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Report Prepared for the  
*The Blakeney Millar Foundation / Churchill Fellowship*

# WAYS OF ENGAGING ISOLATED PEOPLE THROUGH COMMUNITY THEATRE IN SMALL TOWNS

(Or)

# COMMUNITY THEATRE FROM SCRATCH



By

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THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

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Churchill Fellow 2019

**The Blakeney Millar Foundation Churchill Fellowship to study ways of engaging isolated people through local theatre in small towns**

(or)

“Making Theatre From Scratch”

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The author proudly acknowledges Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my mother, Joan McSweeney and to all artists who struggle to balance other needs of life with their artistic passion. She was a singer who lived and died yearning for the sublime that she found in her music. I asked her what she was looking for. She said “To be a singer!” I exclaimed “You sing, you’re a singer!” It struck me as a battle facing every artist, musician, singer, performer who possesses that hunger – A struggle to be simultaneously functional in two worlds – music and reality, in her case. We can’t all be professional artists: we have other work to do.

The things she put before pursuing her passion were her faith, her family, and her boundless generosity. She practiced every day and taught and performed music, however, she never felt she achieved a purity of voice that she sought, and felt it keenly as a sense of pain.

Once at a concert in the Presbyterian Church in Pitt St, as she started singing, birds up in the roof also started singing, and continued until she stopped. They didn’t sing with any other performance that day. There are other ways of measuring success.

This matters to the present study. There is a fine balance in life between pursuing one’s passion and looking after the rest of life. But in community theatre we have a chance to express those passions. What an awful world it would be if there were no avenues for the non-professional to live their passion. So, I dedicate this work to my mother and artist like her.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my wife Linda for her love, humility, patience and unfailing support through the ups and downs of life, my community theatre life, and especially in trying to accomplish a Churchill Fellowship during Covid years. I thank my children, Alex, Angela and Ruby for their love and support.

Crucially, Tumut’s Blakeney Millar Foundation provided the financial support for this study. I would like to thank Tim Oliver, the Foundation’s Chair. I would also thank Louise Halsey (Churchill Fellow) who has provided unfailing strength and support to me during my Fellowship studies.

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for the amazing dedication they have to the betterment of Australian society and for the wonderful support they maintain unfailingly to the Fellows on their journeys of learning. In particular, I would like to thank Adam Davey, Meg Gilmartin and Emma Velzeboer for looking after me,

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I have received interest and support from Roslyn English, Chair of the Association of Community Theatre. Roslyn has reflected on my research questions and in particular taken a strong interest in the question related to how networks might better support Community Theatre in Australia. She read the raw material through – a mammoth task. I thank Linda McSweeney, Allyson Dodd and Kate Jenkins for proof reading. I would like to also thank C.A.S.T. Snowy (our little theatre group) for their support while I have been engaged in the Fellowship study. Finally I would like to thank the many contributing interviewees and organisations that have so generously given of their time to allow this study to happen, even while the pandemic rages on.

## Introduction



Figure 2. Michael McSweeney & Friend

### ***My Interest in Theatre***

I am from a large, noisy musical family and my mother and sister both taught piano and voice. Some of my earliest memories are of my family participating in theatre in Armidale N.S.W. and amateur theatre and stage and choral performance experiences continuing throughout my youth.

Sixteen years ago my own family moved to Tumut, and I joined the local theatre as an usher for their weekly showing of a film. Nothing was happening on the stage there and I asked 'why not?' and the question was put back to me "What are you going to do?" Since then I have been blessed to write, produce and act in locally-based plays (and a movie). Expertise was never in excess but enthusiasm was, sometimes having 55 or more actors in one show.

### ***My Fellowship***

As a social worker, I have developed strong values about community inclusion. The productions were never community interventions as such, but the joy of community participation and connection was always shared openly in our community theatre. The audition criterion to win a role was to simply 'Turn Up'. However, I have wondered how I could improve the experience for the performers, the audience and those who might but have not yet been included in either.

Improving the experience also meant lifting the standard of production as we gain experience together and improving the business and policy framework that supports the wellbeing and safety of those involved as our little group grows. The question began to form in my mind "How *do* you create theatre from scratch?"

Around that time the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust brought their road show to Tumut, and my wife and I went along. Looking around the room I saw very talented people, but I rolled the dice and put in an application to study creating community theatre with inclusive values, and programs built on engaging and connecting the community.

As I was within weeks of leaving for overseas on my study, the borders began to close with Covid management. This sudden change affected our situation dramatically, and it has been a rough journey catching up from that point. During 2020 I decided to pursue the new options of online or hybrid fellowships being considered by the Trust. Although it felt very awkward with many unknowns, I finally commenced in early 2021.

Over the course of conducting online interviews I have learned so much. I can safely say it has broadened my horizons in ways that I didn't expect. I have learned many new terms including ones that fit with what we have been doing here in Tumut. I have learned about networks and policies that support these inclusive goals and I have learned about programs happening in cities that could be adapted to a small community. Best of all, I have met incredible, inspiring people who, without exception were excited by talking about the interplay between the real meaning of theatre and principles of inclusion. It has truly been a feast to draw upon these experiences, even if it was just over Zoom.

### **Methodology**

This research is an exploration – casting the net wide – of things I am curious about. I initially had little knowledge of overseas community theatre resources and all the contacts I established came from web-based research for theatres and programs. I looked at the issues I had become acquainted with in the course of trying to make inclusive theatre in my home town of Tumut, and reduced these themes to five areas of exploration, about:

- Experiences: Little towns doing big things
- How to create community connectedness in the production of theatre
- How to connect inclusively with audiences
- The importance of home-grown scripts and local stories
- How networks might support community theatre

With the purview of these questions, I selected a number of organisations through web searches on specific themes. For example, I searched for rural theatres doing innovative things. I explored ideas of isolation and inclusion in society and developed a list of segments of the community known to experience isolation.

In an iterative process I discovered innovative programs that built connectedness and came up with more complex search terms such as “Intergenerational theatre programs” – that may not be in rural settings but that could be scaled down and applied to a rural initiative.

There were organisations that self-selected out of my study due to factors such as not responding to my emails once Covid-19 had become a factor. Many theatres closed. There were others who did not seem to embrace values of small community theatre being significantly related to their work and opted out. There were again others who, under time constraints of their own, simply did not get back to me in time. There were a number of rolling changes in the process of the interviews and I eventually satisfied myself that innovation, inclusiveness and follow up of referrals given within the interviews were sufficiently covered. Basically, I had obtained consolidated information on my five questions.

During the Zoom-based interviews I accumulated qualitative data using in-depth semi-structured Interviews. During the introductory phase I provided information about myself and the experiences I had, developing inclusive theatre in our small community, to provide context to the five main guiding questions previously emailed to candidates,

I spoke to a wide range of people from:

- Small theatre groups and companies in the rural sector
- World-famous theatres with fantastic community programs that may be scaleable to our community
- National or international networks that may specialise in serving one group
- Moderately-scaled operations catering to a sector of the community

Certain other follow-up questions and thought triggers tended to come up in the conversations, depending on the interviewee’s context, such as:

- What would they do if they were ‘starting theatre from scratch’ in a tiny community?
- How they adapted to the restrictions of Covid
- What ‘business end’ information may be useful to someone starting out?

Having the recorded Zoom interviews was a positive, in that I got to transcribe from these lengthy recordings, and therefore picked up important points that I might have otherwise missed. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and forty minutes, with two of them lasting over two and a half hours. I am very grateful for the generous support.

(The effect of conducting interviews from midnight to 5 a.m may have had an unknown effect on my brain's ability to process information on a couple of occasions!)

### **Reactions to the study**

*I felt it useful to share some of the responses to the study from interviewees to while weighing up the value of the report to my community:*

So great to meet you and chat with you today... truly a joyful opportunity.  
*Paula Alekson*

My job is finding avenues for people to find their way into this thing that I love. That's what you're doing... I wish you a lot of luck. I think what you are trying to do is great. I think you could really change the world a little bit. Do let me know what happens. If you get this written or you get a website up, shoot me a link. I'd love to know what happens.  
*Betty Siegel*

It's amazing what you've done there may I add. That you put that you've put together a theatre community in a tiny town and that's how community theatres start and that's how you get people you know excited about it.  
*Nick Piper*

The interesting thing about your study is that that you're not unique! The start-up of a community group - it's practically a universal model... If you need to tap back in you'll get an open door. I really love what you're doing there, I love the sound of it, the potential of it. It's exciting. If you gather the right people around you  
*Alad Rhys-Jones*

I'm really loving these sub-questions. It's so exciting the work that you're doing, by the way.  
*Paul Brewster McGinley*

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### **My Contact Details**

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## Executive Summary

I wanted to *play*, to do theatre in my small town, where it wasn't happening. Me, who is overqualified at being underqualified in theatre. The original starting question was:



Figure 3. Could we...

I could see it was always going to require welcoming/inviting others (*also underqualified others*) to share that with me. This study is about learning to achieve that, but more effectively. The Winston Churchill Foundation does not ask for an academic paper – the study was created by me following my own lines of questions to get more information about what I have been trying or wishing to do in my little town. It turns out our experiences are not so different to other's, around the world. The aim of this study project is twofold. It is to learn about:

- 1) The broad processes of building community theatre in small towns (*from scratch!*), and;
- 2) To mutually build theatre in ways that provide maximum access to the community.

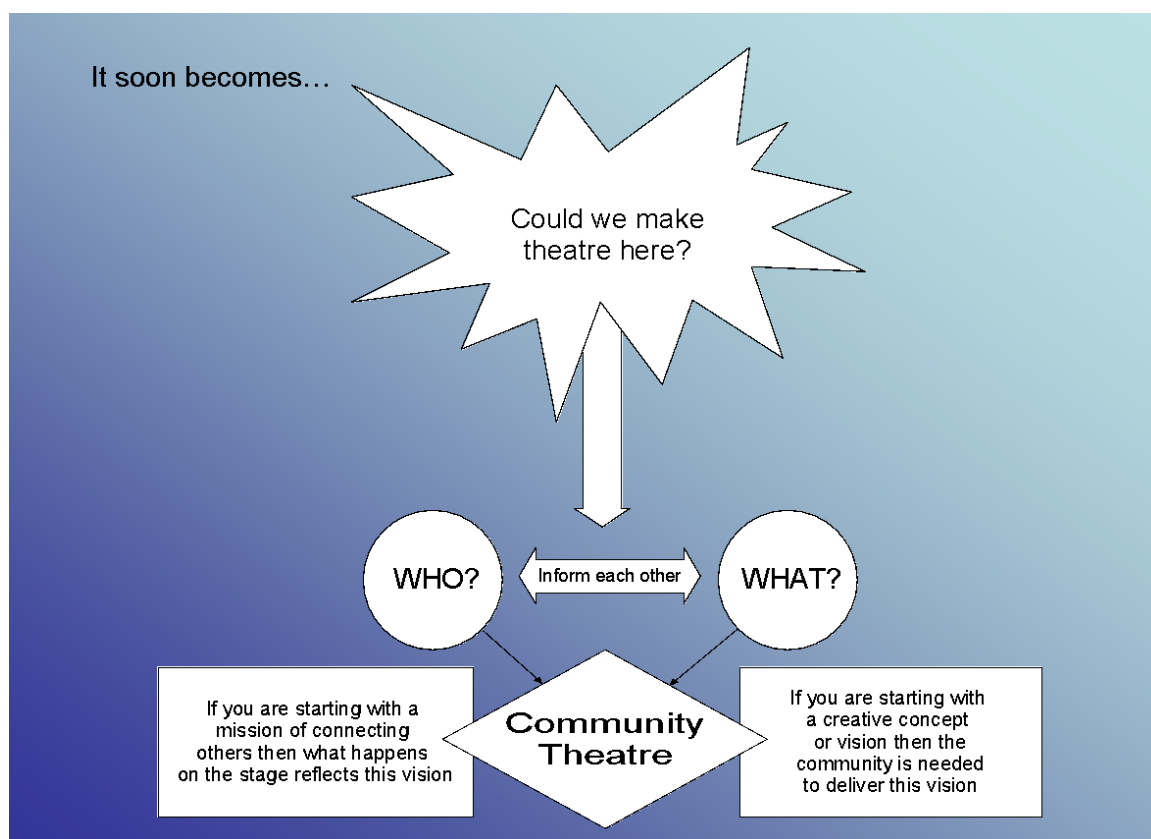


Figure 4. This Study

While I spoke with theatre people around the world, some of whom came from internationally recognised theatres or from important theatre networks, I saw how the two above issues are intrinsically connected, even in a town of 6000.

