative Ireland investment include:

July 2022: Youth Theatre Regional Support Hubs Meeting

May 2022: Kerry Information Session

March 2022: (Re)Creating our Space - How are youth theatre members doing?

February 2022: Congratulations to our QQI Graduates
January 2022: Connect with Youth Theatre Ireland's Wellbeing Programme
October 2021: National Recruitment Campaign
September 2021: COVID Re-Opening and Project Grants
August 2021: QQI Accredited Drama Facilitation and Leadership 2021 / 2022 - Applications Open
July 2020: Youth Theatre Ireland Announces Two Supporting Grants
September 2019: Barry Morgan Joins Youth Theatre Ireland Team

Youth Theatre Ireland's Social Media

Social Media posts were created to promote and celebrate various elements of the investment. Youth Theatre Ireland has 5k followers on Facebook, over 2k on Twitter and 2.5k on Instagram. The average post reach on Facebook is 1,000 followers, 300 on Twitter and 600 on Instagram.

Posts include:

23 March 2023: Announcement of Financial Support for Breaking Barriers Youth Theatre

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/posts/pfbid0czNNDdDJpfcx8Cvaf2fJgRZeLn2uDjjiurjog5uqXTToThvANtDsEXLGPT3z9fiBigI>

16 February 2023: Mentors' Masterclasses for Drama Facilitation Training Course:

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/posts/pfbid02bjAGr4miykYFf3mTUjEePRH4X2SvMAVzfAucSzLBKxHiewExfSoKZDQSDkKLtnkcl>

31 January 2023: Alan King visits Fun House Youth Theatre

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/posts/pfbid02fYCfeGMZzw3CQX2NGtb9HWKxCCgw6yLdLwxY84ZYKZjjgmsjLPHWYM5SRsf8kqgwI>

8 December 2022: Announcement of Youth Theatre Cost of Living Supports

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cl6oSapRNYx>

22 September 2022: Training in West Cork in collaboration with Cork LCYP

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/posts/pfbid02V41aocEfuaUhQtwu2WiZbqWdjPvq7JHHasgD3jRJoTcEMMQUHj2VpzankN5dW1yDhI>

17 June 2022: Youth Theatre Development Workshops in Kerry

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/photos/a.135579287320/10158493831597321>

24 February 2022: Drama Facilitation Training Course Graduation

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10158326609117321&type=3>

09 September 2021: Call for applications 2021-2022 Drama Facilitation Training Course

<https://www.facebook.com/YouthTheatreIreland/photos/pb.100063681334331.-2207520000./10158062303527321/?type=3>

12 November 2021: Launch of National Recruitment Campaign

<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CWLzkyFFU9f>

Appendix 1: My Catalyst

Explore Youth Theatre member, **Aoife Murphy**, was invited to speak at *Back in the Room - A Youth Theatre Practice Symposium* in November 2021. Aoife shared her pandemic experience and the impact youth theatre participation had at that time in their life. Her speech is a testament to how youth theatre supports the wellbeing of young people and helps shape members' aspirations and sense of identity.

I am very honoured to be speaking to you today. My name is **Aoife Murphy** and I've been a member of Explore Youth Theatre in Leixlip, County Kildare for just under two years. Explore Youth Theatre is a non-profit organisation run by volunteers, whose members live all across north Kildare. Although two years in youth theatre is a relatively short period, quite honestly it feels a lot longer than that. With the help of Youth Theatre Ireland, I've gained so many new experiences and skills that have shaped who I am today for the better; and they have influenced my life greatly. If it wasn't for Youth Theatre Ireland and the amazing work they do, I would be a very different person and I doubt I would be here.

To give a background into my involvement in youth theatre; I joined in January 2020 which was two months before the pandemic started. I met one of the leaders of Explore, Orla Gildea, through her drama school and she encouraged me to join Explore. **Alan (King)** facilitated a few of our workshops before the pandemic and mentioned a programme run by Youth Theatre Ireland called 'Young Critics'. So, being a fresh face and eager to prove I was serious about working in theatre, I applied. And it was honestly the best decision I could have made. The Young Critics programme aims to develop young people's skills of criticism via workshops led by Alan King and Dr Karen Fricker. The skills are designed to equip us in analysing theatre performances. Of all the online performances I saw, my personal favourite was *To Be a Machine Version 1.0* by Dead Centre. Although the experience had to be modified to the limitations of Zoom, I made genuine connections with the people there and learning about how real critics examine a performance was very insightful. That summer, I also participated in the National Festival of Youth Theatres 2020. Again, it was re-invented for the online space, but I had a very fun time during the festival discovering the intricacies of puppetry and masks in theatre. And it was through this programme that I met a girl named Ali Murphy, who I am now studying with in the same college course.

My youth theatre was lucky enough to receive grants to fund a project called *Keeping Sketch*, which started in September of 2019. This project allowed the youth theatre members to create short films by having access to professional equipment. The purpose of this project was to show that young people are capable of creating quality productions if given the opportunity to do so. This project allowed me to appreciate every aspect involved in the process of filmmaking. The

sequel to this project, *Keeping Sketch The Specialists*, began this summer. I was the scriptwriter and main cast member for one of the films produced and it is one of my proudest achievements to date. The project allowed me to improve my writing skills, under the guidance of Barbara Bergin, as well as create something that means a lot to me. Additionally, I am currently receiving training from Youth Theatre Ireland and hope to achieve my QQI Level 6 in Drama Facilitation next year.

Of course, none of the things that I've just mentioned happened without its challenges. A large portion of my experiences occurred during the pandemic and in my Leaving Certificate years. Balancing the two was certainly not easy. But what made it possible for me, and so many other young people across the country, to achieve great things like these, through our troubling times, was the support we received. This support came in many forms. Our youth theatre and Youth Theatre Ireland of course, but also our friends, family, and local community. They encouraged us to take care of ourselves when it was so simple to slip into bad habits, which I'll admit I did fall into for a while. We were always reminded, just before our youth theatre classes ended, to go for a ten-minute walk for some fresh air, or to make ourselves a cup of tea. Simple supports like these are what helped us stay creative and fuel our passions. This is what motivated us to be great and do great. They are the reasons we stayed resilient.

Youth theatre has changed me so much and has shaped my life in a very interesting and surprising way. At the time I joined Explore Youth Theatre, my self-esteem and mental health were quite low. And I am so grateful that I found a group who accepted me for who I was without judgement. They provided a safe space for me to experiment and explore without fear of being mocked and helped build up my character as it is now, piece by piece. They encouraged me to trust myself more and be a lot more comfortable with who I am and, as a result, my confidence has increased a lot since then. Personally, youth theatre classes have always acted as my escape from the stresses of my everyday life and for two hours a week, allowed me to have space to breathe and relax.

