

Wirral Youth Theatre/Youth Arts – Peer Education

Executive Summary

1.0 This report seeks to inform the Committee about peer education opportunities within Wirral Youth Theatre (WYT) and associated progression routes for young people. The Committee is asked to note the report.

Background

2.0 Participatory arts are an excellent vehicle for peer education, exploring youth work curriculum areas and providing opportunities for personal self-development of young people. WYT's decision to integrate peer education into its provision gives young people a clear progression route, creatively and educationally, for within both WYT and beyond.

2.1 WYT peer educators are aged between 16-19 years and are given the skills, knowledge, understanding and experience to support qualified workers in delivering workshops and projects with their peers and those younger than themselves. This training process begins pre-sixteen in that young people are encouraged to support younger, less confident or new members into sessions.

Peer Education Projects

3.0 Over the past four years a broad range of peer education projects have been undertaken, including:

- Special requests or commissions from other organisations (e.g. Anti Bullying workshops in schools working in partnership with Education, Social Welfare and sexual health projects with Brook in a range of settings)
- Large scale cross agency partnership projects linked to national targets like Teenage Pregnancy and risk taking behaviour and intergenerational themes resulting in community tours of original plays with content based on research and consultation undertaken by young people with their peers. (e.g. 'The Morning After', 'Girl's night out' and 'Perceptions')
- Requests from the Youth Service to help respond to issues (e.g. Konnectabus promotional video)
- Requests from schools (e.g. Peer Educators regularly support WYT dance workers to deliver dance and drama lessons in primary and secondary schools across Wirral)
- Currently WYT has been commissioned to produce a DVD to be used in schools exploring Section 30 in partnership with the police and Connexions. The role of the peer educator as role models working

alongside youth arts workers and police in this project has been crucial in enabling young people referred through Connexions to feel safe and more open to challenge and change

How young people are involved

- 4.0 Young people from WYT are involved as peer educators in a number of ways, namely:
- In research for projects – for example with the ‘Morning After’ and ‘Perceptions’ a research period involved young people facilitating research workshops with others in the form of designed questionnaires to find out about particular issues / information gathering (reminiscence workshops), discussions etc
 - Input into devising productions
 - Perform and technically support multi media community arts projects.
 - Contribute to the design of resource packs and support materials whether this is DVD’s, video’s, posters or support materials

Outcomes for Peer Educators

- 5.0 Young people gain a great deal from becoming a peer educator (see Appendix 1 – Case Study). Listed below are some skills, knowledge and experience young people gain from being a peer educator:
- Improved confidence and self esteem
 - Better understanding of personal rights and responsibilities and those of others
 - Improved knowledge and understanding of identified issues, e.g. personal safety, sexual health, intergenerational work, bullying
 - Improved arts based skills
 - A clear progression route within WYT into future careers
 - Better interpersonal and group work skills including communication, team work, problem solving
 - Safe environments to explore and understand issues affecting their life and others
 - Links with other organisations and units
 - Involvement in local or national initiatives
 - Improved confidence and self esteem
 - Progression of some young people to become youth workers
 - Young people achieving accredited awards such as Millennium Volunteers, Duke of Edinburgh’s Award
 - High quality finished products, i.e. performance piece, resource pack, workshop delivery, research

Of the thirteen young people who passed the first BTEC in 2006, three have become part-time youth workers, two have become music apprentices on the Sound Steps Project, five are studying a diploma in Youth & Community Work at JMU, five are at colleges on performing Arts and Sports related courses.

Progression Routes for Peer Educators

- 6.0 The peer educator role is now truly integrated into all WYT's work as an effective tool for engaging more marginalised young people in achieving positive outcomes. Many young people involved with WYT now aspire to be a peer educator and see the value in the experience in relation to their social and educational development.
- 6.1 At sixteen, young people are eligible to apply for the BTEC in peer education which WYT now facilitates. This accreditation is equivalent to 4 GCSEs. Young people attend weekly taught sessions and build a portfolio to evidence their learning. They also put this theory into practice by working on WYT projects as workshop facilitators and performers.

Future Peer Education Projects

- 7.0 Future projects involving WYT peer educators will include:
- Youth Dance England – linked to Youth Dance Manifesto – facilitate workshops and represent the voice of young dancers
 - Learning for Learners Conference
 - Sound Steps – 5 peer educators – 2 apprentices
 - Setting up young people's peer education outreach company (see Appendix 2)

Financial & Staffing Implications

- 8.0 There are none.