This study distils 550 data points from 25 theatre-connected people. The range of professions and/or voluntary roles involve is very broad, and the level of experience of contributors is stunning. More powerful yet is their enthusiasm for the art form and passion for community inclusion. Theatre, they showed, reaches out to the human soul and explores questions of what it is to be human. Even the lightest, most flippant musical - 'pure entertainment' - is exploring new ways of celebrating life's richness. Theatre is a way of reflection. This study glimpsed many fantastic projects, programs and ideas that could be scaled-down to work in a tiny community.

No one in the study group thought of theatre without including connection with an audience, and as I suspected the 'Who' of theatre is as conceptually important as the decision of 'What' you would like to make. As one interviewee said, the "empathetic gene" is essential in making theatre, for how can you reach an audience if you can't empathetically connect with them? This led me to a position: I have realised that theatre starts in the heart, and the Who is no less important than the What. In the context of Community Theatre this position is even more relevant as we operate in the context of our own community, people do this often for free, and frankly we had better not leave them behind or we will soon know about it.



**Figure 5. Framing Community Theatre**

It was inspiring how the values of inclusion were so strongly supported by interviewees, within the social infrastructure of theatre. When setting out to make theatre, I did not set out to start *a program for a special sector or segment of the*

*community*, although many wonderful programs around the world flow through our empathetic gene to deliver access and inclusion.

Can someone make good community theatre yet ignore inclusion of fellow community members? Probably not without becoming a sham, a snob, a “wanna-be”, unfulfilled, or feeling a shadow of ‘what could be’. The passion-driven desire to produce quality work, often driven from within as well as from without, means that we risk becoming these things when we leave behind our roots and forget empathy. We certainly can become a caricature, and very rapidly. I think it mostly happens as we treat people with disdain and contempt, and forget that theatre is about connection.

This study reveals that theatre, as an art form, requires its own maker to be authentically committed to artistic delivery. First, it’s about making theatre. But the ‘inclusiveness’ part of the study question is intrinsically connected to making theatre. Because making theatre *is* a process of sharing, enjoying, caring, feeling and reflecting.

## ***Itinerary***

My “itinerary” went through many changes due to theatres and offices being closed due to ‘Covid’, and people’s availability being limited. I negotiated to break my eight weeks study into three periods, and there were rolling changes as time progressed. My itinerary covered interviews from late February to April then a week in July and then early September. This was done for flexibility in case travel was permitted at the later part of the study period. Countries ‘visited’:

### *New Zealand*

Helen Horsnell	President of Musical Theatre New Zealand, Owner of the Play Bureau
Emma Bishop	President of Drama New Zealand Owner of Stage Antics, Board member of MTNZ
Rochelle Nicholson	Zone Representative, MTNZ. Consultant on Health and Safety
Prabha Ravi QSM	Director of Natraj School of Dance Education Consultant.
Tainui Tukiwaho	Producer, actor, playwright and President of Te Rēhia Theatre Company
Bronwyn Bent	Hobson Street Theatre Company Executive Artistic Director, Outreach Specialist
Paul Maunder	Director of Kiwi/Possum Productions Playwright, Actor, Lifetime contributor to theatre

### *Canada*

Janis Monture	Executive Director The Woodland Cultural Centre Six Nations of the Grand River, Mohawk Nation Turtle Clan Ontario (Via SPARC)
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### *Via the Siminovitch Forum on Innovation:*

Jay Baruachel	Actor, director, comedian, and screenwriter
Heather Redfern	Executive Director The Cultch
Sebastian Ebacher	Senior Producer, Ubisoft Chief Creative Officer, arnoovo
Sebastian Heins	Associate Artistic Director Outside The March
Laurence Dauphinais	Theatre Creator and Artistic Associate, La Messe Basse

United Kingdom

Aled Rhys-Jones

President  
International Amateur Theatre Association

United States of America

Alexander Santiago-Jirau

Director of Education,  
New York Theatre Workshops

Hayley Sherwood

Community Works Associate,  
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Paula Alekson

Artistic Engagement Manager,  
McCarter Theatre Centre  
Princeton, New Jersey

Peggy McKowen

Associate Producing Director  
Contemporary American Theater Festival

Betty Siegel

Director, Office of Accessibility and VSA  
Kennedy National Centre for Performing Arts  
Washington D.C.

Marcie Bramucci

Executive Artistic Director at Hedgerow Theatre  
Artist, arts producer, champion for inclusion  
People's Light and Theatre Company

Bonnie Vorenberg

President  
ArtAge's Senior Theatre Resource Centre

Kandie Carle

Producing Artistic Director  
East Haddam Stage Company

Casey Carle

Creator, Producer and Performer  
East Haddam Stage Company

Ashley Hansen

Obama Fellowship  
Executive Director, Founder  
Department of Public Transformation

Paul Brewster-McGinley

Managing Director  
Trusty Sidekick Theater Company

Nick Piper

Associate Artistic Director, Barter Theatre  
Director  
Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights

Barrett Guyton

Artistic Director of The Barter Players  
Barter Theatre

Katy Brown

Producing Artistic Director  
Barter Theatre

Maria Calderon

Coordinator  
Public Works Dallas, Dallas Theater Center

*If you would like to get to know some of the contributing interviewees a little better, these articles reveal their passion, wisdom and some models to adapt. They are great examples of their points of view. The diversity of contributors and their experiences amazed me – and I mean at every interview. As you will see, the theatre workers from the larger cities or theatres add as wonderful insight alongside the theatre workers who are in the rural context.*

### **Igniting Country Communities through Theatre - Helen Horsnell**

Interestingly, I'm finding that people travel for shows now whereas they didn't - they wouldn't travel half an hour to go in someone else's show. I've had a really interesting experience over the last 10 years. Just up the road from Dunedin (about 25 minutes north) to a town that is surrounded by lots of hills... There is a wee settlement. The local government built an event centre there. It's a basketball court, and it's a big hall and it quite a nice stage. It's actually quite a wee retirement place. They notified us they would like to put on a show.



About 12 minutes up the road from them is a small town with a high school and a couple of primary schools. They didn't really want to feed into this event much from the start but they did a wee bit. It sort of built up. Over 11 years I've directed six of the shows. It's built up over the years. Really interestingly people from Dunedin are travelling up there. They didn't have any musical directors so quite often I'd grab one from Dunedin. The one I used last time was a singing teacher from the university and of course a lot of his students came in too.

We actually won the best show for Targo Southland about three years ago. We did Anything Goes and then The Addams Family. It was amazing. The local people built this amazing set. Just really got into it. It was the best show and it was because we were actually right at the end of a group of kids that we had bought through for the last eight years. They were all sixth and seventh formers and they were really good. The next year was probably the worst one they have ever don't because they had lost all these kids.

**Figure 6. Helen Horsnell**

### **Creativity and the Individual - Alad Rhys-Jones**

The relationship between the individual and creativity is a constant. It happens throughout life. The role creativity plays in your life is a constant. You might start by

doing a little nativity play in school, or singing in the choir in school or doing a little dance, or playing instrument. Then you might start to do it a little more professionally. You might do it on the weekend or of an evening. You might be playing a guitar in your bedroom. You might do it professionally, you might not. You might get some training. But the likelihood of you making a living out of it is pretty small. So you do other things to pay the bills and to bring up a family, but you still play guitar in your bedroom or you go and sing in the church, or wherever you can find an outlet for your creativity. Maybe daubing in an art class at the local community centre - then you might decide you actually wouldn't mind doing a course, maybe an exam. As the kids get older and you have a little bit more time, and a little bit more cash. You might get yourself a qualification even, and then you might start teaching a class.



But your relationship is with the creative element, whether it's playing guitar, singing, dancing, painting - It's the one constant that carries you through life, the relationship with your creativity. And yet the recognition of that role, in terms of government funding and government's acknowledgement of how it enriches life, and how it makes life better, and how it helps with mental health, is missing."

**Figure 7. Alad Rhys-Jones**

### **Building Theatre From Scratch - Emma Bishop**

That's quite interesting... 'how do you create theatre where there is none?' and like you were saying earlier – how do you find a space, or find a topic or find a group of people that want to perform - instructions on how to do this and then do that. That would be fantastic for grassroots, for small town that don't have theatre - You could then include testimonials of people and their sharing of expertise.

“When you started doing this, what has that meant for people in your town?” That sharing of expertise. That kind of thing. I could see that kind of thing for dissemination, being an article in Stage Whispers, being a presentation at the ACT conference - having a presentation. How do I create theatre where there was none? I think that's quite exciting!



**Figure 8. Emma Bishop**



### **The Senior Theatre Resource Centre - Bonnie Vorenberg**

I was looking for a thesis project and they said about children's theatre and a variety of things and it just wasn't working for me. I was walking across the campus one day and I just had an idea to do theatre with seniors. I can still see the crack in the sidewalk in my mind. There was a kind of a lightning bolt in my chest. It was Argghhh!, life changing. And then I started doing gerontology and just really loved it. When I started doing this there was only one dissertation in the field. So, I didn't have any original research to use in my thesis.

I went to this drama class and expected those kind of people you know? Old and crotchety and bent over... and instead I got this group of vibrant, intelligent, sprightly people who were creative, flexible older women, and I was smitten and I remain smitten. I have found over the years that I really like ... love older people. I connect with them, value them, enjoy them.



**Figure 9. Bonnie Vorenberg**

One of the reasons to do arts and ageing is to increase the positive impact and the image of ageing, to help people understand that ageing and growing older can be a great time of life. If you have a theatre program where the young people are taking over from the old people all it does is entrench those myths that older people just can't really do anything. One of my actors was approached by a young boy and this boy said to this actor "After seeing your show I am not worried about growing older".

Everybody wants to know that growing older can be okay. And a lot of growing older is 'what is the genetic composition of the family?', and so if you see your grandparents doing well at learning things or being in a film then it gives you encouragement that you might have a good retirement also.

### **An Important Entry Point to Theatre - Betty Siegel**

We don't acknowledge that there are lots of points of entry to the arts. Lots of points of entry to theatre. And while being a professional is wonderful - starring at the Sydney Opera House, or the Kennedy Centre - that's great. But those are very exclusionary places. If you're not the best, you're not on the stage. Then you have educational theatre. That's an entry point. And then you have community theatre which I think is a really important entry point for people. It's not just that you are putting on theatre. You are putting on Community Theatre. Meaning the Community is a part of it.



Getting involved in Disability, for me was a way of saying that when the curtain comes down, the work that I am doing is still going on. I'm sharing my love with a community that hasn't been a part of it. My job is finding avenues for people to find their way into this thing that I love.

**Figure 10. Betty Siegel**

### **Engaging Community as Performers - Paula Alekson**

We (at McCarter) had an annual production of Charles Dickens' a Christmas Carol for 38 or 39 years, 4 different versions remounted basically.

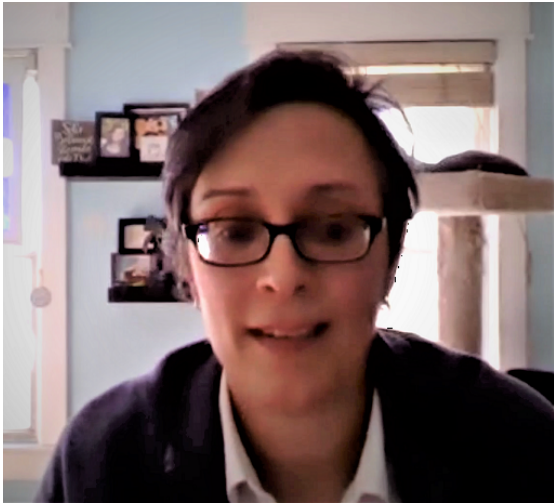
In the last mounting that we did knowing that audiences are able to be creators of the art, and it will deepen relationships. We decided to do a version that had the "typical" cast for the script that we had been doing but then we also casted a community ensemble around that and what the community ensemble did was that an hour before the show they would be in our lobbies in costume but as themselves, and we had five different roles that they would play.

We had one group that were welcomers and would welcome people into the theatre and tell them what was happening in the lobby before the show started. We had a family activity where members of the ensemble that were chosen for that activity were coached in how to lead theatre games for children and their families that related to A Christmas Carol.

We had carollers. We specifically casted if possible for people that were able to sing loud. You could still get cast if you didn't sing loud but you weren't going to be a caroller. We would have this group of carollers that would either stay in one spot or roam the lobbies and try to encourage the people that were gathering for the play to sing along with them.

We also had a colouring activity for children and we did some community spotlight event for - so we have this soup kitchen in the city where I live and we would ask people to write a holiday greeting on a bag that we would put candy in and that bag would be sealed and then we collected the candy in a box to go to meals for the holiday for folks that showed up at the soup kitchen.