I've made so many new friends by being involved in drama and theatre. Some are of course from my own youth theatre, but many of them are from various corners of Ireland. I never would have met these people by any other means and they've had such a positive impact on me, it's hard to imagine my life without them in it. I feel that the social connections forged are a very important feature of youth theatre which are often overlooked. It's different from other social situations, like school, because youth theatre classes give people the opportunity to fail and try again. While in schools, young people are always under pressure to constantly succeed and do well in their exams. I've found that because of these two juxtaposing environments, in general, it's far easier to make friends and build healthy, strong relationships within youth theatre. The social aspect of youth theatre also has a positive impact on increasing social cohesion within local areas and reducing social decay. Youth theatres provide young people with access to enriching experiences and a place to go that is designed specifically for them to gain new skills and capabilities.

My passion for the performing arts and theatre was sparked when I participated in my secondary school's musical production in 2018, however, I only ever considered acting as a path to pursue after I joined youth theatre. The skills I developed have helped me immensely in terms of acting and performing, from learning how to analyse a text correctly to understanding body language. This proved to be invaluable knowledge and I'm glad to say that because youth theatre helped me develop my artistic side, I'm currently in my first year of college at the Cork School of Music,

studying Theatre and Drama. If it wasn't for me taking a chance on trying out youth theatre, I never would have realised what I wanted to do with my life and, without Youth Theatre Ireland, I definitely wouldn't be doing the course I love right now.

Because of all of my positive experiences with Youth Theatre Ireland, even during a global pandemic, I couldn't be more optimistic and hopeful about the future of theatre. The last eighteen months have been extremely difficult for everyone, no question about it. So it is that much more impressive that theatres were able to pull themselves through this monumental moment in history and still continue to create, explore and dare. It would have been easier to cancel everything and for the whole world to stop. But I have seen first-hand, the incredible benefits that youth theatres have had on the young people of Ireland. People came together in a totally alien way and adapted to our unusual circumstances through fascinating means, going above and beyond for the service of young people. Lockdown was a terrible experience, I'm sure none of us wants to go through again, but quite honestly I don't believe I was as negatively affected as others. This is because each of my youth theatre leaders, Pete Butler, Tamara McCarthy and Orla Gildea, gave me an outlet and reduced the mental strain I was going through by organising small projects and ideas for our members. This kept us constantly innovating and being proactive, which made the time spent during lockdown almost fly by. This determination from Youth Theatre Ireland to help each and every member is inspiring and I've no doubt that this inspiration will continue to last the test of time.

Thank you.

Aoife Murphy

Appendix 2: Wellbeing Programme Report on Consultations with Youth Theatres

The majority of the people consulted were the lead youth theatre facilitator or artistic director. In some cases it was an assistant facilitator. In a small number of instances it was the youth theatre leader who is most active in the youth theatre. In one case it was paid staff members; one whose main function is overall management and another whose role is programme management for the youth theatre. For some youth theatres more than one adult participated in the conversations but all fell into the above categories. The term 'participant/participants' is used unless specifically referring to a role in which case 'facilitator', 'leader' is used.

Observations from the pandemic experience

The pandemic was a steep learning curve for youth theatres. They found they had to adapt very quickly and engage with platforms and technologies with which they were largely unfamiliar. The vast majority of the youth theatres who engaged in the conversations did provide some level of online activities for their members. A very small number of groups found it didn't work for them because either the young people weren't on for engaging online or they felt they lacked the expertise to run online sessions. There is definitely some guilt felt by these groups as they feel they could have done more.

Many youth theatres believe that the most important function they served during the pandemic was as a source of connection for their members; the main priority of their online interactions were checking in to see how young people were doing. Youth theatre became more focused on the members' wellbeing than youth theatre practice. In terms of the nature of the online activities, a wide range were undertaken from more traditional drama activities to film to creative writing to projects about their locality/community to social activities such as bingo, karaoke or film nights. A few facilitators mentioned they found activities, other than drama-related ones such as creative writing, more conducive to the online space. Some groups managed to deliver projects or online performances. Other groups organised guest facilitators. A small number of youth theatres did outdoor workshops and activities and/or outdoor performances such as street theatre. Some groups felt this had enhanced their visibility locally.

There is a strong sense that online work became more difficult as the pandemic went on, especially when school went online. Members were less likely to engage and some parents felt young people were spending enough time in their rooms on devices.

It is interesting to note that some participants felt that facilitating from their own home, while members were in theirs, broke down barriers and brought the group closer. A couple of participants spoke about an increase in mutual respect between youth theatre members and the adults involved. Others spoke of the high level of appreciation and gratitude young people felt for youth theatre continuing. Parents also vocalised their appreciation and recognised the

importance of youth theatre at that time in their young person's life. In some respects online youth theatre had positive outcomes. Participants spoke of an increased sense of community and belonging that grew out of living through a difficult experience together. Others stated that it solidified some young people's involvement. A few facilitators also spoke about how the nature of communication and facilitation through online platforms meant that everyone's voice was heard and this allowed quieter members to have more input. Several facilitators spoke of being more attuned to the growth of individual youth theatre members.

On the flip side, it is felt that it was harder to engage new members when youth theatre was online. It was challenging to give them a sense of what youth theatre is and develop engagement and connection with other members and facilitators. The consensus is that most online work involved a relatively small core group of members and engaging/re-engaging other young people beyond this cohort was very difficult. This was not the case for every youth theatre. A small number found their numbers either consistent or grew.

One youth theatre facilitator mentioned that young people were a bit intimidated by the standard of online work being disseminated that appeared very polished. They felt their own work didn't meet this 'standard' and were disillusioned.

Several youth theatres believe they have better relationships with parents after the pandemic as a result of more frequent communication and, perhaps, a greater appreciation of the role of youth theatre for their young people. Some groups felt that there was more open dialogue around the specific needs of certain young people, particularly those who were experiencing challenges.

Several youth theatres mentioned they found Youth Theatre Ireland very supportive over the pandemic. The Covid Relief grants were very welcome. Youth Theatre Tuesdays were an important source of connection and support, being described as a 'lifeline'. A few participants mentioned they found information conveyed by video especially useful. Despite some fatigue with online activity, there is a sense that continuing to connect in similar formats would be desirable into the future.

For some youth theatres, the pandemic allowed them to re-assess their activities and in a few cases this has led to consolidating groups and choosing less activities with bigger groups.

Quite a few youth theatres are eager to continue exploring the possibilities of some of the tools and approaches they utilised during the pandemic including film, video, creative writing and the opportunities afforded by online connectivity.

Observations on youth theatre members

The general consensus is that the majority of youth theatre members are doing ok. They are very happy to be back in the physical youth theatre space. Facilitators said they have been told it is the highlight of a young person's week and they spoke about the resilience and adaptability

of young people. Youth theatre seems to be an escape for young people from other aspects of their lives including school and the pandemic. There is a strong sense that, at this moment in time, members are eager to have fun and not go too deeply into more difficult topics, especially the pandemic. Facilitators are mindful of this as they begin to look at scripts and think about performances in 2022. Some mentioned they don't feel the young people will be ready to return to full productions for a while.