Equal Opportunities Implication

- 9.0 The WYT peer education projects aim to increase the opportunities available to vulnerable and hard to reach young people.

Human Rights Implication

- 10.0 There are none.

Community Safety Implication

- 11.0 The peer educators work often includes issues centring around community and personal safety.

Planning Implication

- 12.0 There are none.

Local Member Support Implication

13.0 This report affects all wards.

Background Papers

14.0 There are none.

Recommendation

15.0 The Committee notes this report.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services

Case Study:

S came to an audition to be a peer educator in 2002 for the 'Morning After' production commissioned by Brook and Teenage Pregnancy Unit. Initially he presented as quiet, withdrawn, low in confidence and self-esteem. His experience of the arts had been participating in the Scouts bi-annual gang show. He was quite introverted, which was partly to do with being partially disabled as well also experiencing bullying at school. He had struggled with his education and had attended a special school until it was recognised that he had dyslexia. When help by a teacher was offered and he then went to mainstream school with additional support. Although he was 16 and living at home, he had a limited social life, and not many friends, he hadn't seemed to experience being a "teenager".

Once S joined the project he began to come out of his shell. His popularity and confidence grew and this was demonstrated in the work he put into developing his performance skills and his relationships with others. He began to interact with others, to create new friendship groups and socialised with young people from the project. He said his parents commented on how he was changing and were really glad to see him going out and experiencing new things. He also began to see and compare his own life and issues to those of others in the group who struggled with homelessness, being estranged from their families, drug and alcohol misuse, sexuality and violence. He commented upon how it had changed his view of things he had taken for granted, but he was also able to offer empathy and support to other young people who were going through things. At one point one young man lived with S's family while trying to sort out other accommodation. S went onto participate in the tour of the 'Morning After', helping to educate young people about safer sex, and increase awareness around HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Since the 'Morning After' S has gone on to participate in several other peer education projects, performance projects and conference presentations, and a cultural visit to Barcelona, He is now an accomplished performer developing his own comic style. His face-to-face and workshop skills are very good and he relates well to people of all levels and backgrounds. His experiences here have enabled him to see how the arts can be used in issue-based projects.

S is currently at John Moore's University studying Youth & Community Work and wants to pursue a youth work career. He is now a sessional Youth Arts Support Worker with WYT and part of this role is supporting peer educators in training.

Proposal to Arts Council – GRANTS FOR THE ARTS
Written by Peer Educators

FIRST CLASS OUTREACH COMPANY

You And Your Work

Our aim is to set up an independent outreach company: **First Class Outreach Company**; this is a new and unique project which is different from anything that we have done before. We are a group of **young people between the of ages 16 and 21** who have or are in the process of obtaining a **BTEC Intermediate Award in peer education** allowing us to **gain experience** working with young people with the support of a worker. The company will be a **clear progression route** within Wirral Youth Theatre enabling peer educators and young performers to take on more responsibility eventually leading to real **career prospects** in youth work. We are planning to use the arts skills that we have developed in Wirral Youth Theatre arts sessions to produce a performance piece using all performing art skills that we are skilled in: **Dance, Drama, Music and Technical Theatre**. Our aim is to educate other young people aged 13 to 19 about **issues that affect their lives** and explore these issues in a safe environment.

We are going to decide what we are going to focus the performance piece around by **interviewing young people** to find out what issues effect them or what they would like to know more about. This activity has the added purpose of providing peer educators with some **valuable experience** in interacting with young people

Using the issues relevant to young people we will then devise and rehearse our performance piece and tour youth groups across Merseyside. We will also **devise and deliver workshops** about the issue to educate people even further. We plan to use our knowledge, skills and understanding as performers and peer educators to **produce, and perform or facilitate** any material for our project.

As part of our research we have got in touch with a number of venues of which have already **expressed an interest** for the tour.

Peer educators will gain **enjoyable and valuable experience** by working with other young people in a variety of venues performing a wide range of material and running workshops.

The company will produce **high quality multi media/arts performances** and we will regularly monitor our progress as a group to ensure we are to timetable and most importantly that the work produced is of a **high, professional quality**. We also are going to be hiring advice, training and support from other outreach companies like Action Transport, and we will receive in kind support from Youth Arts Workers at the Wirral Youth Theatre

on a regular basis. By combining these we will be able to gather support, training and advice to secure the future progress of our company and its goal to eventually become independent.

The project we are planning caters for all aspects of Every Child Matters.