We were doing a variety of activities in the lobby to show the spirit of the play, engage the audience where they came in. When the show started that community ensemble showed up on stage as the Londoners that interacted with the professional company member.



**Figure 11. Paula Alekson**

We did four years of that prior to Covid. We created relationships each year with (sometimes it overlapped) but with 24 new individuals. And then we found that it increase their participation in our theatre to see the shows. They felt like members of the family.

But then they also had options to deepen their participation so for example someone that was in the community ensemble became a member of the Onstage Seniors as well. We started having people in the ensemble that now had professional rehearsal experience to be prompters on our plays. If they were retirees they could sit in the rehearsal room and get that whole experience and then also be helpful to us in being able to prompt the actors. It just was remarkable the way that that worked. We were creating ways so that an amateur could have a professional experience.

### **How Theatre Involving People Changes You - Bronwyn Bent**

The more you know about something, the more nuanced your views. I think I probably, when I started, didn't understand the complexity of some of the reasons why people might be out on the streets, or homeless. I think that what I have really learned is the richness of that community in terms of how they support each other and look out for each other in the little bit of the street hierarchy with the elders who people know. One day we were moving house and the place we were moving to wasn't quite ready, so we had to stay in a hotel for the night in the city. In the morning I was wheeling the suitcase to the car and someone saw me and was like "Are you sleeping rough? Are you out on the streets because if you are you can come and stay with me." That was such a generous offer from someone who really has nothing. And that stuff happens all the time - this amazing generosity.



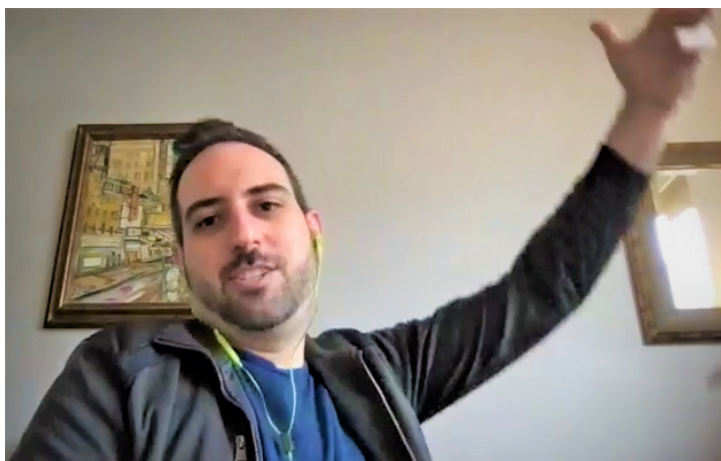
**Figure 12. Bronwyn Bent**

### **Asking the Potential Audience – Paul Brewster-McGinley**

We want to cater their experience, to centre them in that process. All of our works are devised and original. We aren't putting up pre-existing pieces. We try to create our shows with young people involved in the process. We will often be doing rehearsal in a rehearsal space but then we will do workshops in partnership with a school where we test out some of the content.

We see what the young people are responding to and sometimes go in asking a question that then informs the next step of the rehearsal process. E.g. "What happens to your shadow when you go to sleep?" The class came up with the suggestion: "Oh it goes to the moon." and we asked "what happens when the shadows go to the moon?" and they said "Oh they go out and have a dance party." and that is where the narrative of the show basically came from - that group.

And then what we do in terms of pre-show engagement is that when audiences arrive at the theatre they encounter a shadow playground with projectors set up and they can put their own shadow in answering questions and there are projections asking questions on a slide show as that's happening.



**Figure 13. Paul Brewster-McGinley**

### **Public Works - a Community Pageant Model – Maria Calderon**

Public Works Dallas is a program which creates ambitious works of participatory theatre through long-term partnerships city wide. We start by building partnerships with community-based organisations. We have a family centre with us, a jubilee park and community centre and two recreation centres from the city of Dallas. We focus

our mission through organisations: those supporting senior citizens; plus Jubilee, educational after-school programming for children in the community;. We look for those organisations with a mission of "community". And throughout the year we offer theatre classes and workshops at each of those sites. And after building those relationships with those people and partners we invite them to participate in our community pageant in the summer where we come together.

The last time we did this pageant was 2019. We had 100 participants from the community performing on-stage. Adding up with the production team and the stage-management team backstage the whole company sums up to 200 people. We show it to up to 2000 to 3000 people per weekend.

I think the Public Works model is more inspired by the flash mob movement. In the playbook it had an introduction of how the movement came about, and if my memory doesn't fail me, the pageant is more inspired by the big parades in the city and the big movement - sort of like a protest of workers or something like that. They all started dancing on the streets. That's what the Public Works pageant aspires to. The *professional* actors that are in our pageant are part of the acting company of the Dallas Theater Center. One of the shows they sign up for is our pageant.

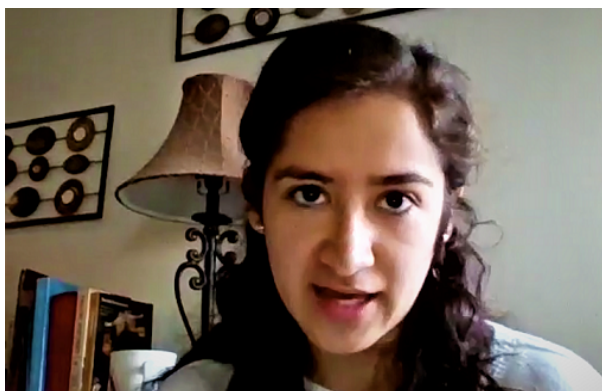


Figure 14. Maria Calderon

### **Young Writer's Festival - Barrett Guyton**

Our Young Writer's Festival is for high school students. Our playwright in residence trains teachers on how to teach students to write 10 minute plays. We have done it every year since 2002 and have anywhere from 400-600 different plays that are turned in by from anywhere from 500-800 different playwrights in a year. Every one of them is read by a theatre professional with individual feedback and constructive criticism. And then we select the top eight - the top three get prizes, and the top eight are read in a kind of Reader's Theatre style. We have it in our theatre. Schools come in - maybe their whole school or perhaps their whole grade or class. We like to say it's a literary pep rally - and seeing a group of high school students just lose their minds over their friend's play.

Since 2002 we have received over 4000 plays from among our 6000 playwrights and these are people who might never be able to write a play outside of this program. And so it lets people find a new medium to tell their story and we have had students change their lives - from deciding to go on to school, to be writers, and then those really impactful students who learn their worth and about what they are doing and that they can do something really wonderful like this. It's one of my favourite things to do and a highlight of the whole year - it is such a celebration of the plays of young people.



**Figure 15. Barrett Guyton**

### **Cultural Fusion Dance Performance Pieces - Prabha Ravi**

More recently, in the last 10 years I've been involved in creating fusion pieces, without diluting the authenticity, genuineness and tradition of the art forms. I have brought Maori Kapa Haka and Bharatanatyam on one stage. We performed together and we have done something remarkable. We performed it on the Cricket Grounds with 22,000 people watching it during the India Vs NZ T 20 game in Wellington, NZ. It was over in 6½ minutes, but it took several months to develop. The concept was 'Salutations to Motherland', which everyone can relate to -the Maori and their mother land, the Indian community and their motherland. Also, it was about unity in diversity, and that we are all one family - "Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam".

I consulted with Maori dance groups and leaders. Talking to the leaders of the Maori community in Wellington, I carefully worked on this shared understanding, taking several months. I had to convince them that this concept is not just about Indians or the Indian people but universal concepts of "Unity in diversity" and "Salutations to motherland". I translated the whole song and showed them what it means, and played the music too to be absolutely sure of their approval so I could be confident to present something like that. It was a lot of work.

I did two more, last year and this year. It was a lot of research, hard work, convincing and making sure that it is culturally appropriate. I've also done fusion work with Samoan Fire Dance, Western Classical Ballet and Sri Lankan Kandyan Dance. This kind of fusion dances provides truly amazing experiences not only in terms of learning about other cultures, integrating two art forms in ways that is very respectful to the two cultures and the art forms, but also in finding commonality and finding how we can bring them together. It is about unity in diversity, to collaborate and bring something that people have never seen before. That has been my forte for the past 10 years. Truly amazing experiences in terms of learning about other cultures.



**Figure 16. Prabha Ravi QSM**

**Black Ties – a cross-cultural collaboration - Tainui Tukiwaho**

It was a show called Black Ties. My company, Te Rehia Theatre and a Melbourne based Indigenous Theatre company called Ilbiggerri Theatre Company. We were touring a co-production, sort of a comedy-musical about how Maori and Aboriginal families may come together. It was heaps of fun.

It was cool man. We had a good time figuring it all out. Lots of spaces to navigate in terms of cultures, relationships, different countries and things like that. It was written by John Harvey and myself. We had other people working on it - it was a real process of working out how it would and wouldn't work between the two groups. There was a lot of zoom meetings and contributions in different ways by members from both theatres. Rehearsals were hilarious.



**Figure 17. Tainui Tukiwaho**

### **Local Storytelling Reveals Hidden Connections - Kandie Carle**

The people who may have not understood the impact of the Japanese culture, right here in East Haddam, they had an eye-opener when they came to see this show. They experienced the story of this one Japanese man who lived here, being treated as a foreigner, having lived here for decades. His lifespan goes up to 1942. He came over from Japan in 1888.

One of the things I am trying to illuminate with this is the very thing that you start out in theatre to do. It did more than I expected it to do. I wanted people to realise that this was a local story. This isn't a Japanese story. This is a local story. He happened to be Japanese and he brought that local culture here. It turns out that his brother was the mayor of Tokyo and gave Washington DC the famous cherry trees. It turns out there were 8 or 10 local Japanese people who worked this land. Nobody knew about them. People are like "What!?" Yes, yes. I managed to use that in the promotional material. So, to that juror from when I applied for that grant who said "Who is going to care about this?" I felt like "Well the whole country should. It's a connection."



**Figure 18 Kandie and Casey Carle**

### **An Empathetic Gene - Casey Carle**

...and that you are doing this in a region where it is already a challenge. But you are a social worker, which suggests you've got a big heart and an empathetic gene. And that empathetic gene comes into play at the theatre. It's the empathy that we have for other people, that makes us want to share stories, so that we can connect and learn from them.

### **An example of Audience/ Community Buy-In – Nick Piper**

Each year during this festival we choose six or seven plays to be read. Our acting company reads them. After each reading there is a brief panel discussion where a few theatre professionals get up and give a few thoughts about the play and then we open it up to the audience for their feedback. It is really the most important thing for a playwright to hear from people who actually attend theatre.

One of the reasons it has been successful for us is because we have developed a core audience of people who love to develop some new work particularly about stories that reflect their lives. I think that's the advantage - and that's what's important about the kind of work that you're doing. It is like how do we get people from here invested in this kind of work? And you do it by getting them to be a part of the process of doing. I'm sure we three all agree that there is no better medium than the theatre for getting



people to a subject and provoking discussion and thought, and of the possibility for change. Changing people's minds, or things within their community. That's kind of where it started and it is still the foundation of it today.



**Figure 19. Nick Piper**

### **Art Changes the World - Peggy McKowen**

I absolutely, as an artist, believe that art changes the world and I believe that it is part of the artist's role to do that but I don't think it has to be contained in this sort of unrealistic noble thought that art is for the elite. Art happens when people interact and share story. It doesn't matter what that story may be - it is the art of telling and listening and sharing that connects and makes the artistic experience ever-changing for all of us. What you want to do in your experience with that other listener is what drives how you do work that you do (with the community of people that believe what you believe in what that work can do.)

I would say we are provocative - we want to provoke thinking about these things and we want to really ignite dialogue so it is our desire that when people leave the theatre that they are so impacted by these things that they have to talk about it. We are probably more loudly radical, but there are ways of the delivery of that message that don't seem radical.

If you want to share something in your art that is a bit more message/statement, the way in which you do that, it's more compelling. The first hurdle is getting them to come and getting them to want to keep coming. They want to crave the experience and that its part of their lives on a regular basis, whether that is creating some sort of serial experience or to have them participate in shaping the next part of the experience so that there is a sense of investment and ownership of belonging.

The other thing is being very clear about what you envision, what you believe that experience is that you want to share with the people that walk into the space. And if the space feels as if everyone is welcome - whether that space is online or physical or whatever - that they feel welcome and important to the experience and that you want them there. Then they know you believe.



