**Same Circle Productions, Artists Respond winners 2021**

**St Hugh’s Foundation: Presentation Narrative.**

**Project Outline:**

We held a research & development phase of our new LGBTQI+ show Contradicktion, a new devised theatre piece which focusses on toxic masculinity, gender bias and other damaging cultures in the LGBTQI+ community. The process was split into four weeks.

Our first week was an opportunity to spend crucial time with seasoned Hull professionals to provide invaluable support in the creation and support of our company. This included sessions on marketing, company vison & mission, artist bio and finance management.

Our second week acted as our engagement week which would form the basis for our show. We worked closely with The Warren Youth Project’s Shout Group. A group of 16-25 year old LGBTQI+ individuals who come together to share a safe space in the city.

Our third week heavily revolved around rehearsal room-based activities which would create the sharing material.

Our last week was the rehearsal and sharing of our R&D material.

**Aims & Objectives:**

* Develop new audiences across Hull & beyond.
* Create the foundation for a high-quality LGBTQI+ sharing.
* Represent and reflect the voices & opinions of the LGBTQI+ community.
* Develop the company model to be more rigorous and sustainable.

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| **Age groups of those taking part:**  There was a variety of age ranges that we targeted during the process.  Shout Group - 16-25  Hull & LGTBQI+ forum - Mixed ages but generally 20+  Pop-Up Engagement - Mixed.  **Who Benefitted and How:**  We targeted the LGBTQI+ community of Hull to represent and reflect the opinions of the community across the city in our work who have been historically underserved in the arts.  This projected heavily benefitted the LGBTQI+ communities of Hull. The time spent with our focus groups was invaluable to developing a strong framework for our piece and was able to reflect their voices and opinions in our work, making them feel as though they were part of an integral artistic experience in the city. Working with the focus group from the Hull & East Riding LGBTQI+ forum allowed us to experience different and useful insights from people across the spectrum of the community and a variety of ages. The members of the forum felt that they were able to speak openly and that particular barriers to representation in the arts was being lowered in the city.  Our time spent with The Warren Youth Project was crucial to the formation of our piece, and the young people had a great interest in the piece at large as they felt it reflected their viewpoints and opinions. Furthermore, they felt that during the focus group we had created a safe space that they felt there were few of in the city. I have attached a piece of writing that was sent to us after our focus group that demonstrates the frustrations felt within the LGBTQI+ community in the city. We are actively using these comments to work with various LGBTQI+ organisations across the city to use the arts as a transformational tool to help bridge the gap many of these young people feel to engaging with society. The work we have done demonstrates that we are able to use the arts as a way of developing open discourses in the city amongst LGBTQI+ people to develop change.  Our pop-up spaces were originally meant to be at The University of Hull & The Warren Youth project. Using this time to develop our networks we got in touch with the Hull Artist Research Initiative and developed the beginnings of a useful long-term relationship with them. This meant that we were able to put our pop-up space in Hull City Centre. We felt by moving the space to the city centre, where very little engagement happens currently, as well as, at the weekend when footfall is at its highest this offered a much richer opportunity to develop new audiences.  The pop-up engagements garnered an overwhelmingly positive response as we ended the weekend with over 200 engagements. This is largely due to creating a performance spectacle using Andy Train’s - Sasha at the Disco where he performed LGBTQI+ songs throughout the day drawing people in. In the context of our project being reflective of the communities of Hull, we classed engagements as speaking to people either about: i) Same Circle & its values, ii) Contradicktion and its themes or iii) both. We did not classify an engagement as greeting somebody or giving them merchandise.  **Provision of access for people with disabilities & minority groups** |

Throughout the process we have tried to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. We ensured there was a Makaton interpreter at our sharing, we felt Makaton was crucial because this also allowed any neurodivergent individuals beyond d/deaf people to access the sharings. Furthermore, we filmed our sharing material prior to our sharing at Hull Truck Theatre to ensure that any who were unable to attend or would have difficult in attending would be able to from home.

**Development of new audiences**

As this was our first research & development project, this process was crucial to developing new audiences. Our pop-up engagement events were vital in new audiences getting to know who we are as a company and a brand and what kind of work we produce as our outputs. These pop-up events had a clear success reflected in our social media growth. I have attached a form which shows the growth we had through our social medias from the beginning of the process through to the end

**How this was measured:**

As this was an R&D, the measure of success was not quantifiable in-terms of ticket sales. We felt success was measured in two forms.

1. Feedback and engagement numbers throughout the process and;
2. Engagement on social media.

**Summary of the success:**

Throughout our company development week, we spent time with local theatre makers which provided vital time to develop our company model ensuring that as we continue to grow, we are robust and sustainable. We have now formed a sustainable company structure which allows us to be responsive to the uncertain times for theatre companies as a direct result of covid. Furthermore, the work with artists in the city has meant we are able to develop and grow our voice and brand to enable us to reach new audiences across the city and beyond.