However, there are youth theatre members who haven't returned and/or disengaged over the pandemic period. Many people commented on the fall in numbers (in the region of 25% - 50% loss of membership) which is pretty much across the board. Some of this loss of membership is due to natural cycles - where young people are moving into exam years or have left to go to college. Due to the fragmented nature of youth theatre over the last two years, it is difficult to get a sense of the reasons for this fall off for all young people. Some youth theatres have been told that young people will return when it feels safer to be in the physical space. The lack of consistency in showing up for workshops is also an issue. Again this could be for a myriad of reasons including Covid in the household or just that it is a darker and colder time of year. It is interesting that some youth theatre facilitators feel they are only getting to know the members now who joined over the last two years, while others felt they got to know young people better as a result of engaging over the pandemic.

Reports on engagement with youth work over the pandemic have indicated that, in many cases, it is the more marginalised young people, most in need of support, who have disengaged. While there is no specific evidence reference to this in the conversations, it is worth keeping in mind.

Facilitators also spoke about challenges relating to the fact they have a lot of members who are unfamiliar with workshoping in the physical space - how it is like having a group that is mostly made up of new members and how this changes the dynamic of the group. This is a challenge as some members, who have been around longer, are very ready for performance while the newer members don't have a lot of the basic theatre skills required. Some youth theatre facilitators mentioned that either young people have really felt the loss of the live audience for their work or they themselves feel this was a considerable loss for young people. Productions provide young people with opportunities to become aware of the skills they have developed and to experience their application. They are also valuable confidence-building experiences. The sense of achievement and recognition by their community wasn't as present. It was also mentioned that young people have missed out on attending live theatre experiences themselves and it is felt this is an important part of their development.

A number of youth theatres do feel that there is an increase in anxiety among a minority or (in some cases) a significant percentage of youth theatre members. There is a sense that, while the pandemic has exacerbated this anxiety, it has been on the increase for a period of time before Covid. Facilitators spoke of the challenge of encouraging young people to be fully present and in their bodies. Quite a few facilitators commented that they find that young people

need very specific instructions and it is harder to bring a group to a place where they are happy to play and take risks. Ensemble-building has also become more challenging. Many of the exercises and approaches that help create a sense of ensemble involve physical touch and close proximity. It is felt that the physical restrictions around Covid have added to this need for safety and to remain within a particular comfort zone. A couple of participants mentioned they feel some young people are very protected by parents and this could be a factor in their resistance to play and take even 'safe' risks. There is a feeling this may be exacerbated by the pandemic.

Gender identity is one aspect of young people's lived experience that a number of youth theatres feel they need support with. By and large, young people are more comfortable with new terminology around gender and self-declarations of preferred pronouns than adults who grew up in a world where gender was discussed in binary terms. As ever, there are youth theatres who have taken this in their stride while others are concerned about saying the wrong thing or unintentionally disrespecting a young person's identity.

It is fair to say that there has been a sense, over the last decade or so, that young people's life experience is changing, particularly due to the impact of social media, the quicker pace of day to day life, greater awareness of global issues and the proliferation of so many sources of information. There has been a lot written about how young people will need a wide and varied skill set and a deep resourcefulness to thrive into the future. There is definitely an awareness of this among participants in the conversations who are mindful of the necessity of youth theatre being equipped to support young people in this respect. A small number of youth theatres talked about observing a lack of empathy in some young people and are finding it more difficult to cultivate a sense of appreciating other people's experience.

A number of youth theatres mentioned they are aware their groups are not completely representative of the young people in their catchment area. Some youth theatres have taken action on this but for some smaller youth theatres with less resources, expanding their recruitment process and targeting specific groups of young people has not been something they feel they have the time or capacity to achieve. A few youth theatres mentioned they would particularly like to see more young people with physical disabilities participating in youth theatre.

Another concern some participants spoke about is body image. They have a sense this is a source of struggle for young people. It was felt their perception of body image and standards around it are being particularly influenced by social media.

One other area where some participants felt support would be welcome is advising young people who are looking to them for guidance on pursuing a career in theatre.

Youth Theatre and Youth Theatre Facilitators/Leaders

After talking to participants, it is evident the pandemic has taken its toll. Like many, they found themselves in a situation where they had to redefine their relationship to their work while also grappling with issues around childcare and schooling, concern about family members who are vulnerable to Covid and the general sense of uncertainty. It is a testament to their commitment, resourcefulness and adaptability that young people continued to benefit from participation in youth theatre during the pandemic. Participants spoke of feeling as if they have been 'treading water' and that the 'youth theatre had just about been holding it together' during the pandemic. While some conversation participants are still enthused and energised, many are tired, feel depleted or indeed burnt out. There is undoubtedly a sense that people have felt they have been working in isolation.

While many lost work and income as a result, a few spoke of how they earned more as a result of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment. There is a strong sense that there is a lack of recognition around the work that drama facilitators do and this is a contributing factor to low morale. The low income nature of the work is an indicator of the value in which it is held but also there is a lack of recognition of the professional nature of the role. A large majority of facilitators have trained in theatre at third level, committed to it as a career and are actively pursuing their ongoing professional development. Yet many believe there is an expectation that it should be quasi-voluntary and a general perception that they are "doing a bit of drama with the kids because they love it and aren't they great." Some facilitators feel reluctant to take their full fee, especially when the youth theatre is under financial strain, while others had questions around whether to charge a full fee if a production will not be happening in 2022. It is not an exaggeration to say that few, if any, youth theatre facilitators receive a payment that reflects the time and commitment they give to youth theatre. For facilitators reaching the end of their career there are concerns around continuing income and pension.

Some facilitators spoke of a loss of confidence relating to their work. The consensus is that online facilitation was very difficult. It involved a significant stretch in a facilitator's skills set and the demands of constantly having to reinvent exercises and approaches took a lot of imagination and energy. There were a minority who relished the challenge and the resulting discoveries but for most it was hard work and they questioned their ability to deliver a quality experience for their members. The isolation resulting from the pandemic meant opportunities to engage with peers to share ideas and experiences were limited. There is an eagerness to re-engage with in-person training.

Their genuine care and generosity towards their members is very evident and the pandemic highlighted it to a great degree. They are constantly responding to their members' needs and it could be argued that this 'responsiveness' is the most crucial, but also most demanding, aspect of being a youth theatre leader/facilitator. It goes beyond reacting to the group's needs in relation to the work - to adapt the practice to where they are at any given time - but also to reacting to where young people are in their lives; both collective challenges and sometimes

individual struggles. It involves high levels of both alertness and energy. A small number of facilitators mentioned being unsure whether they can continue to access this capacity and the high energy required to deliver youth theatre workshops.

However, several commented that it is the time spent with young people in the workshop space that they find most sustaining and rejuvenating. Many spoke of how they feel they are constantly learning from young people and how young people give them energy. Others spoke of how young people are a source of hope.