**Figure 20. Peggy McKowen**

### **Theatre Featuring Community Issues – Paul Maunder**

I thought I'd better get back into doing something, so I put the word out. We got a group together and did a play each year for about 10 years. We worked on issues and one issue tended to generate the next one? We started out with one about 1080, the pest control poison. They put it all over the place down here and it poisons everything. There's controversy about it. And then we moved on to the Pike mine explosion. We did the play that you saw video of.

We have done a variety of things. Oh, the mine closed and the workers wanted to take it over as a Co-op. And there was an environmentalist who had a radio program. We found one of his talks.

And James Joyce's sister was here as a nun so we did a heritage piece. And we looked at the economy, the need for transition from an extraction model here so we did *The Measures Taken*, a musical which explores economic change. And we did the greenie thing, the native logging dispute. It was very big here, so we did one about that. We did one about Dairying. And I think the last one was the climate change one. It was based on *Waiting for Godot* - "*Waiting for Greta*". We just did one a year and we gradually built up a following.



**Figure 21. Paul Maunder**

### **Making Roots in the Appalachian Mountains – Katy Brown**

It is so interesting. For a long time when I was in charge of casting here, whenever I would talk to people from elsewhere about what this is like here, they noticed the audience here - it feels very different. The audience has such ownership over it. The building was literally a church before it became a performance venue and it still sort of feels that way. Just in the way that the participation of the people - Appalachia, where we are located is such a story-driven, community-driven area of the country. And these mountains - that's just part of the nature of it.

With our resident company our actors, most of our designers, most of the people that are creating the art that you see - around our country - I don't know how it works in Australia - but it's a very freeze-dried business where you get hired to do this one thing and you hop all over the country a few months at a time if you have a career in theatre. We are one of the only truly resident theatre companies left in America. The people that work here for the most part may have come from all over, they are people with incredible careers but they wanted a place where they could have a home where they could know the ground that they are performing for and the stories of the place and the people they are performing for.

That attachment and its true relationship where people come up to you in the grocery store and you are both the local person that they know but also like 'a star' in this area and they want to talk to you about what they have seen. They want to be a piece of that in a way that is incredibly special.

There was a couple that saw theatre all over the world for fun. They were from Chicago but they would go overseas and all over the country and they said that this was their favourite place on earth to see theatre in part because of what we do. But most of all because of what it's like to sit among our audience members who love these artists and love this theatre and feel such pride in it. They just had never experienced anything like that and it's just a real touchstone.



**Figure 22. Katy Brown**

### **Mind The Gap - Alexander Santiago-Jirau**

We work in education programs, with audiences, and we work in community settings. We're doing theatre intergenerationally, providing access to the work that we do. We are giving them access to the means of production of theatre. And I don't mean by that the money, I mean by that the skills the opportunity, freedom to use the theatre as a tool to organise, to create, to self-express, to learn. There is a play-writing program and there is one that is about performance – a "devising performance" program. The play writing one is the oldest one.

The way it works is that we recruit seven elders and also seven teenagers through an application and interview process and we bring them together into the playwriting seminar. It is not your traditional playwriting seminar - they are taught writing skills and throughout the process they independently write their own play - but we have a curriculum that centres on intergenerational dialogue as the source of inspiration for the plays that they are writing, and that teaches play writing skills in a fun way that doesn't feel like a class, though there is homework.

The way it works is that at the centre of the program there's an interview protocol. We teach young people and elders to interview each other. At the core of the interview technique is its listening skills rather than speaking, so if the two of us were in an intergenerational partnership let's imagine and I'm interviewing you, I'm just asking the questions and I'm just letting you talk. Sometimes I ask a follow-up question - like follow the rabbit down the hole - for something that has sparked my interest. But the idea is that I ask a provocative interesting question that I really want to know the answer to but stay out of the way and let you talk. And listen deeply for understanding, for interest, and for inspiration.

And then we flip the script and I do the talking and you do the listening. And then we take that information, and through the exercises and activities that we do I find inspiration in your stories to write a piece of work - a piece of theatre - that is both an homage to who you and the things about you that have inspired me, but also representative of my own artistic voice. It's that amalgamation of what collaboration is all about which is 'I'm not taking your story verbatim and dramatising it' because not every element of your story may be interesting for a play. It is really about how the two of us come together - I am inspired by the elements, the ideas - maybe there is complete stories - but what comes out of it is my own play.

Mid-way in the interviewing program I get paired with an intergenerational partner and then at the end of the program we get some professional actors to do a reading of the final plays for an invited audience.

The performance program is different in that the intergenerational partners write separately and collaboratively, but ultimately they get to perform their work. It may incorporate poetry, movement, dance. It may not be your traditional play with an opening, a middle and an end, it's a performative work, thematically threaded. We have done that program in NYC, other states and cities, in South America and in London with Southbank University - Southbank theatre (Elders program) and younger students from the university. We bring them together for a week and they develop a performance. We have done that for a number of years. (Apart from it being postponed due to Covid) we were heading back to London and working with elders some with the beginning stages of dementia.



**Figure 23. Alexander Santiago-Jirau**

### **Creating a Writing Group - Haley Sherwood**

We have created a writing group of folks. I think of it as one of my greatest accomplishments. One summer I got to pick folks that I have met throughout the years, that I had a feeling were playwrights but maybe had never written a play before. I was like "Hey, you don't really know what to expect out of this but would you like to spend a week with us and maybe at the end, you'll come out a playwright!!?" And they were all like "Yeah, for sure!" It was a group of ten. We spent a week with Lucy, and at the end, a sharing of all the things we had written with the group. At the end, they were all "Well you got me. I'm a playwright!" We were like "Well yeah, we know."

I think that that is born out of the same ethos, which is that theatre belongs to everyone. And again, I feel similarly about scriptwriting as I do about acting. If you have the desire to do it, you're probably going to be great at it. If you are open to learning and soaking it up, then pursue it - do it. And so now we have this group who has been meeting monthly for the last two years and some of them have written full-length plays at this point, and two years ago, were not playwrights.

I really think Lucy is pretty special at how she facilitates. We have been doing it over Zoom but it started in person. They trust her because she has that reputation as a playwright in our community. They bring in pages that we read, and we like bring in some actors, and it's a pretty spiritual event each month, because people are super vulnerable. We have created a batch of playwrights that can write these big spectacles in the future. And it doesn't have to be Lucy. It can be folks that have seasoned over a couple of years and are ready to do something like that.



Figure 24. Haley Sherwood

### **“What Else Is Possible?- Ashley Hanson**

...he said, there's this town that has a beautiful river running through it and it has so much potential but it's kind of stuck and there just needed to be a little boost of energy. He was saying like it's really ripe - like it's ready and I think that they would really benefit from something like what we were doing. So we wrote a grant and I came out with Andrew and we did our first show in Granite Falls in 2011. We fell in love with the community, that region, and the history of the place as we developed this process that had been living in my mind. Based on a tonne of research (like you're doing) of other theatre companies working with small towns and rural communities, and writing and telling original stories about place. We developed this methodology that we practiced here and it worked really well.

We had a cast of like 50 some people and they were dancing around the river valley and it was this really beautiful exploration. Well they (the performers) were in canoes and kayaks, *on the river*. (It's not - well it is polluted but people still fish it and swim in it anyway. It's not like it's radioactive... I mean it is kind of... but we paddle it a lot.) The play itself wasn't trying to shove environmental doctrine down people's throats. It was more like "let's explore the history and ecology and industry of this river and its significance to the local native community and what has happened as a result, as you know, of overfishing and over farming that has caused this river to no longer be the same kind of asset that has been in the past.

We use it for a hydroelectric dam so that's really great because the town is powered by the river, literally. Some recreation comes from it (but like it could be so much more). The idea of really honouring the sacredness of that place by learning from our Dakota neighbours, of what this place means in their culture. Just layering, and the layering of history and story and culture, without having to say "Shame on you farmers for putting too many pesticides in your field and causing this river to be glow-in-the-dark." We're like "We should care about this river, all of us, because it's brought so much to this region. You can do with that what you want - however you want to care about this river, we should all be caring about it. And if that means and you're talking to your neighbour about their farming practices, awesome - I'm not going to tell you that you should do that. Yet. Maybe once we're friends.

You've got to build that trust especially as an outsider. I didn't have a very long relationship with the place and who am I to come in and try to... These farmers are working so hard and doing their best to keep up with the global market. It is very

complex. And to be like "How dare you, with this river" - that's not going to get anywhere. We're just like "let's go experience the river and see how beautiful it is" and then later say "actually it's hurting right now, the river is in pain and so what are we going to do to heal it?" And leave it at that, for now. And then we just keep building on it.

Then the town said 'we want to do that again' and so we did a series of three shows in a row that helped us really hone our process and spread the word about what we're trying to do in this kind of 3D approach of getting people invested in the landscape, and then in the water and the water quality. It's the most polluted river in the state of Minnesota that runs through the town here. We did Paddling Theatre - our second play, with people actually on the water to experience that landscape in that way, in order to kind of care as stewards of that place - experiencing it from recreation pace and immersing themselves in that experience.

And then Main Street - we did a main street show. There is a number of vacant buildings on main street, very similar to a lot of small towns in rural America. We recreated storefront facades and brought to life some of these past characters but with a future spin. It is really beautiful, the re-imagining of Main Street. The really fun part for me is where we think about the audience. We have the audience for 2 hours tops, right? But we have the cast for six weeks. This is where the work happens. This 50 people that show up every day or whatever every other day, for rehearsal. These are the change-makers.

These are the people who are going to unstick the cultural inertia of the place. We're not going to be able to do that as we don't live here. But we can light fires in the people who are already invested and are getting more invested and are like finding their voice. And they are stepping into this leadership perspective and the spotlight for this moment, and encouraging them to take the next step.

After the play was over we did some feedback and brainstorming sessions with the cast. We said 'that was really awesome, we thought that's a really crazy beautiful thing we did together, and what are we going to do next? Not a play, something else. Then people might say 'oh well, I really want to start an ice cream shop' or 'I really wanted to start doing violin lessons', and we support each other in these ideas.

We continue cheerleading onward with like things that people want to make possible. We build upon the foundation of having dreamed together and having made this big, crazy thing happen together. What else is possible?



**Figure 25. Ashley Hanson**

### **Overcoming Historical Wrongs in Disability Work - Marcie Bramucci**

Where are the trusted spaces? Where are the networks? Where are individuals and families gathering, or just existing, who have divergent needs? And how can we as theatre practitioners and community stakeholders, how can we go there? To meet people where they are and not expect them to always come to us because we need to first address the different barriers in order to get people to come to us. We need to build trust.

A lot of people with disabilities have experienced wrongs. They have been harmed in some way, shape or form, in being a part of the public experience. Even if it's not our fault, even if it has nothing to do with us or our organisation, we really are implicated and need to make up for those harms. We need to build trust with those individuals who have lost significant amounts of trust in engaging in public experience.

I would say it is a really core consideration within the disabilities community. These are folks whose trust has been broken time and time again. These are folks who opt out of the public experience because of negative interactions. That social definition of disability – where we recognise that the world has made a disabling environment. It's not about medical diagnosis - its about the disabling environment the world has made.



**Figure 26. Marci Bramucci**

### **Building with Indigenous Artists from Six Nations – Janis Monture**

We really started small and started and really truly grew it from our own backyard and showcasing our local artists. And then for local artists that are little known, we always book a local opener for a headliner who may be national or international - with someone people may not know, but people would come out for sure to see the local artist and stay. We have had some really great success with that. We bought in a Japanese lanu rock artist - a lot of people didn't know who he was - we paired him with a local group. People came to see them but he sold out of all his CDs because people were so amazed.

We started small and we just really took time to build that audience first. We showed all-indigenous works. A few theatre companies were on tour so we jumped on with them. We also connected right away with local artists. We are very fortunate at 6 Nations that we have a lot of very talented artists. It's great and an easy way to



promote local artists, they bring their friends and families along and now with social media a lot of them help to spread the word for their events. We started small and moved to ticketed events and secured additional funding we were able to bring in national and international artists.



Figure 27. Janis Monture

### **Mental Health in the Theatre - Rochelle Nicholson**

For me, Mental Health is about how we actually look after people while they're in the show. It's not just about their coming to a show, or them coming to rehearsal then leaving again. It's about how we are looking after them while they're there. I've seen too many times that directors absolutely lose their marbles at people and give really bad notes in front of people and people are just so ashamed. Or when people give them s\*\*t about their costumes or whatever. And then that brings out their embarrassment and that whole feeling that 'I'm not good enough'.

We all do theatre for the love of it. We don't get paid for it. And whether you usually work at 9 to 5 job and then go to our other 5 to 9 job, or later! And really thinking about things like fatigue and how we actually connect as a cast and crew while we're there.