- **Be healthy: Creating opportunities** for young people to develop good relationships with their peers. Some performance will be dance so company members who dance and any young people that may take part in any workshops that involve dance as the creative medium will be physically active. This will be done through performances and workshops with other young people looking at issues that are important to them and may affect their lives. Some workshop or performance material may **focus on drugs or sex education** directly conforming to be 'be healthy'.
- **Stay Safe:** This offers peers the chance to talk about issues affecting their lives; this could include bullying, drug awareness, and sexual health. This will help the young people gain an **understanding of issues** and help them to make changes in their lives with support. The activities done will also be done in a safe environment meaning that time spent with the company will conform to 'stay safe'.
- **Enjoy and Achieve:** The workshops and performances will bring **performing arts to groups of Young People who may not have experienced much** of them. The performances will be as **enjoyable** as possible while still delivering the message behind the issues. The workshops also aim to be **entertaining by educating in as fun a way as possible**. Young people will achieve a better understanding of the issues that are to be explored and we will be prepared to advise the Young People on Wirral Youth Theatre's activities if they are interested in joining a performing arts group.
- **Making A Positive Contribution:** We will help and advice young people in decision making as well as promoting **their personal and social development**. As peer educators and performers we will be able to **use our skills and training** to do something we love, knowing that this will have a **positive impact** on other young people's lives.
- **Achieve Economic well-being:** The Company will provide a **progression route** for peer educators, leading to jobs when we become an independent outreach company. Some workshops may include work based around job seeking or skills building and thus will be a training exercise for young people looking to employment, directly conforming to 'Achieve economic well being.'

Making It Happen

First Class Outreach Company has received £4000 from the Youth Opportunities Fund for research and consultation, this will involve young

people who are undergoing or have completed **BTEC Peer Education** training to go out to schools and youth groups including '**Hard To Reach**' and '**At Risk**' groups and interview young people about what issues *they* want to explore in issue based performances and workshops.

We are applying to the arts council for money to devise, rehearse, perform and evaluate an **issue based multimedia performance tour** and to run **issue based workshops** relating to the piece, this will include collaboration with specific agencies depending on the issues raised. This ensures that Young People get to enjoy a performance *and* explore the issues raised in the piece. All this work will be done by the Peer Educators including **facilitation** of the workshops.

All workshops and performances will follow all **Every Child Matters** criteria for both Peer Educators and audiences. For Peer Educators '**Achieve Economic Wellbeing**' is a main aim as we hope to form an independent company in the future with **career prospects** for Peer Educators.

Peer Educators already use their arts skills to assist Youth Arts Workers in sessions at Wirral Youth Theatre, and have been involved in Peer Education projects such as '**Soundsteps**', '**Girls Night Out**', '**Inclusion Dance Company**' and the '**PAYP Arts Award**' all of which have been a success. These projects include work aimed to benefit '**Hard To Reach**' and '**At Risk**' groups, and we will use the experience gained from these projects to benefit ourselves in the future.

We will receive support from Youth Arts Workers at Wirral Youth Theatre for administration support and arts skills training but we aim to become an **independent outreach company** within a few years, when we have enough experience. We aim to keep close ties with Wirral Youth Theatre for support from trained Youth Arts Workers.

A **steering group** has been established to **manage** the company. This consists of Young People from the company and decisions are fed back to the main group in weekly meetings and all decisions are arrived at in a democratic process. All members have an equal say in the group and all ideas and comments are given equal consideration. The purpose behind the steering group is to learn experience in managing a company so when we become **independent** we will become an **ongoing success**.

We will use some money to apply for **development training** such as paying a group like '**Action Transport**' to help us with the company, with advice and training (see budget). We also aim to complete **Arts Council Silver and Gold Arts Awards**. Company members will all complete an arts award.

We have planned a **time scale** over 8 months:

From **September until December 2007** we will be **devising** both the performance and workshops, this will also be the time where we will be calling in any development training.

From **January until February 2008** we will be **rehearsing** the piece.

During **March 2008** we will **perform** a ten date tour over a period of four weeks. We hope to reach around 600-800 Young People.

April 2008 will include **workshops and evaluation** for the project. The workshops to be held will be facilitated by Company members working with Young People who have seen the performances and they will be a key part of the evaluation. We also plan to go on a weekend residential to finish the evaluation process but we are seeking funding elsewhere for this residential.

Managing this schedule will be **led by the young people**, especially the **steering group**. The sessions so far are planned at once a week; this will increase when performance time approaches. Administration and general support will be given by Youth Arts Workers at Wirral Youth Theatre.