One particular challenge faced by a number of participants is the lack of support available to them from within the youth theatre. In some cases this also impacts the most active leaders who are carrying out the majority of the youth theatre work. There is undoubtedly an issue with some committees/boards and how they are functioning. A number of groups stated that they have lost volunteers over the pandemic. Due to the nature of the last two years, volunteers and committee members haven't got to experience youth theatre events and activities, in particular performances. A number of groups mentioned that they don't feel committee members have got to experience the 'magic' of youth theatre and this has had an impact on commitment and understanding. Some participants mentioned they feel people in general were reflecting on how they prioritise their time after lockdown and they believe this was having a negative effect on volunteer commitment. For the vast majority of youth theatres the weight of running the group is falling on a small number of people. There are ongoing issues for a number of groups with volunteers accessing child protection training and other Youth Theatre Ireland supports/opportunities as many adults have so little time availability.

Some participants mentioned they have stayed on with the youth theatre longer than intended because there is no one to replace them currently. There is also a sense, as voiced by a few facilitators, that there is a lack of appreciation and understanding by the committee of their role and expertise. For example, sometimes facilitators don't feel they are being listened to when it comes to deciding the most appropriate age for youth theatre membership or feel their expertise is in question when it comes to planning a programme. A number of facilitators spoke about being either out of contract or having a rolling contract that hasn't been reviewed in a long time. Issues around support were not raised as a concern for many of the better resourced youth theatres, particularly those that exist within parent organisations or have well developed structures and paid staff. Although, where youth theatres are venue-based, in some instances issues exist around a shared vision, division of responsibility and understanding of youth theatre practice.

On a positive note, most youth theatres do have some division of tasks and shared responsibility though most groups would welcome more adult volunteer involvement. A number of youth theatres have a set-up involving a few committed key individuals and it is working well. However, even where it is working well, there is an awareness that if one of these individuals move on, it would be difficult to replace them. Several participants spoke about the onerous nature of administration and meeting standards and regulations. These requirements have

undoubtedly increased the level of time commitment required and it is rare that youth theatre leaders/facilitators are paid for this work in full, if at all. The volume of paperwork increased when the physical space began to open. They also sometimes feel they are being inundated with emails from various sources. Increased regulatory and administrative requirements are a factor where individuals are feeling depleted and burnt out.

Many youth theatre facilitators are mentoring young leaders/facilitators. While they really value having young people who are committed to the future of the youth theatre, it also involves time and energy and requires a very extended skill-set. Youth theatre facilitators who feel they are coming to the end of their time with a youth theatre expressed a willingness to mentor a replacement facilitator.

A number of facilitators mentioned the challenge of maintaining a fresh and engaging youth theatre programme. For obvious reasons, programming was challenging during Covid. The physical restrictions have also limited the choices for games, approaches, exercises. There is a wider sense of it being an ongoing challenge, especially for facilitators who have been working in the sector for a long time. Opportunities for training, engaging with new ideas and other practitioners have been a loss over Covid. A few facilitators mentioned that sourcing and reading scripts is time-consuming and an element of the work they struggle to fit in. Some youth theatre facilitators mentioned that challenges around delivering productions are impacting the youth theatre workshop programme. In some cases the choice of production informs the programme quite directly in that it provides focus and enrichment.

Quite a number of youth theatres have had issues with securing a venue since the return to the physical space began. This has been a particular issue for those who had been using theatre venues. There is a concern that youth theatres won't be able to return to these venues and may have to relocate to less centrally located workshop spaces.

Participants weren't especially concerned about the youth theatre's financial position at present though the challenge of project based funding is a constant issue. However, the loss of members poses a threat to youth theatres in a financial respect. This is obviously a bigger issue for youth theatres who are more reliant on membership fees. A few groups spoke about the possibility of having to raise membership fees, though all are reluctant to do so.

A few groups mentioned they would like to foster a stronger relationship with parents. Some have felt the benefits of this as a result of the pandemic experience and would like to further develop these links.

Youth theatres don't tend to be in contact with other youth theatre groups in their area. While a few have contacts and connections with other facilitators through Youth Theatre Ireland events and training, it doesn't appear there was much interaction between youth theatres during the pandemic or since the physical re-opening began. An exception to this was Youth Theatre Tuesdays, online gatherings organised by Youth Theatre Ireland, where many participants did feel a sense of connection. A few groups mentioned they would be happy to share the resources they have with other youth theatres but don't know how to go about it. The South East Network of Youth Theatres has been active from the beginning of the return to the physical

space in 2020 and those involved, who participated in the conversations, have found it a valuable source of connection for both themselves and for the young people who have participated in activities.

A few participants spoke about how they would value more events and activities organised for them, particularly those that involve space for recharging, reflection, growth and connection. Participants spoke of how they feel self-care practices such as yoga and meditation would be beneficial in maintaining their energy and ability to continue to do the work. Where participants are already using these practices they have found them helpful.

Suggestions for support

When asked what they would like from the Wellbeing Programme and other suggestions for how they can best be supported at present, participants came up with a broad range of suggestions including:

- Access to a relief panel of youth drama facilitators who would be available at relatively short notice. It was stated by a number of facilitators that it would be very beneficial if they felt they could have a break or could call on another facilitator when they are stretched. It is also believed this would be a good way of increasing the variety of the programme and enriching the experience for young people. Some facilitators also spoke of the benefits of being able to access facilitators who had expertise other than their own to bring into the workshop programme, maybe for a series of workshops.
- Communicating information by Whats App for other messaging platforms was suggested as an alternative to email.
- A couple of facilitators mentioned the Playshare showcase model could provide a useful focus for lighter touch performance opportunities for youth theatres where they don't feel they can deliver a full production this year.
- Suggestions for strengthening committee/volunteer involvement included training and/or induction packs for committee members.
- Look at pathways and structures for senior youth theatre members becoming leaders/facilitators.
- Training in different aspects of administration and funding was suggested as a way of helping with the burden of paperwork.
- In terms of strengthening relationships with parents, suggestions included a guide to holding an information session for parents that could also feature videos created by Youth Theatre Ireland.
- A suggestion in terms of increasing inclusion was to look at approaches that are working for youth theatres who are achieving better representation.
- It is felt a workshop for members focused on coming back together and creating a sense of community and purpose would be useful.
- Some participants had suggestions for venues they feel would be conducive to reflection, recharging and growth.

- There was a large consensus that connecting locally and regionally, both for leaders and young people, would be hugely beneficial and would help ease the sense of isolation. It was felt in some ways local connection is almost preferable to national as more young people can get involved if events and collaborations take place. Other ideas for local collaborations included opportunities for skills sharing and facilitator swaps or inter-youth theatre mentoring and a Whats App group where facilitators could ask for suggestions or get opinions from other practitioners.

Recommendations

- Examine ways to increase and strengthen adult volunteer involvement in youth theatre. Perhaps the most live threat to youth theatres is the fall-off in membership but the lack of support from committees and other adult volunteers seems as urgent a threat to the sustainability of many groups.
- Explore how Youth Theatre Ireland can engage committee members and adult volunteers in its programme.
- Examine approaches and actions to create increased connectedness and community among youth theatre facilitators/leaders. The idea of local/regional hubs is worth pursuing.
- Look at creating reflective, recharging, growth spaces for youth theatre leaders/facilitators.
- Advocacy - examine ways Youth Theatre Ireland can advocate for youth theatre facilitators in order to increase recognition of the importance, and skilled nature, of the role but also ways to ensure youth drama facilitation is a sustainable and viable career option. Also look at advocating the importance of youth theatre to parents.
- Organise training on Gender Identity & Young People and Body Image. A few participants who attended Mental Health First Aid training said they would recommend it.
- Foster an understanding of the development of young people during adolescence in order to help ensure their needs are being met. Such an understanding would also strengthen advocacy around the benefits of participation in youth theatre.
- Provide youth theatre facilitators with access to a Wellness Programme for young people such as Youth Work Ireland's Be Well programme.