I've been production secretary, I've been on the production crew, been backstage. I've seen a lot of things in my time where I'm just like "That's just not right." Thinking about how we treat one another and the committee not caring about the people in the cast. They are there just because they need to be. It's really about connecting the committee together so that they are there to support the cast and crew as well and not be there as part of the committee.



**Figure 28. Rochelle Nicholson**

### **The Siminovitch Forum on Theatre Innovation**

*As part of my online Churchill Fellowship, I got up at 4am on World Theatre Day to Zoom in on the Canada-based Siminovitch Forum on Innovation. I suppose the irony is that while learning about the future of theatre, the only way I could attend it was online. This Siminovitch Forum included Jay Baruchel, Heather Redfern, Sebastian Ebacher, Sebastian Heins, Laurence Dauphinais. The splash screen read:*

“What we have learned about telling stories online, and what does this mean for the future of live theatre”

The forum was asked what do we gain by taking theatre online. The responses were mainly about concepts of accessibility through technology - both in terms of equity of access for those with disabilities in the audience, and geographical isolation including overcoming distances internationally.

The forum was asked about drawbacks of taking theatre online. There were many criticisms :

- Economically it would need to be done in a way that ensures that artists are getting paid properly, with artists having equal access to digital tools. It could become a very elite and uncompetitive practice.
- Nothing replaces the live experience of theatre. A whole new set of paradigms and models would come into play as a different art form.
- The loss of travelling and physically attending the theatre, which is a holistically engaging experience
- At live theatre, the audience fills in the 'blank spots' with their heart. Some of that magic is lost in a digital transmission, as image imposes something really strong, imposing conformity to a vision rather than one's inner exploration.
- Losing the "freedom of gaze" of live theatre that engages your own imagination, impeding your own curatorship to your experience of the play.
- The art of evocation comes under threat, where in cinema, the audience is shown everything (and theatre doesn't work like that.)
- You're only at the theatre for just one night. There is something ephemeral, finite and fragile about live theatre.
- Do we still call it theatre when it's online?
- How much energy would our servers consume and at what carbon cost?
- Would you care if you just turned it off?

- Limited by serious technological limitations – access, reliability etc..
- Performances become permanent. (I would add that you cannot edit away all the imperfections of a live experience.)

### Interesting Potential for Innovation in the future

One panellist spoke about a company that had it's staff meeting within an online game environment – everybody dressed virtually as cowboys. I could see how this could inspire new interactive theatre pieces involving people from around the world. Surely the future holds some pretty exciting online experiences in this direction.

- The people who produced Red Dead Redemption (a game) decided to hold their meeting inside Red Dead Redemption. Everyone got their avatar and their horse, met at a place, lit a fire. And with the sound of wolves in the background and the full moon and everything, it was like Wow!
- In Fortnite, they have a social hub. Fortnite is the biggest shopping mall in the world right now. They tell the crowd "Hey that artist is going to perform - let's gather." They have a virtual venue, everybody knows how to get there, and it's easy to gather millions of people. That's an opportunity. The numbers are not on the same scale when you go online. The revenue model of your business changes at the same time.
- Changes in interactive virtual space in live time. Your sound comes in and out depending how you move through the space. If you're in a corner of a room you can only hear the people gathered there. Then you can leave them and go into another space and interact there. Our team has built our theatre into the environment. You can embed little posters and visuals into it. It's a fabulous interactive tool.
- Another virtual space is Kumo Space. Really easy to set up.

### Keeping an Open Mind

*I had noticed many negative comments in the sidebar about online theatre replacing live theatre. The host noted also that it was the same in the breakout room discussions: There were recurring themes and questions about 'Just because we have access to these technologies, do we have to use them? What are we losing if we do?' He reflected that it's not a binary option.*

*The host spoke about the coming of the camera and how that technology led to the artistic movement of Impressionism "exploding": "The question we should ask, as we offload tasks onto technology, is, what are the ways humanity can come to the forefront?" (Jay Baruachel, Siminovitch Forum on Innovation, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2021)*

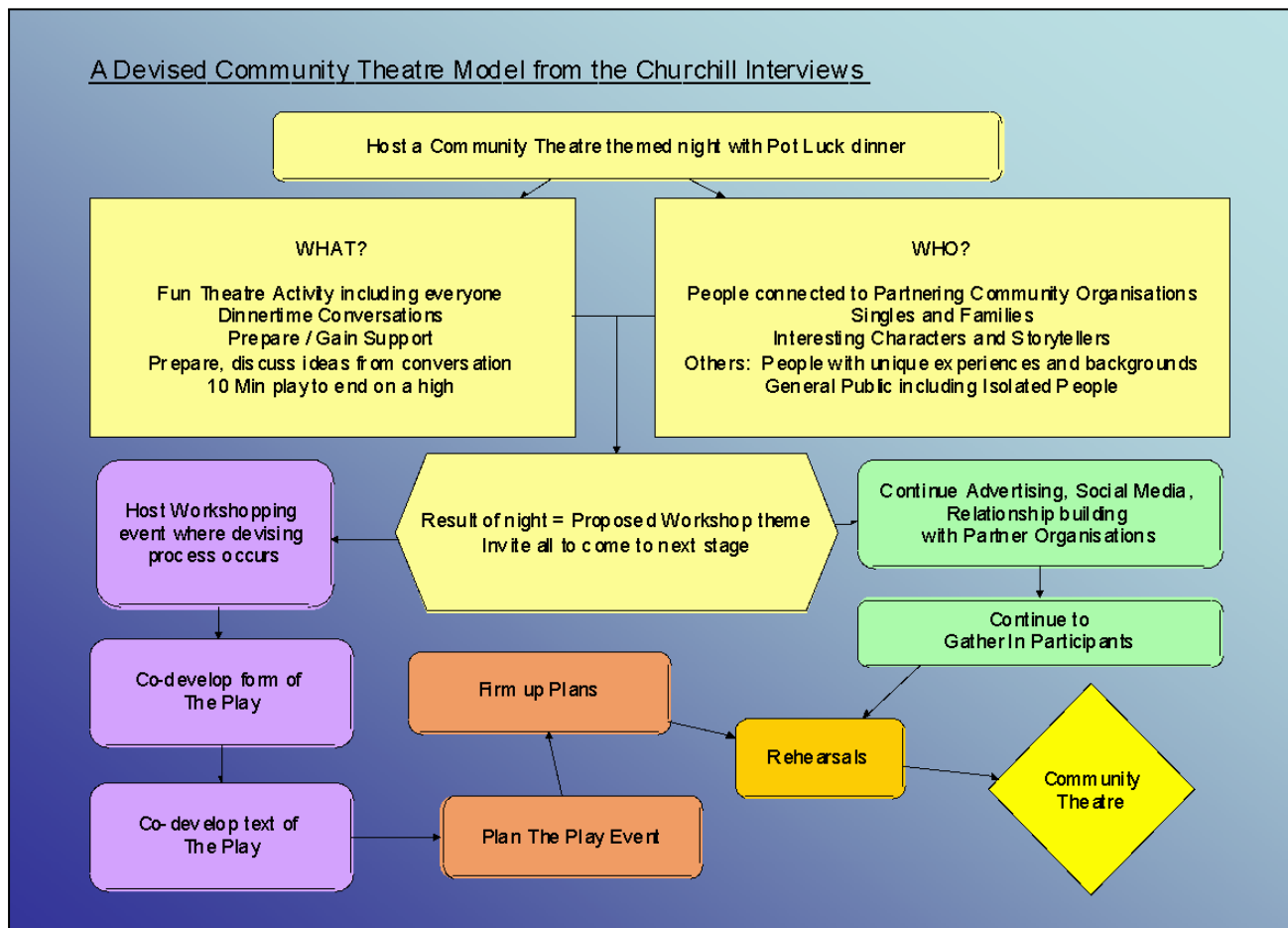


**Figure 29. Siminovitch Forum on Innovation**

*Siminovitch Forum: Andrew Shaver, Jay Baruachel, Heather Redfern, Sebastian Ebacher, Laurence Dauphinais, Sebastian Heins*

## Findings

*The information gathered was both principled and practical. For example, I have been enabled to develop the following model from the interviews, which brings together the 'What' and 'Who' into a sort of playbook plan for getting things going:*



**Figure 30. A Model of Engagement (Derived from this study)**

*This study touched on (to me) very useful models, ideas, and points of reflection. The interviews also allowed me to develop some more detailed views of what is possible with theatre processes such as running a group workshop devising theatre:*

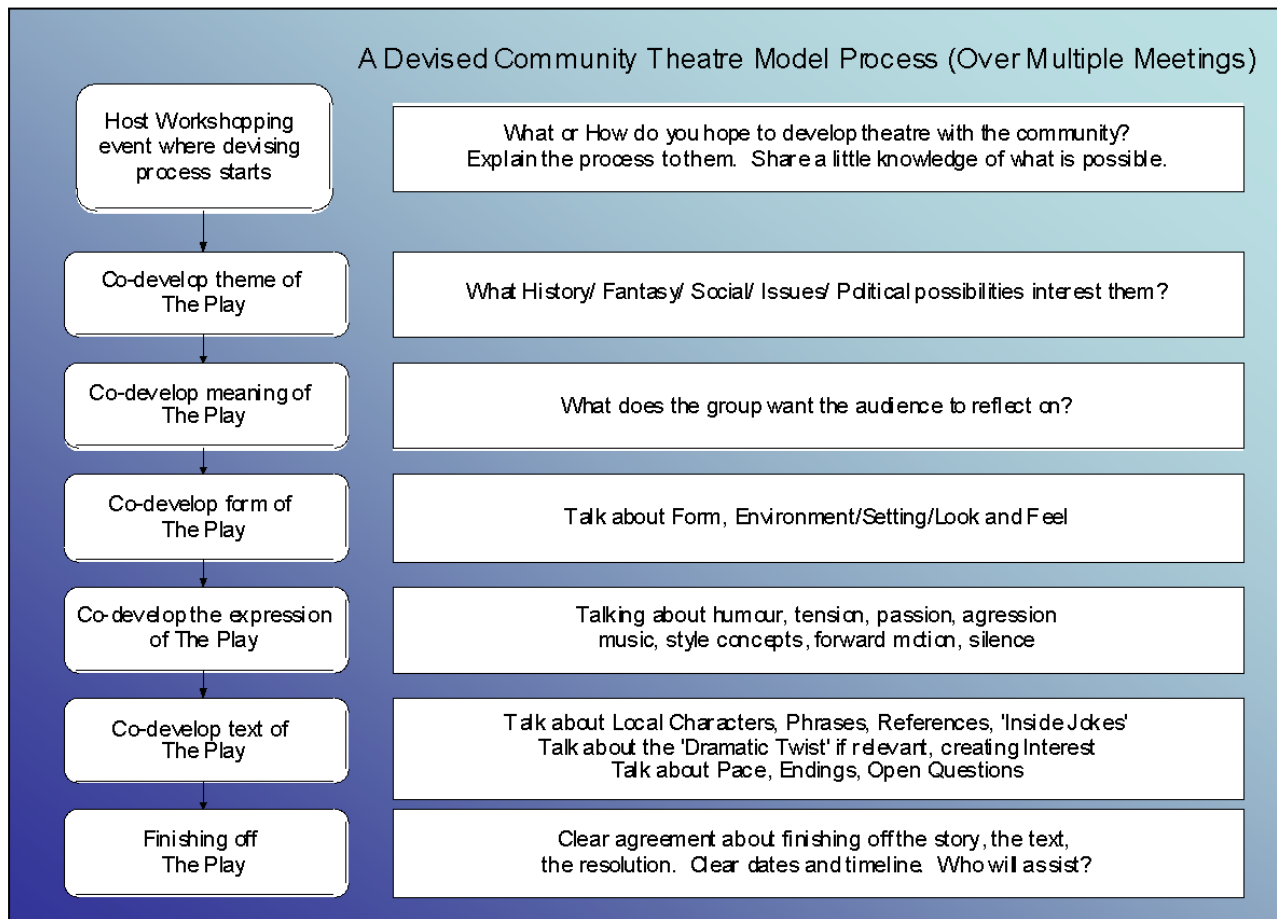
*The findings of this study include that Community Theatre is deeply linked to principles of inclusion. (It is not always the case: There are many who think of theatre in terms of being exclusive to differentiate themselves from others in the sense that it reflects upon their professional ethic, passion, or ability.)*

*From this group of interviewees, many of whom have devoted their life's work to delivering theatre including among marginalised groups, **the values** of community theatre they spoke about are well defined and are discussed below as the **starting point** to understanding the ways they answered the five sub questions (arranged as chapters, below).*

*However, taking into account of the value-base that informs the responses to these questions is the first steps.*

### **What is Community Theatre?**

*Definitions of Community Theatre came into the conversation time and time again, in response to the five sub questions, and established common ground in our discussion, triggered conversation and gave me a glimpse of the perspectives of my interviewees:*



**Figure 31. Planning a Devised Process**

Notable ideas from the interviews:

- Theatre is inherently a place of community.
- Theatre is all about creativity but involving connection with others.
- You need to think about how you make it happen.
- Creative expression is something that's innate within us.
- The community element represents the glue within society.
- Theatre is live storytelling that anybody can do.
- You tell your own story, you tell of what's around you.
- Creating stories out of your own community. People love to talk about themselves!
- In different countries, it's the same, but expressed on a different cultural map.
- It's about the similarities instead of the differences. We want to welcome.
- It's natural. E.g. Babies mimic people. They are doing their own little theatre.
- If you're depressed it's a place to be *not-depressed* because you're celebrating joy.
- It can be for people of all ages. (Multigenerational theatre work)

### **Values, Missions, Goals**

Many responses discussed values and missions and goals of theatre groups, and performers – relating to community as well as theatre. (This section is reminiscent of a whiteboard where diverse ideas are distilled from the group, like at a brainstorming session if I had been able to get all these interviewees together in one room.)