Our focus groups provided a safe space for many people in the city to create the foundation for a high-quality sharing. The measure of success with these focus groups was seen in our sharing where many who came found that they were able to talk openly about their sexuality and question some of the cultures within the LGBTQI+ community. Starting conversations about how we could as LGBTQI+ members, make the community more inclusive from within was a main artistic foundation for the development of this piece. We felt that this was met when we were sent a lengthy document (attached) that was sent to us after our focus group from a member of the Warren Youth Project.

This informed the high-quality work that was demonstrated in the sharing. Although there is learning to be done the feedback from the group shows that as a company, we are serving historically underserved communities with high-quality work which is deeply rooted in the voices of the local LGBTQI+ community.

Finally, reflected in our demographics data we engaged far more heterosexual identifying people. We found this to be a good measure of success because we were able to inform and educate people from outside the LGBTQI+ community to create a new understanding of why we need projects such as this to develop more inclusivity and representation in Hull.

**Impact on increasing the community’s knowledge, understanding, participation and enjoyment in the arts:**

The time spent with our focus groups was invaluable to developing a strong framework for our piece. Although there was originally a lot of interest in taking part in a focus group from the Hull & East Riding LGBTQI+ forum, this was not taken up at the time. As such we opened this up to our own personal networks in the LGBTQI+ community, which was received well and allowed us to experience different and useful insights from people across the spectrum of the community. Our time spent with The Warren Youth Project was crucial to the formation of our piece, and the young people had a great interest in the piece at large as they felt it reflected their viewpoints and opinions. Furthermore, they felt that during the focus group we had created a safe space that they felt there were few of in the city. The people that we engaged with through the piece felt that because we were directly reflecting their voices and opinions, they were more likely to engage in the arts. Furthermore, because we aimed to do this in non-traditional settings and in a conversational way, many felt that a barrier had been lowered to engaging in the arts; they didn’t have to act a certain way to enjoy the performance.

Our pop-up spaces were originally meant to be at The University of Hull & The Warren Youth project. Using this time to develop our networks we got in touch with the Hull Artist Research Initiative and developed the beginnings of a useful long-term relationship with them. This meant that we were able to put our pop-up space in Hull City Centre. We felt by moving the space to the city centre, where very little engagement happens currently, as well as, at the weekend when footfall is at its highest this offered a much richer opportunity to develop new audiences.

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I have attached a sheet which shows the demographics of people we engaged. We will use this in the future to create an engagement map in the city to ensure we are consistently developing and engaging our audiences on a long-term basis whilst continuing to open up access and lower barriers to the arts in Hull.

The feedback as reflected in our social media and engagement figures, meant that we were able to educate, inspire and inform people about the LGBTQI+ community and the necessity to create appropriate representation in the city.

**Main Learning:**

Working with Paul Smith from Middle Child we spent time developing a robust and sustainable company model. As Covid has shown the need for such company models is crucial with many companies having to halt production. Furthermore, we have also developed a cogent and succinct vision, mission & artist bio which we can use when we are trying to market ourselves in the future.

Working with Sarah Penney a seasoned producer on our marketing and social media strategy has helped us develop a strategy for short- and long-term social media goals meaning we can develop a much larger presence even when projects are not happening.

We have learned the most from our engagement work. Having engaged such varied audiences and collected significant amounts of demographics data. We can utilise this data to demonstrate the audience types that we have engaged. Using our future engagement strategy with the data we have collected we can identify key groups and postcodes where there are gaps and programme future events to develop new audience relationships in this area.

Working with an actor in an R&D to develop a script has created a process for co-creation that has set a methodological basis for future work. The R&D has provided an invaluable experience for us to develop our practice as theatre makers which is rooted firmly in community voices. We will continue to explore how community can inform the creative process and be brought in over a much more sustained period of time in order to make a piece that feels authentic and truthful in voice, especially using the opinions and lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people.

Luke has gained valuable insight on how to handle shifting timelines, budgets and communication with Arts Council England.

All the learning from this process has been evaluated and will form a strong basis for the continued life of the show. This will be invaluable when programming the show in its second phase with regional theatres.

**Engagement Figures:**

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| Beneficiary Type | Estimated people who will benefit | Actual Figures |
| Artists/Creatives/People | 7 | 8 |
| Participants | 50 | 270 |
| Audience Live | 50 | 20 |
| Audience (broadcast, online, in writing) | 5000 | 5996 |
| Total | 5107 | 6294 |