Appendix 3: Notes from consultation with Youth Theatre Ireland's Youth Board.

Question: What has been challenging about returning to the physical youth theatre space? What has been positive?

Respondent 1: It has been amazing returning to the physical space. The one challenging aspect is getting used to interacting with others in real life, and finding chemistry with others again. These challenges include verbal and emotional interaction but especially physical.

Respondent 2: Positives are inclusion, friends for life, being out of your comfort zone. Challenges on Zoom and during the pandemic included shyness and the fact there was not as much energy online compared to being in the room/in the circle. Overall, it's the greatest thing in my life. I am able to be myself without being judged.

Respondent 3: The experience of returning has been very good - very supportive and everyone has been trying to get back to normal. Although I have been in YT since 2019, just before Covid hit, I found the support since being back in person impeccable and really respectful of people's boundaries with Covid and social distancing.

Respondent 4: It was strange at first because of the social distancing, it felt like you couldn't immediately know people. I'm glad we are not on Zoom anymore. Didn't get to meet half of the people in my year until about 10 weeks in. But I've made seriously good friends that I wouldn't give up for anything. My confidence has definitely grown. I just feel better. I look forward to it every week. I feel comfortable and safe.

Respondent 5: Since returning to in-person youth theatre even while social distancing measures were in place, it has been an opportunity to connect with new and old friends. I believe that it has been immensely helpful in re-adjusting to being out in the world and socialising again.

Respondent 6: It has been very different with new members, lots of new ideas and outdoor workshops. The positives are exciting new projects. The negatives were uncertainty around how long we can operate for and feeling we've lost time.

Respondent 7: My experience since returning to the physical YT space has been particularly good. In the beginning, there were some challenges, such as COVID restrictions and a sense of isolation and awkwardness. At the same time though, there were many positives, such as the friendly atmosphere and welcoming attitude of the group. What was most helpful in making me feel comfortable in the space again was the patient and easy-going feeling provided by the facilitator as well as fun games to warm up and wind down.

What would help with the challenges?

Respondent 1: We are struggling after Zoom and social distancing to feel comfortable with touching each other. I would love a workshop around developing those skills again particularly around physical comfort.

Respondent 2: Some of the things that have helped are participating in the Connections Programme, tea breaks, weekly check in (3 good things that happened during the week), saying something nice/good about each other, 'Ring of Fire' at the end of each workshop and participating in LYT's Transition Year Programme. Things that would help: the youth theatre getting involved in different programmes and working with different facilitators who could facilitate around different aspects of theatre - lighting etc. Advertise youth theatre in schools.

Respondent 3: Cooldown training for characters (approaches that can be used to separate actor from character) and for scenes that may take a toll on members. Awareness of triggers/serious situations. Intimacy and consent training/workshops. Post-Youth Theatre Groups for people who have left youth theatre. Anonymous statements on how youth theatre has helped people.

Respondent 4: Shows need to be talked about if they have content that may be triggering. Get past members involved - not necessarily with their own youth theatre but they could get involved with other groups.

Respondent 5: YTI can support youth theatre members by encouraging increased social time, working with past members and engaging with the school curricula.

Respondent 6: Making a friendly environment for members, making sure members are comfortable with roles, promoting youth theatre, programmes for former members.

Respondent 7: I feel that my youth theatre and Youth Theatre Ireland have been incredibly supportive, and there is no way that I can think of in which they could be more supportive.

APPENDIX 4: Notes from (Re)Creating Our Space: How Are Your Members Doing? - Online Sessions

31st March 2022

Observations on Youth Theatre Members

- Lots of challenges identified around young people's participation in youth theatre at the moment including a reluctance to socialise, lack of confidence, unattuned to their bodies, lack of comfort with physical and vocal exercises. It was commented that members need very precise directions. They are averse to what can be described as 'safe' risks within the space. A general sense that young people are easily overwhelmed. Such challenges are seen as a logical outcome of a period when young people were given very precise instructions around what was and wasn't permissible e.g. keep your distance, wear a mask, stay in pods etc. As one facilitator put it, the things we want them to do in youth theatre now are the things they weren't allowed to do. The increase in anxiety among young people was referred to.
- A sense that young people are physically and socially censoring themselves a bit. One facilitator said that when young people knew each other previously or externally from youth theatre, those relationships have tightened a bit so there are social pockets rather than a wider social interaction among the group.
- There is a general consensus that the transition to the physical space has been exhausting and very challenging. It was remarked that it is a totally different skill-set to the one required for online work. Being able to plan and schedule and rehearse productions still doesn't feel comfortable or natural. We are almost conditioned to feel that shows/events could be pulled at any minute.
- Some members are still wearing masks while others are not. There is still concern about vulnerable relatives etc.
- The low paid nature of the work was commented on particularly in relation to younger facilitators who are just starting out. The cost of rent and other living expenses are so high. There are concerns that if the lead facilitator left, nobody would be in a position to take over. In terms of freelance work that might supplement youth theatre earnings, it is unreliable and inconsistent.
- While a small number of youth theatres, who participated in the sessions, have waiting lists, most groups have experienced a decrease in membership.

- Continuity in attendance is an issue. There is a sense that opting out is more of an option now than pre-Covid. The pandemic has fed an 'opt-out' culture. It is felt this is, at least, partly due to a hesitancy in committing as we are all so used to things not going ahead or stalling.
- As one facilitator commented, it is almost as if each youth theatre member needs bespoke attention at the moment.
- There was agreement, at the moment, that 'every week in youth theatre is like a first workshop'. You have to re-create the culture of the youth theatre from scratch. One leader commented that youth theatre feels like 'a fragile entity' at the moment. It's almost like we need to press the reset button.
- Responses are difficult to elicit when members are asked what they would like to do in the youth theatre.
- 14 - 16 year olds in particular identified as exhibiting stalled development due to Covid. Displaying a lack of independence and initiative. This age group had some very important milestones migrant online or missed completely. It shows up in terms of their physical comfort in navigating the physical space.
- It was also felt that asking members to do any work outside the space in terms of research or background work on a theme is difficult.
- The pandemic has denied us opportunities to experience the joy and magic of youth theatre, in particular, creating and sharing work with our supporters and community so while productions are challenging at the moment, they achieve something that no other aspect of youth theatre can.
- There is a sense that facilitators/leaders are in a constant state of reflection - what might work? What else can I try? etc. We are all learning as we go.
- One leader commented that young people seem more attached to their phones than previously.
- There seems to be a fear of failing among young people.
- Issues with rehearsing and performances. Very difficult, if not impossible, to get a full-cast rehearsal due to high Covid cases and other factors. Also, stress around directors/facilitators getting Covid as this would be disastrous for a production. Some groups have found that keeping casts small is helpful.
- Managing the balance between existing members and young people who joined during the pandemic is tricky. It has resulted in a large spectrum of experience and different needs. It was commented that many of the current cohort of youth theatre members don't understand the commitment required for a production and the level of work involved.
- A strong sense that the dearth of opportunities to attend theatre performances has been a big loss in recent times. Many young people have never been in a theatre.
- We discussed possible barriers to engagement. It was felt that parents may in some instances be limiting young people's participation. We discussed whether it was desirable to have greater buy-in from parents and how this could be achieved. Several groups felt that the autonomy of the young people is priority; it is their space.