#### Values:

- It is - it's hopeful, but - what else are you going to be? (Loved this Ashley!)
- In our education department, in our own mission statement is the word "Joy"
- It's about courage - being courageous and having courage and overcoming and connecting through relationships
- "What **can** be done?" I always quote that. Not "We can't do that because.."
- It really does not have to be about 'glitz'
- At McCarter we share how we do things in the hope that it may benefit others.
- We're here for enjoyment
- Don't "dig for pain". Why do that? Use theatre to bring out people's strengths and resilience.
- In historical re-enactment theatre it is important to be true to the subject and ok to use the language he/she used to describe their world.
- It isn't necessary to over-rely on strong language to get a point across in theatre
- That to me was a gauntlet thrown down. I said "Wait a minute!" Eventually I reapplied. New Jurors: I got the grant. (Courage, Kandie!)
- I think the most important thing is that you actually *trust* one another, that's it's like a mutually beneficial relationship that you're seeking to build
- You have to be very clear about why you were doing it, and what it is you want to do with this work.
- I want to create experiences that are both *art and community*, that help people come together and share some joy
- Being able to be part of seeing someone's life change and to be part of that - it's really something special! (*Laughs heartily*)
- You can *produce important work* without having commercial hit-making as your primary goal
- A lot of this is driven by our anti-racism work ... As a group we commit that this is the way that we're going to work.

#### Missions:

- Working collaboratively with community partners while respecting our own needs and directions
- Connecting to people, connecting to community, feeling love as individuals, within a group or within the world.
- Creating a supportive environment with inter-cultural dividends
- The word PLAY is what we are creating right? That word means to be spontaneous and to pursue your desires. To have fun, right?
- Exploring our relationship to history, what history can tell us about the world today and really asking tough questions about the institutions that shape our country and the world.
- We do want to help West Virginia, we do want to help build the community... And to bring them into the fold a little and make them feel welcome.
- That tension between the more exclusive theatre from New York and the lack of development of local theatre *here*, ... I was like 'I know this isn't it, and there's got to be some other way to do it

- The other part of it is showing up. Being there. Letting people know that you're still around. That you're not a 'fly by night' person, especially when working with communities like this that are pretty vulnerable. Be consistent
- One of (my main themes) is trying to work with the strengths and skills that people already have, and develop those rather than trying to fit everyone into a one-size-fits-all box.
- I think that the depth of our relationships, individual relationships with each of our participants and their families... their trust in our organisation has deepened because we have demonstrated that we care about their wellbeing. We're not just interested if they sign up for our theatre classes.

#### Organisational Perspectives and Goals

- My job is finding avenues for people to find their way into this thing that I love
- We set up East Haddam Stage Company. The mission is minimal set, maximum connection. That is our goal.
- The creation of Rent with its commercial success is a by-product of NYTW pursuing its developmental goals... To nurture artists and to work with the community through a host of programs. And also education programs
- To assist in the play selection process, casting, and ... really making all of that happen and to ensure that we're doing it with radical care and radical hospitality. That we at CATF are really doing that kind of work both on stage and off stage that makes a better experience for everyone.
- NYTW is about bringing people together in community and then placing the theatre and the art within that community gathering. It is about bringing people together so that they feel like they have a stake in it.
- People's Light really anchors itself as a centre for community gathering. It's theatre that's at our core but we are a centre for community gathering
- I think the idea of Public Transformation is that we are hosting spaces and projects and events and ideas that bring people together and invite them to dream of the alternate reality - of everything that we are discussing - and hopefully providing some tools and connections and resources to help and bring that dream to reality.
- My favourite part is we get to go, with Barter Players, to two of the most under-served and poorest counties in the nation and we see every single student in their schools... We have built our careers on getting passionate young people, teaching them to be better, while you are teaching them to serve, and while you are serving them.

#### ***Benefits of Theatre to Social, Physical and Emotional Wellbeing***

*This section opens up and explores the Why's. Why do theatre? There are many ways to approach this question. The ultimate answers are probably selfish: "Because I LOVE TO!" I.e. it's a passion for many people. However, from a community perspective there is massive evidence from the responses that theatre really should be supported and recognised as an important social art form for many reasons.*

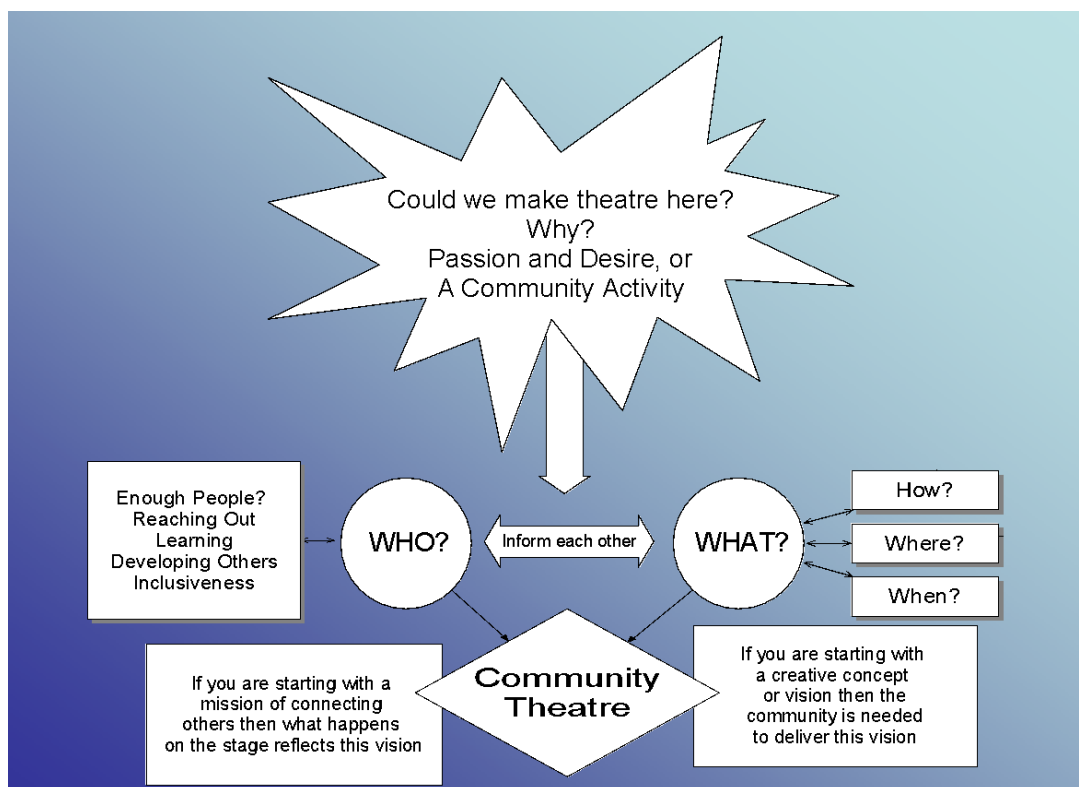


Figure 32. This Study – Looking Deeper

I have a friend who takes guitar lessons online (because of the pandemic). She doesn't have to travel there, she doesn't have to dress up. However, travelling there, getting dressed up, gets you in the role for it, gets you in the mood. If you're going to have a drama class online, and you come from the kitchen to over here, where is that transition?

Whereas if you go to the senior centre, you're going to get dressed, you're going to figure out how you smell. You're going to primp and preen and get up a little bit, turn up and say hi, how you doing.

And then you are 'on' a bit. Because when you have to do a social thing you're 'on'.

And it strengthens the bond between family members as it gives them something to talk about. One thing that is really cool about shows, especially in retirement housing or a senior centre is that after the show the people are always talking about it. Six months later! They'll be saying "When are you going to do the next show?"

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **It Can Give You a Lift**

When you're feeling really, really feeling 'ugh!', and you go and sing in a choir because that's what you signed up for, and you find you get it out of your system. You drive to that rehearsal - you don't even want to go, you don't want to leave the house. All the way there you grumble. You engage with other people that you wouldn't have. And you get it out of your system. You sing it out, and you get it out through your lungs. And you go home in a different world. You get back in your car, go home, you sleep a little bit better. It's cathartic.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*



### **A Safe Space to Play**

That's the thing about theatre - it is a safe space – hopefully. You can play in ways that you might not be able to play normally because of safety issues. Or you're never given the chance. It is pretend, in a sense. It allows people to be people that they are not, or to be people that they do want to be. Or to just express themselves.

*Paula Alekson*

### **Departing From Reality Has it's Benefits**

In our drama class warm-ups I always say "Ok now we're going to move and we're going to stretch and we are going to move from reality to fantasy."

I think that's really important that we have a chance to get away from reality and think about fantasy, create characters, be in unreal situations and not have to deal with reality. The emotional value comes of that escape from reality. It gives them a chance to free themselves a little bit also.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Other Benefits to Health**

It broadens your horizons. I say that I do this for my art. Yes there are of course therapeutic things that come from doing senior theatre, but I always say that I am doing this for my art, for theatre. There are benefits, you're going to feel better and have a great day. The benefits are social/mental/physical/cultural/emotional. Of course social is the strongest because of the spirit de corps.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Finding Yourself and Your Strengths**

That's the thing that got me into theatre in the first place. I was a young person who didn't really know where my group of friends were. I didn't really know where I belonged.

But then, when I did a play and my friends saw me on stage and we got to have a conversation about that then I was like, oh you know something about me now. And we can talk about it.

What this kind of work does is gives everyone in the audience that kind of opportunity to see their grandma, or their child or their neighbour up on stage being a kind of different version of themselves. And then their definition of that person expands because they are like 'I never would've thought they can do that.' And you're like 'You can! It just happens!

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Challenging your Assumptions**

And it breaks down so many misconceptions. You get a company that's very bravely come from Iran. (And I've got a personal experiences of this). With all the non-Islamic world's misconceptions and what have you, and then you have this lovely open-minded theatre company with women on stage performing without veils, talking about sexual politics on stage. You think 'Wow'. This is coming from Iran and they're teaching me about sexual politics. This doesn't fit with the box that I put them in.

You start to think, well where is the truth? Where is this, this town in Iran? I wouldn't actually mind, if I was brave enough, to actually visit it. And so you get people thinking outside the box, people testing their own preconceptions, their own judgements on the world, where they've put things.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Learning About Other People and Cultures**

(On the learning process at Toi Whakaari, New Zealand's premier acting school.)

The whole school, including the board members, go to a Marae and stay there for a whole week. And the whole learning happened in the Marae and in a Maori setting. We learn the Maori way of communal sleep, eating and talking. It gave me a deeper insight and appreciation for the Maori culture and way, and understanding what the culture can do for the art form.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **A Little Pride**

I think for communities it gives them a little pride. People love going and seeing people they know put on a show. And quite a lot of people from your community can be involved. From the lady who makes the tea.

You still have an opening night shindig and again a closing night but that there's not a social feel. I've noticed they are starting to go back to it. They are having a lot more open mic nights and different things like that.

*Helen Horsnell*

Other notable ideas from the interviews about what involvement in theatre does:

- When you build something yourself, you're investing in your own infrastructure, your own society.
- You're ensuring that young people who come up feel to remain in that society.
- You're learning all the time
- It helps us explore the human condition and therefore understand people better
- You have a great show, everybody laughs, and you think I am going to keep doing my lines just like this. Then the next day nobody laughs and you have to figure out why. Not only do you have this adrenaline going on but you also have all this analysis happening cognitively.
- We grow really good kids on the whole (in community theatre). They learn really good life skills. They learn how to be committed, how to be part of a team, and not let people down.