Benefit To You And The Public

Our work is focused on delivering performances and workshops that deliver material based on **Every Child Matters**. We will be providing a **Positive Contribution** to the young people of our community but especially '**Hard To Reach**' and '**At Risk**' Young People. This **Positive Contribution** will be our performances and workshops, designed to **inform** and **explore** issues with Young People educating them in an informal manner about some issues important to them. It will be a positive activity for the young people of our community to take part in and will allow them to **Enjoy and Achieve**, through watching a performance and learning about the issues, which will have a **positive impact** on their lives.

We have already had **several expressions of interest** for the consultation phase from local youth units and in the research phase of our project we will secure interest for the performance stage of the project.

We will also produce and distribute marketing materials such as posters and flyers to gain more interest. These will be produced by the Peer Educators.

Our project will provide **excellent value for money** as the performances and workshops will be **free of charge!** The funding from the Arts Council will cover all expenses, and one of the key aims of the company is to be a non-profit organisation.

As we have links to the local authority via Wirral Youth Theatre so we will be applying their guidelines and supporting their aims regarding work with young people including **Every Child Matters** working with **Targeted Young People** especially '**Hard To Reach**' and '**At Risk**' Young People. We will work within the **curriculum framework** of the Wirral Youth Service. Young people will achieve accredited outcomes through their work for their BTEC or arts awards. We will also be working within the equal opportunities legislation.

This activity will benefit the young people by allowing them to be part of an **exciting and innovative project** which is an entirely new concept in the borough. It will provide **useful experience** for the peer educators and also provides a positive project for them to work on. In the long run the aims of the company are to provide employment and therefore achieve **Economic Well Being**.

Meeting Our Aims For The Grants

How we will meet the aims of Grants For The Arts:

- **Help more people to take part in the arts:** We feel that we will meet this by showcasing art forms and **Encouraging Young People** to take part and learn new skills which they could use later on in life. We will offer information about Wirral Youth Theatre and encourage people who want to join to go to arts sessions there.
- **Create Opportunities For Children And Young People:** The Company is a stage in the **progression route** through the theatre, from 13-15 performance groups, up to 16+, then through the peer education programme which leads to the BTEC course. After completing the BTEC, peer educators will be invited to join the First Class Outreach Company. This may **lead to employment** within the company or employment as a part time worker at Wirral Youth Theatre. The company will also provide performances to groups that might not usually experience them, **bringing the arts to a wider portion of the community**.
- **To Help The Development Of The Artist, Arts Organizations And Creative Economy:**
 - We are working towards the **Arts Council's Silver and Gold Arts Awards**.
 - We plan to bring in independent companies to help with **training and development** of the company which will include building up our arts skills the business knowledge and understanding on how to set up an independent company.
 - We will hire professionals such set designers and costume designers. This will help support ourselves as a company and give us the **opportunity to develop as a company**. It will also provide some **high quality, professional aspects to our project**.
 - When we are independent we will offer opportunities to young people to take part in activities of which we have available at the time and also job roles in the company when they become available.
- **Involve the arts and artists in creating vibrant communities:** Young People in the company will be from the **local community** and all work will be **free to access** meaning it can be accessed by all areas of the community. Young people to be targeted will also be in the local community and we hope to **inspire Young People** to take an interest in the arts with our performances.

- **Create opportunities to promote and celebrate diversity;** First Class Outreach Company will follow The **Equal Opportunities Act** and **not discriminate** against disability, race, religion, gender or sexuality. The Company members are all from an individual and therefore **unique background**. There is a wide range of sexuality and disability, religion and race in the group. There is a massive range of social background in the group ranging from **homeless Young People** to those from a middle class background.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be an ongoing process, as this is the first year the First Class Outreach Company is active we will evaluate all activities internally using a group diary where members can write their thoughts, feelings and questions down. At the end of each phase we will each complete a **formal evaluation sheet for our records**. This will, no doubt help us recognise key strength and weaknesses that the group itself contains and will also aid in the future resolution of any problems.

Every group we perform an activity with will be asked to complete an evaluation designed for all audiences **including disabled persons**. The young people will be asked to fill out a questionnaire and group leaders will fill out a more detailed evaluation report listing recorded outcomes for the groups and how we have managed to work to criteria. This will help us **improve for future projects**. We will use a video diary to record the participant's reactions and any comments that they have.

As the workshops will be ran some time after the performance they will act as part of an evaluation exercise, both of the **participant's enjoyment** of the piece and their **learning**.