However, if parents are in some cases a barrier to full participation, it might be worth getting them onside by communicating the benefits of participation. Due to the rural or isolated location of some youth theatres, parents can be key to a young person's engagement. One participant mentioned that our thoughts on parents are often based on an assumption of a certain level of privilege- it is important to remember some youth theatre members or potential youth theatre members come from more challenging backgrounds where parental input is minimal or absent.

- In one session we discussed the observation that young people are unlikely to be attracted to youth theatre by the benefits of participation. This message is more likely to land with parents. New members are attracted by the drama, fun and friendship elements of it. It is challenging to hit the right tone and not 'talk up or talk down' to potential members. As one youth theatre leader put it, we need to challenge expectations about who youth theatre is for.
- One facilitator, who has been working in the physical space for quite a while, said his group is beginning to gel but this has taken around 7- 8 sessions.
- Some facilitators are confident that the young people will progress with skills such as physical and vocal ability with time. As one facilitator put it, they are not 'match-ready' yet but it is a process of slowly building confidence, self-esteem and resilience.
- At the moment, young people are very averse to anything that involves online participation.
- It was said that young people need a lot of encouragement. They are quick to be hard on themselves if something doesn't work.
- In one of the sessions, we discussed the 'magic' of youth theatre and how sometimes a group works well despite factors indicating it might not. The example given was a group with an unbalanced gender mix.
- A youth theatre facilitator commented that there can be feelings of guilt and shame when you can't commit to a workshop or a programme. Often you choose youth theatre over other commitments but also your social time. It is felt that all the weight tends to land on one person and it can be hard to take any time out. It is also challenging to find time to pursue funding so there is guilt around the youth theatre missing out on opportunities. Many adults in youth theatre are working over the hours they are paid for. The pandemic has exposed how fragile the reliance on one or two people can be - if they are ill, everything comes to a halt. There aren't enough safeguards to allow secure planning.
- A few youth theatres have tried, or are trying, to get the full youth theatre membership in the same place at the same time to give a sense of cohesion and community but this has been problematic.
- Many leaders/facilitators commented how reassuring it was to hear that other practitioners are having similar issues and challenges.

What is working?

- The consensus is that meeting youth theatre members where they are at the moment is essential. Some groups are at a point where fun games and exercises are meeting their needs. Wink Murder, Fruitbowl, Zip Zap Boing were cited as games members are enjoying.
- Other youth theatres have put the emphasis on physical ensemble work and have found it effective as an approach.
- Flexibility and adaptability are key (though this can be very exhausting for facilitators!). As one leader said, we are looking for ways to honour young people's commitment to youth theatre at the moment.
- Some youth theatres are finding that dedicated social time is helpful. This could just be having a snack and chatting.
- Going to see another's youth theatre show was a breakthrough experience for one group. Members had a sense of connection and seeing another group's show gave them a better sense of what youth theatre is about.
- Using online platforms such as Zoom has been useful for 'table readings' and line rehearsals etc.
- One youth theatre has a policy that if members can't make a session, they must email at least 24 hours in advance, unless it is an emergency. This has been quite effective. This group has found that emphasising the importance of the ensemble has been conducive to buy-in from individual members, in that it is clear everyone's presence matters, and this has helped define the culture of the youth theatre.
- One youth theatre found the group engaged well with International Women's Day as it brought up important issues for members.
- One group has introduced more short breaks and found it useful as a way to get members talking.
- A facilitator commented that she facilitated an exercise around young people's abilities, their strengths and what makes them unique and she could see an increase in their self-esteem as a result. She also used a Puppet String exercise to facilitate them in exploring the pressures in their lives and what gives them satisfaction.

What would help?

- Increase GO SEE YT fund so more groups can experience other youth theatre's shows.
- Regional Hubs are being developed, as part of the Wellbeing Programme, to support youth theatre leaders in sharing expertise and to create opportunities to interact with other youth theatres. The exact format and remit of these hubs will be customised to meet the needs and wants of each group of youth theatres who make up the regional hub. The idea is to start small and ensure they aren't too demanding time wise for leaders. This can also be a space where other volunteers, committee/board

members can link in with other adults involved in youth theatre. (More information will be sent out soon).

- Return of Youth Theatre Tuesdays (online meetings of youth theatre facilitators/leaders facilitated by Youth Theatre Ireland). Once a month was felt to be adequate.
- Create a listing of relief facilitators who could step in at short notice to give youth theatre facilitators a break and also people with specific expertise who could deliver a series of specialist workshops.
- Look at developing opportunities for facilitators/leaders to play, to try out new things, space for reflection and fun.
- Support around dealing with current world events such as the war in Ukraine. Guidance on how to approach this with young people who may well have concerns. Support on facilitating discussions around internet etiquette and promoting critical thinking on information from media sources was also discussed.
- Crinniú Na nÓg: Youth Theatre Ireland has liaised with Creative Ireland so youth theatre can apply for funding to run free workshops/events to open up the youth theatres space to their community and potential new members etc.

To Explore

- How can we create a sense of fun and community as experienced at the National Festival but facilitating more young people to take part? How can we bring the festival energy to youth theatres?
- Would developing a 're-set' workshop for youth theatres be useful? This could have a focus on creating a sense of shared purpose and cohesion for a youth theatre. It could act as a reminder of why ensemble and showing up for each other is so important. Youth Theatre Ireland could create a template that youth theatres could adapt to their own scenario.
- One facilitator suggested having a youth theatre day where members celebrate the youth theatre, curated by the members themselves. For example, they could choose what they love most about the youth theatre, their favourite games, photos/video footage from their youth theatre experience that is meaningful for them.
- How can we engage parents so they understand the benefits of youth theatre for young people and as a result are willing to facilitate participation at exam times?

APPENDIX 5: Notes from online meeting to introduce Regional Hubs

27th July 2022

Welcome and Introduction

Eoghan Doyle (Director of Youth Theatre Ireland) welcomed everyone to the session. He said how great it was to see so many youth theatre representatives present, especially at this time of year.