## Chapter One - Small Towns Doing Big Things

### *Making a Start of it*

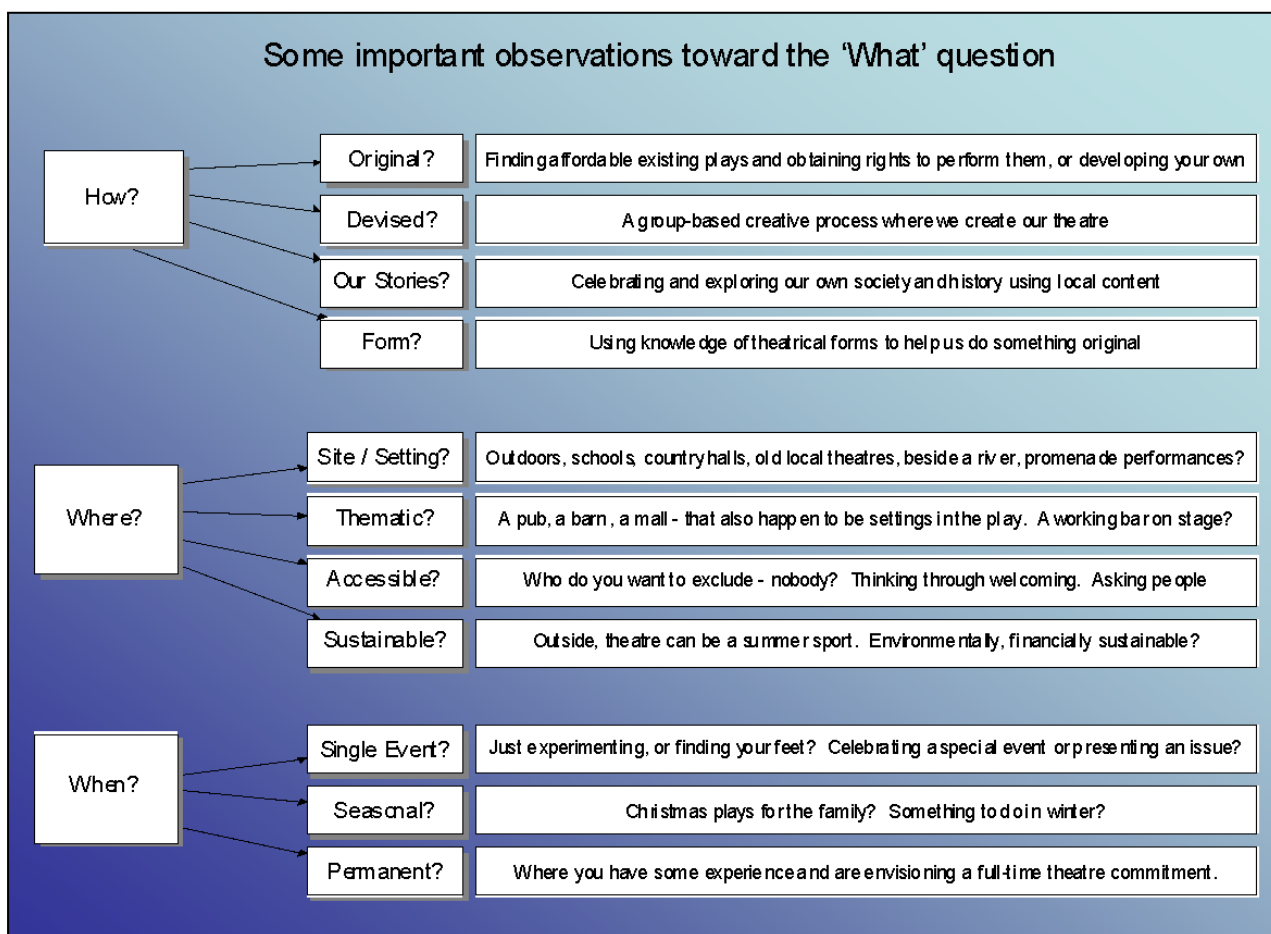
I think there's a really important role for community theatre, and the 'community' part is as important as the 'theatre' part. I don't think it is rocket science. When you get to performing in the Sydney Opera House, sure, there is craft, technique, and a whole business side to it. That's maybe not where community theatre needs to start.

*Betty Siegel*

*Ideas discussed about getting going included:*

- Just Do It!! Pick a project and go for it.
- You can do a play in five days!
- Have you done any kind of public readings of plays? As opposed to fully producing them? That may be a way to pull your community in.
- Communal Sharing: You know, we're going to have a potluck dinner with a fun evening of family activities and that through those activities we are going to come up with a theme around what is important is in our community. And then we might make a small movement piece around that idea. And then we will share those out to each other.
- And then maybe thinking about these as a series of workshops that you are going to build into some sort of communal sharing.
- Start with project work. Think about a year, or a season, and decide "these are the three projects we want to do. We're going to do a pantomime, a 10 minute play festival, and a community reading group. You're developing hopefully some excitement about it in the community. When you tap into that initial community I think it will grow.
- Probing and Piloting a Project - more probing before piloting. People often jump right to the pilot of an idea. Thinking about stepping back and saying "first, probe the idea." Do little experiments that are contained to see if there are legs around that idea and then pilot what you learn from those things.
- Consider Free Content for your Community - My engagement programs are free. Not the theatre productions – they're not, but the programs are free.
- Children's Theatre and Workshops. Another thing is to start with the kids if that's possible, because parents want their kids to be involved. And if you get the kids involved then the parents will be involved.
- Start by doing a Christmas show. Everybody loves a good Christmas show.
- Start simple – Shakespeare in the park may be many years away yet.
- Storytelling is a good starting place. Sitting in a room and sharing stories. Theatre games that we learn: "Let's do mirror". Or you start a story, then I'll add one word, then you add one word. I'll tell a sentence, you tell sentence. You have theatre, starting right there.
- Free Workshops lead to engagement in theatre. Ask if people are interested. Start doing workshops for free and start to build some trust. We did this until summer and said 'we're going to do this play, who wants to audition?'
- Folks who had already met us through organisations, the contacts at those organisations could tell us 'These six people want to be in the play', and we said great they're in. Then we had open auditions. Folks who had heard about us were invited to just show up.
- Begin with any particular need ...by connecting with those individuals. Once you start there, it all just kind of blossoms open. But it is very easy to get overwhelmed. Start somewhere specific

*Of course, it helps the more you know about what you are doing. But you have to start somewhere. There are so many ideas below, I had trouble deciding how much detail to report. In reality, the possibilities are endless. But to get the creative process started, consider these perspectives/observations:*



**Figure 33. The 'What' Question**

### ***Some Ideas, Applications and Forms of Theatre***

Paul Maunder advised during his interview of the benefit of building a foundation of knowledge to help build on the work of others and adding form to theatre you create.

And having a knowledge of the different theatre forms to call on which I think you need in the community theatre space because that particular content will require this particular form... I think a bit of a study of community theatre wouldn't go amiss in terms of those forms.

*Paul Maunder*

*There is theatre for 'pure entertainment'. There is theatre designed to change society. There were many theatre terms for theatre forms mentioned including many approaches which were not expounded upon. For example:*

- *Musicals*
- *Drama*
- *Ensemble Theatre (See "User Terms")*
- *Kitchen Sink Theatre*
- *Comedy*

*The following lists the more detailed observations of theatre-based activities, theatrical forms and ideas that I encountered on my journey. While not all of them were in rural locations, these are ideas that may be adaptable to local context. You may need to find someone experienced to help, or just embrace the learning curve yourself, read something then and just hang on: but these are a starting point.*

### **Children's Theatre**

Children's theatre is the answer to just about every problem you have because you get the children, you get the parents as well and they can go on for years. Sometimes you get a good group of them and maybe get the chance to put on shows like Grease or something because you have the right mix of boys and girls. You might not have them the next year - it might be their last year and you might have to go back to doing shows that involve the whole community rather than a show they really want to do.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Contemporary theatre**

Contemporary theatre, for us, is about connecting to the now ... We do plays that we think challenge questions about current norms or explore challenges that we are all facing today and in society and that our audience members will as if it relates to them in that moment. That's when they walk out of the theatre and they can say oh I know what they are talking about - I experienced that, that's something that is happening in the world today. Other people may have a different definition.

An example of contemporary theatre that we are trying to produce in this pandemic world, is a piece called The House of the Negro Insane. Now that play is set in the 1930s so someone might think it's a historical drama but it is a really blistering look at the idea of incarceration and how it's used against black people about things that continues to be an issue in today's society.

...

We had an article in the Washington post one year about a play that had a biracial couple - about a biracial relationship. Somebody tore out the newspaper clipping and wrote us a note that said this is exactly why I won't come to your festival any more.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Comedy, Musical, Contemporary Theatre**

I'm in comedy musical production. It's a way of challenging without giving in to stereotypes: "...I trained in a colonised concept of theatre, and so challenging what that is and grabbing the good bits out for what serves us and leaving the rest behind, then doing the same with our cultures, moves us forward" (Quote prior to interview, read in Timeout Magazine Online, Wed Jan 8 2020)

*Tainui Tukiwaho*

### **Pantomime**

Traditionally Pantomime is the way that you pay for the rest the season because everybody comes to see the pantomime you know. It involves everybody. You can build in local stories, you can build in the local anecdotes, the local characters, the idiosyncrasies of the town, personalities, and certain businesses. You can make it local, very very local, and you going to sell your seats out.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Documentary theatre**

The story comes from usually one member of the company and people invest in this story because it was the story that they responded most to, that resonated for them.

There's a particularly good group in Berlin, an amateur theatre company, and they chose a story of an older holocaust survivor and her life now in Germany. It's a familiar story that's been told before but it had its own different facets. It was the story of where she came from, her experiences. The group decided that this is a story that they wanted to tell. They wrote the story around her and created these roles and told the story. It was based on her life and based on her telling of those facets of her life. Somebody within the group was responsible for developing the text, and they had support in terms of dramaturgy, you know, structuring the play and getting it right.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Immersive theatre**

Immersive theatre is like..... In our pieces ... the audience is set within the world of the play, whether that is you're sitting around a table and the play is happening all around the room but we're all at a banquet table. Or, one of our pieces where you sit in this hot air balloon and the show is happening all around you rather than the traditional - where the audience is in one section and actors in the other.

*Paul Brewster*

(Me: Like when we were at the Globe Theatre in London and we were the peasants and the peasants really got involved?) Yes! When people complain about people not having decorum in the theatre I'm like well you know in Shakespeare's times...

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Forum Theatre**

And then there's the forum which is called forum theatre. It is participatory technique where people from the audience come on stage and then engage in the forum itself in trying to solve the issues of the core of the play.

### **Before things got divided...**

The Greeks divided the public between audience and actor. The birth of the actor comes from Greek Theatre. Before that it was the ritualistic community gathering Theatre. I should bring in those elements too - there were parts of Greek theatre where there wasn't a single actor or a chorus it was all of us together and then things got divided.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Original Content that Engages the Imagination**

...Not Disney, Sesame St, all of those, the Nickelodeon, PBS, Arena style shows. We wanted to be making 'small batch' shows that really engaged the whole child and had them lean into curiosity, and are made with original stories. That was the seed behind it, the idea of a bold original production for young people where we would blur the lines between where the show ends and life begins. We really try and put a lot of pre-show content around our pieces and then we try to make the edges of the theatrical experience a little blurry so that it really engages the imagination on a lot of fronts.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Political theatre**

When people ask "what's political theatre?" It's personal theatre that is within a very concrete, explicit context. We don't do a play about every single instance of racism, or about every single instance of homophobia - that would be a very boring play - just would not engage an audience. A play works where there's specificity. Where you can identify with the people in it, what they are experiencing, within a very specific context. ... It's cliché that 'All the world's a stage' but there is truth within it and the truth is theatre is a mirror to a society for self reflection. It's a space to ask really tough questions. If a play solves the conflict and the drama it tends not to be a very good play in my opinion.