Katie Martin (Wellbeing Officer) gave context to the development of the Hubs. She said that she had consulted widely with youth theatres in the development of the Wellbeing Programme. What came across loud and clear is that all youth theatres are grappling with the same challenges and they all feel they are working in isolation. There is a need for us to come together. There is an extraordinary level of expertise, ability, creativity, knowledge, problem-solving ability in the youth theatre community. There is huge capacity in the community as a whole. As well as addressing the needs of the community, the Hubs can also be a huge opportunity for growth. From talking to people about the potential of the Hubs already some ideas have emerged.

What can these Hubs do?

1. **Support youth theatres in delivering their annual programmes:** They can help with the delivery of the annual youth theatre programme. For example, ideas sharing. You have a workshop you have done with your group that worked well, another YT facilitator is looking for a workshop that works for their group. Why not share it? Up until now, we haven't really had a mechanism by which youth theatres can do this. Similarly, you might like to bring in another facilitator to freshen things up for your youth theatre and there is a youth theatre facilitator down the road who has a slightly different approach and way of working.
2. **Sharing resources and knowledge:** We all gather stuff as youth theatre leaders. We may have costumes, props, other bits and pieces. We also know practitioners who work well with young people. We can recommend set designers etc.

3. **Extend youth theatres' capacity to deliver programmes:** There might be a need or desire for a particular training in a region for adult leaders. There may be a practitioner that a region might like to bring in to deliver a masterclass for facilitators. Also for young people. How can we use the Hubs to do new things? To do things we haven't had an opportunity to do until now. For funders, it is attractive to have added value e.g. 'If you fund this idea, you are not just supporting one youth theatre, you are funding X number of youth theatres.
4. **Tailored Youth Theatre Ireland Support:** YTI can focus their energies and attention on the needs of each region. For example if a region needs a particular training input or help with policy development or governance, YTI can offer that service to a number of youth theatres simultaneously.
5. **Wellbeing Benefits:** We are all looking for the same solutions and asking the same questions. I already mentioned that sense of isolation. Being an adult working in youth theatre is not easy. We all share a passion for youth theatre. It can be a lonely place to be at times. Our work isn't always valued in the way we would like it to be and the way it deserves to be. There is a resilience and strength in community that we haven't plugged into yet. We can lean on each other a bit more. If you are going through a challenging period, being able to connect with somebody who understands is important. The Hubs can offer facilitators and leaders a space for reflection and self-care. A space where we can reflect on our work, our abilities and our own growth. From the conversations around the Wellbeing Programme, there is a sense of disconnect among volunteers and committee members who are not involved directly in the delivery of the programme, who don't get the buzz you get from being in the room working with young people. The Hubs can be an opportunity for these individuals to connect into the community too. We really do invite and welcome everyone involved in youth theatre to participate. Important that young people also have the sense of connecting to a wider community also. That knowledge there are other young people in their region who have a shared interest in youth theatre and in creativity.

They will be your Hubs. They belong to you. Each region will find a way for their Hub to develop to meet their current and future requirements. It is important they get a good grounding and a good start. Youth Theatre Ireland is very committed to this. We have some initiatives that we want to share with you.

Youth Theatre Ireland Initiatives

Eoghan spoke about these initiatives. He said what was very clear from the conversations that Katie has been having and from chats he had at the National Festival of Youth Theatres is that youth theatres have missed a sense of community over the pandemic. Youth theatre members have too. Opportunities to connect are really valuable. He presented a couple of initiatives YTI are putting in place very quickly to support the development of these regional Hubs:

1. **Financial Support:** €1000 is available for each Hub to spend before the end of the year. The suggestion is that an event is run for each Hub to kickstart the initiative using this money. Long term it is not the best idea for YTI to run them. They should be your own community Hubs. A portion of that funding will be allocated to a person from the region to run the event for that Hub. As an organisation, YTI is committed to artists and individuals who carry out work being paid. The organisation will support the Hubs but in terms of organising the meetups etc it is preferable that the Hubs take shape themselves and support their own development in a way that suits them. YTI doesn't want to come in and say we think you should do X, Y, and Z when that might not work. We all know that no two youth theatres are the same. They all have their own way of working which is one of the great strengths of the community. So, there will be an initial financial investment and we will be looking to invest further in these Hubs over the coming years to keep them going and to keep the energy behind them.
2. **Go SEE YT:** We want to support youth theatres to support each other. One of the existing strands of the Youth Theatre Support Scheme is the GO SEE YT Fund. Up to now this has involved Youth Theatre Ireland providing funding to cover a portion of the costs incurred by a youth theatre to attend another youth theatre's show. We understand that could be financially restrictive. When we re-launch the Youth Theatre Support Scheme in September, there are going to be a number of bursaries for youth theatres to go and see another youth theatre's production completely free of charge. So YTI will cover the full cost to include tickets and transport. In this way any financial barriers to youth theatres engaging with each other will be removed. We understand that transport in particular, especially in rural areas, is a major cost.
3. **Employee Assistance Programme:** From 1st September, an Employee Assistance Programme will be available to youth theatres. It is a support programme we brought in for the staff in 2020 but we want to extend it to all adults involved in youth theatre. We are concerned about young people's wellbeing but we are also concerned about leaders' wellbeing. If there are challenging times for you in your youth theatre, or in your personal life, you as an individual, and indeed all the leaders in your youth theatre, can access professional counselling support. Youth theatre can be challenging and stressful at times and it can be difficult to find somewhere to put this. So this is another benefit of your membership of Youth Theatre Ireland.

Eoghan welcomed Ollie Breslin from Waterford Youth Arts to talk about what is already happening in the South East.

Contribution from Ollie Breslin

Ollie said that he was old enough to remember when there were Regional Festivals. A group of youth theatres from the South East got together - Waterford Youth Arts, Barnstorm, Laois,

Clonmel, Wexford and Waterford and organised their own festival; a one-day event for younger members and a two-day event for older ones. It wasn't residential. It consisted of workshops and had a theme. Generally they happened in Waterford or Kilkenny because youth theatres had spaces there. It was hard work, and like anything else, the difficulty was the level of work involved as you were also running your own youth theatre. You had to ask yourself if it was worth it. These are questions we will have to ask ourselves as we go along.

Ollie added one of the reasons he wanted to talk today was because he is getting older and will be moving away from this work in a couple of years. He has been thinking about this whole area he has been working in most of his life. What concerns him looking at the big picture is that he doesn't think the system for youth arts in Ireland is anything to write home about. The sector is still in a very precarious situation. It doesn't have a proper funding structure or proper policy and there isn't a single agency that deals with youth arts in Ireland. Groups and organisations have to apply for one year funding each year which means there are no guarantees they will have anything to work with. The provision for young people is different in each county and depends on the Arts Officer, LCYP (Local Creative Youth Partnerships) or whatever else is in place. A few years ago we asked the four Arts Officers in the South East (Kilkenny, Wexford Waterford and Carlow) to sit down together and as a result they funded Molly Molumby to do a research project about the state of youth arts in Ireland. It was published around 2 years ago. It was provisional in nature. With the four Arts Officers a collaboration grant (a source of funding that Arts Officers can access) was pursued. That funding was used to employ John O'Brien (Arts Consultant) to do research on youth arts in Ireland. It will be published in August or September. The findings are very bleak. It shows the overall difficulty of the situation.

Ollie said that the groups in the South East asked themselves if they were initiating this research, why didn't they do something themselves. He is interested in the idea of regional work and particularly how we can support each other. Basically, exactly what is being talked about today. There is a lady who works in Dance called Rachel Brennan who is looking at connections in the South East too and looking at how more young people in the South East can be involved in contemporary dance. Young Irish Filmmakers have other initiatives in the area. There are a lot of things happening which is good. It gives us glimmers of hope. He added he felt it was important to mention there are efforts to look at the bigger picture in Ireland and to do something about it. There are those who are trying to change the thinking. The Arts Council's entire funding for Children and Youth Arts in Ireland is less than Music Generation which came about without any policy, planning or state funding but came about through U2. Waterford Youth Arts is very supportive of a South East Hub. He is interested in the sharing of expertise. There are many in youth theatre who have been around for a long time and can talk about structures, funding and things that have worked and haven't worked. There are those of us who can maybe help you avoid the same mistakes and help each other along the way. When Waterford Youth Arts was starting out they looked at what was happening in the UK and went over. One of the best models looked at was West Lothian Youth Theatre. What was lovely about it was that they

threw open everything and allowed us to take everything they had gathered including applications for funding etc. Ollie added he was very much of the philosophy that we need to learn from each other and steal ideas and go for it. The more noise we are making, the more media attention we get, the better for all of us.

Eoghan thanked Ollie for his contribution. He said he remembered going to those South East Network Festivals years ago and there was such a strong sense of community at them. He acknowledged there is a huge amount of work in progressing regional initiatives. That is why funding is being sought to support the work and the reasoning behind allocating some of the money for the Hubs to pay an individual to do the work.

Breakout Rooms

The meeting was then split into breakout groups where youth theatres that are relatively geographically close were put together. Eoghan spoke of how Youth Theatre Ireland was very eager to get input from youth theatres and these breakout rooms were to gather ideas around what groups would like to see with the regional Hubs. Each group was instructed to nominate a notetaker to feedback to the full meeting. Katie added that this was an opportunity to have an initial conversation and brainstorm and to consider questions such as “How can this help my youth theatre?” ‘What are the opportunities?’ Suggestions and ideas could be concepts or solid ideas such as a Festival. It could be as simple as setting up a What’s App group for your Hub so you can easily contact each other etc. Think big, think small.

Breakout groups run for 15 minutes.

Sarah from the Mill Youth Theatre Dundrum gave feedback from the Leinster group. She reported they had begun with a short introduction from everyone in the group. One of the things that came up was that they were all feeling a bit of isolation and wanted to connect with others. On a simple level, there was a desire to be connected to other facilitators. Participants felt it would also be great to have access to a database of facilitators from their region so they could find replacement facilitators should their facilitator be on holidays etc. There were also possibilities around linking in with other facilitators who could do a session with your members in order to bring in a fresh face and fresh blood. Suggestions on suitable plays from someone local would also be helpful. Sarah said the group also talked about the idea of joining up two youth theatres to do a workshop so groups could get to know each other. Local theatre visits were viewed as very useful. For example, the Dundrum group could go to Greystones, watch their production and meet the members and they could have a return visit. She added on a larger scale, Sarah (Dublin Youth Theatre) was talking about a global network and Peter (from Kildare Youth Theatre) had some ideas around bigger initiatives. Sarah (Dublin Youth Theatre) described how she has been on a Global Youth Work Development Course and would love to share the resources from it because there is a whole approach that could open up some

interesting areas for youth theatre. Peter (Kildare Youth Theatre) spoke of the Erasmus+ programmes they are involved in. Up until now this has been localised to one own youth theatre but KYT would be interested in expanding it out to include members and leaders of other youth theatres so they could access training and other international work. There are possibilities around funding study visits, sharing other expertise etc.

Maxine (Rusty Frog Youth Theatre) reported for the Southern region. She said that an exchange of information and expertise was already happening in the group. They were discussing possibilities around visitor facilitators. She spoke of how transport is extremely important in rural Ireland and how it costs a youth theatre in West Cork €450 each way to go to Cork city. In Cork there has been an annual meet up usually around the Midsummer Festival. She added that In terms of sharing expertise, she would love to connect with someone who can support her with tech. She said that Julie O'Leary (Activate/UCC Youth Theatres) informed the group that UCC has a great Drama Lab which would be ideal for hosting meetups and events. The breakout group also talked about CE schemes and what's available, recruitment of members in rural areas and advice on recruiting certain age groups etc.

Brady (Galway Community Circus) reported for the North and West group. He said they discussed networking and indeed the first part of the breakout group was networking, getting to know each other and sharing what is on offer at the different youth theatres. They talked about the ability to refer youth, from the rural community who are leaving school and maybe going to college in the bigger cities, and how they could find a network of theatres so they can continue to be involved in theatre both for their wellbeing and their ongoing interest. Brady added there were possibilities around facilitation, maybe a young person could get experience with a group in another area, as a kind of internship, in a youth theatre with a different way of doing things. Funding clinics also came up and other ways of getting people together to discuss what funding is out there, applications that they are working on, supporting each other with applications and helping translate some of the jargon that can be very hard to decipher. They had just begun talking about regional festivals as the breakout room ended but having the Hubs can provide the space to have those bigger conversations about regional festivals. They are aware there is a lot of work involved in that and it takes resources but they also know that the youth are interested in it and the opportunity to collaborate and get to know other young people in their area. He said it is about finding creative ways to do it that doesn't add to the work and finding ways to transition the work that we do and combine it.

Katie said you already sense there is a lot of energy around the Hubs. As an organisation, Youth Theatre Ireland is always very conscious about what we are asking youth theatre leaders and facilitators to do because we know how demanding youth theatre is in terms of your time

and how much it asks of you. We know you all have lives outside it as well! It is important from the start that this initiative energises and engages and provides space to grow. We need it to be something that helps take the burden off rather than adds extra burden. The development of the Hubs has huge potential and can really have an impact on the youth theatre landscape into the future.

Next steps

Katie described the next steps. She said there are a fantastic number of youth theatres here today and it is great to see so many youth theatres represented. There is also interest from groups who couldn't be here. She will disseminate what came out of the meeting to other groups. Youth theatres will be asked to declare their interest in participating in the Hubs. We will then do an initial breakdown of the regions depending on who is interested and where they are based. Then, every youth theatre who wishes to get involved will be contacted in order to organise an initial online meeting of each Hub in September. It's important that they begin to kick in early on in the youth theatre year so that the benefit of them can begin to be felt. The focus of those region-specific meetings will be to solidify ideas and investigate what each region wants to do in order to begin to shape the event that is to happen before the end of the year.

In September, as part of the Wellbeing Programme, a Youth Mental Health Resource will be available for each county which contains details of where to refer a young person to, if you have a concern about their wellbeing.

Appendix 6: National Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Resource

The complete collection of National Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources can be downloaded directly from the Youth Theatre Ireland website.

<https://www.youththeatre.ie/resources/mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>