Theatre is, at its best, asking really complicated difficult questions that we really have no answers for. It's artists inviting audiences to ponder how can we be better at being human.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Survival Stories - Local**

*(We had talked about the Gundagai flood story)*

It's a gut wrenching story. I think the hero in it (the Indigenous man), he could've just stood at the top of the hill and said 'well we told you so'. Instead they helped save people. There are so many layers there. That's the kind of story everyone flocks too. Disaster movies are huge! People will flock to these things. Oh my gosh! Strife, war, people killing each other, and disasters happening and they just want to watch as spectators. What you got there is you got a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, base human, survive or don't story.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Living History Theatre**

I had this combination of my love of history and love of performance and dance and that's where I started to overlap into the living history field. We do everything from individual living history programs to scripted pieces and I would say 50 to 75% of the ones that I produce are local stories. Mostly 18th and 19th Century, a little bit into the 20th Century stories. It's a way for all the different locales and places what we visit to develop local storytelling.

We've got a historic house down the road. They have new management and they asked me to a meeting, saying we want this to be an arts venue, not just another house museum. There is a bunch of stories to be told theatrically.

### **Historical Characters**

You have to make sure that you don't sugar-coat things. For example I'm going to pick a really controversial person right now in United States. Henry Ford - let's pick him. Everyone glorified Henry Ford as the man who started the assembly line. (Well he didn't he just made it better - there had been assembly lines in the textiles and clothing industry for some time but it wasn't nearly as big.) But Henry Ford was rabidly anti-Semitic. He was funding anti-Jewish things. People don't know this about him. They see him as 'that guy' and they want to portray 'that guy'.

This is how I've seen people tell the story of someone who is not who they thought they were. You do the stereotype, usually in first person, (I did this and I did this) and then a third person narrator or a storyteller, they're bringing these characters to life but they're filling in the gaps that the person themselves wouldn't ever admit to.

You do have to be careful if you don't want to be accused of wanting to bring down people's idols. Well it's not about bringing people down, it's about humanising them and telling their story. You have to tell the whole story, but having this other voice come in and say 'and then do you know what happens?' and filling in that gap from a third-person, researcher standpoint. You can have a character say "I was doing research on Edgar Allen Poe and I found this whole thing about Henry Ford! And then the actor portraying Henry Ford takes it from there and does all this great stuff."  
*Kandie Carle*

### **Historical Houses**

They understood that I was not just coming in to use them as a venue. That was an uphill climb (until this year actually) I launched there in 2004. It took until this year and a turnover of their not-for-profit wing of the Friends, for them to understand the value of having live theatre there.

What the subject, William Gillette, who created Sherlock Holmes for the stage, did for the art world was tremendous and what the State Park does is to focus more on the structure of his house, the physicality of the structure. They don't talk about the way that he changed the way theatre was done in the USA. It went from very stylised to much more controlled and naturalistic. He was a neighbour of Mark Twain, who gave Gillette \$3000 to start his theatre career. He was like a Brad Pitt of his day. He also had patents for a number of theatrical devices, inventions and special effects.

And the doorway in was my understanding heart. I learned about trees, I learned about grasses, and about stone walls. I learned about some of the architecture. The Park staff saw it day-to-day. They stood back and said 'I dunno, whatever as long as it doesn't cost us anything.' And then they realised. They would stand there and watch people coming to see the shows, which are free for the public, and the response we were getting. I had to do surveys and things like that for the grant. And I shared that information with the park staff and they were very impressed with the tie-in. But it took talking to the parks people and getting them to understand the value behind what this man Gillette did for theatre and for the arts in general.

*Kandie and Casey Carle*

### **Monologues**

What the Onstage Senior program evolved into is a group of seniors who are interested in performing, and interested in storytelling, to have the performers solicit interviews with people to collect their stories on a theme. These could then be adapted into monologues that the actors could perform, for example, a theme of "Always Change". That's what stories are about - what affects someone to think of change? There is actually always change.

Another theme might be "Risk-taking", and so they would create a prompting question to ask whoever their subject was. They would have a recording device and would ask "Can you tell me a story about a time that you took a risk?" They would record it, the recording would be transcribed and the transcriptions would be collected by the director. The director would choose which stories to perform and sculpt the monologues so that they were more dramatically compelling. Not changing it, but refining it in the way it's told.

*Paula Alekson*

What drama is not and what theatre is not, is monologue. There are monologues within drama but typically that's an actor talking to an audience and in that interaction the actor is engaging the attention of the audience in very direct ways - that's the



main scene partner, your audience, your audience always plays a role. Theatre is about dialogue, it's about human story telling, it's about relationships.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Immersive Theatre**

On audience participation - we have had some of the lyrics to songs printed on the back of the program and then we had a moment of like 'okay everyone stand up, follow the lyrics on the back, and we're going to sing the last verse together' or something like that.

One year we had a guy in the neighbourhood who leads drum circles. He opens up his minivan and has 28 djembe in the back. There was sort of a summoning moment that happened in the play. He taught half the cast how to play the djembe and then they all came out into the aisles of the audience and played magnificently among them.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Integrating Other Art forms**

I really want to bring theatre and music and dance together. I really want to have some productions that will have some live music. I like music, theatre and dance but I haven't brought the theatre aspect in yet. I want to show that all of these art forms can be brought together on one platform in a very powerful manner.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **A Short Movie**

We filmed it over a couple weekends. We didn't have any money, a thousand bucks or something. Then the editing - that's a bit of a trick.. You can film these things reasonably cheaply - borrow gear - but then, post-production, that's harder. The software program just coped, but only just. Took about a month.

*Paul Maunder*

### **Working with the aesthetic**

There are many things that we can do to engage with audiences (not necessarily just with a disability). Work with the aesthetic... We had a working bar on stage - the audience could have a drink and then the bar became part of the play.

Me: You could select performance spaces that fit with the play!

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Zoom in, zoom out structure**

We use this phrase of 'zoom in, zoom out' structure where the play has anchors with a full group scene and then there is going to be one-on-one time: with a puppet, and an audience member and a cast member together and the cast member is improvising.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Reworked Shakespeare Musical for Cultural Connection**

It is a constant conversation. I first wondered 'Do we put up Shakespeare so freely?' You know, a Shakespeare musical? For some people in academia, you know, it's like "Argghhh NO!" I personally disagree with making such a differentiation. I personally believe that Shakespeare - theatre in it's highest of forms - can and should be shared with all communities. I am still very young and I will have the opportunity to do all the art that I am wanting to do.

*Maria Calderon*

### **Devised theatre**

*The processes of devising theatre – or “collective creation” - is a method of theatre-making in which the production originates from collaboration of a group. This section examines devised theatre processes because these processes came up so frequently in discussions about community theatre, scriptwriting and theatre-based educational programs. It is a **key concept**.*

Sometimes you get a group of people and you say "What are the issues?" What are the contradictions? What are the problems? Devised theatre is where you come up with an idea, as a group, and you work around it. You create theatre from whatever is around you. You don't rely on somebody else's pre-constructed text. You are inspiring others - whoever else comes into that circle to create that play. And you're helping the brain, let's face it - the creative instincts, to create elements.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

*Consider the following example:*

#### **Hobson Street Theatre Company – by people from the streets**

All our shows are devised by the company members. After we did the show about racism, we got everyone together and said 'okay what are we going to do now?' We had a bit of a roundtable discussion and someone said they'd like to do a show about friends and friendship and what does that mean.

It ended up having a lot of songs in it - obviously there are a lot of great songs about friendship. And we have some strong singers in the group. The process of devising included a lot of small group work, people working in groups of two or three, coming up with scenes that got stitched together by the director to make a totality of it.

*Bronwyn Bent*

*In the following example certain cues were given by the trainer to a group of aspiring authors, then the devising continued into the directing phase:*

#### **Using Devised Technique in class**

She would ask: "If rage could speak, what would it say?" And then she has people write a monologue. And then she says "If joy could speak, what would it say?", and then we will go around the room and people will perform those as monologues.

After someone shares their gorgeous piece of writing (I find anything anyone writes beautiful, I just love when people express themselves), we will say "okay this is great! There is this line where you repeated "Oh Oh Oh"". Ask them "What did you think of that? Did that tell your story? Would you want to adjust something about your writing or would you want to adjust something about how we performed it? And so they get to be the maker of their own story. (And then people are like okay I want to be a playwright.)

*Haley Sherwood*

#### **Providing a Safe, Fertile Environment for creativity**

*The next article demonstrates the power of food to bring in co-creativity:*

Create some event around the theme with food. You bring in your cultural food, and you add some other creative elements. You create an evening. It may be someone playing fiddle or something like that. Then some dance. Creative elements, so that you've got those bridges. You build the context, you get to know the people. You build an element of trust.

When it comes to "Do you fancy getting involved in some theatre?" that trust relationship is there. You know that you respect each other's cultures. You know that you respect each other's boundaries.

That's my experience anyway, food! Potluck, sure! Get them to share. And pick up on the storytelling. Get the stuff from the past, the stuff that makes your identity who you are. Talk about "Well my grandfather came here from..." And so that you realise you all came from somewhere else, and that's a common denominator. The majority have come from somewhere else (except for Indigenous peoples).

You've all brought something into the pot. Nobody's got authority over another in this 'melting pot' and the storytelling that comes with it. You can discuss "Why did your family come here? What were you coming from? Was it bad?" Was it for economic reasons? Was it for the whole refugee situation?

And so it's storytelling that brings people together, because you hear common notes. The Greek person who came after the Second World War for economic reasons, and because there was a civil war in Greece, have come for the same reasons as the Syrian who has only just arrived. The same basic motivations. With the storytelling and the food, you can create theatre from there.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Relationship is at the Core of Devised Theatre**

If you as an artist don't gain that trust and respect and dictate to others what that experience was like, the theatre experience could be worse than intended "We came to see a show and it's about all these deep issues we were not ready for emotionally or psychologically. . . "

"You know when people have not expressed opinions about things and the artist then filters them through their own experience rather than the community's experience - it's not an experience of the community. They may feel manipulated, ambushed, or experience a dissection of their personal space. Ideally the community work is done with the people in the community. The devising is with people in the community."

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Approaches to Performances & Spaces**

*Very often, asking interviewees about 'creating community theatre from scratch' leads to ideas of theatre in less-typical performance spaces. This section also covers some creative approaches to scheduling theatre works. The predominant response among interviewees asked "How would you do theatre from scratch in a small town?" was to **use food** – dinner theatre formats, pot luck nights etc. It is one idea I plan to put to use next year.*

### **Spaces Suited to Purpose**

I think sometimes our more adventurous work ends up on Stage 2 because, as you know from being in the situations, it's really nice to have an intimacy in the audience when you are tackling work like that. That leads people to want to talk about it. And where it is not just tighter, but where the front row is sitting right on the stage, you are just so close that it seems to open up people to talking about things in a different way. Our Stage 2, the more intimate room, is like our 'Off-Broadway'. And you might hear more strong language on the small stage than we would present in our main stage,

considering audience expectations. And we might deal with more challenging topics on our small stage. Our main audience might say "I do not want to see a play about a mother who killed her small children, I'm not interested in it. I want to go see a musical!"

But there is a portion of our audience interested on a more mission-driven show, tackling a subject that is important to our community, and yes it may not be a musical that you want to see but there is an audience there and it's going to be a service-oriented project. In some ways, although where we do even more commercial titles on Stage 1, the way that we will go about them can open up conversations as well, in surprising ways. But I think we do compartmentalise by size of audiences.

*Katy Brown*

### **Theatre in the Community**

It's political theatre, its poor people theatre, it's done on the streets, it's done on a shoestring, it's theatrical. It uses what's engaging about theatre but it doesn't have to be professional theatre or polished theatre - it just has to be engaging for a community which makes it relevant for their community. It's interactive, it's call-and-response, it's many different forms.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Site Specific Story Telling**

Something that has become very popular here in the United States is 'Site Specific Story Telling', not in a theatre. They do this in Bath England, and a variety of different places.

#### **- Cemetery Tours**

Take the cemetery tours for example, where you go through the cemetery and an actor portrays someone who died. They perform based on the tombstones. For example, here is John Smith, there is his tombstone and the playwright has done a little research and it usually is because the tombstones have really interesting stuff on them. For example: "We have someone buried here at Saint Stevens who it actually says that he died when the bell from the church fell on his head" Wow, it's a great story! Have the people come up from behind their tombstones and tell the story of their deaths. And a little bit about their life, And how they are grumpy and how they wish they had a nicer tombstone like Mary over there.

They can vary between being almost slapstick and almost Laurel-and-Hardy-ish to being sad - incredibly sad. One is a bride-to-be that died before her wedding. There's all these different stories you can tell. They have done it very successfully in Hawaii and not just for Halloween, this is real storytelling - underground, deep grassroots.

#### **- House Tours**

You could have scripted stories about the community and go on a house tour. They used to do it during holidays here in East Haddam, it was called the 12 Doors. You actually went to 12 different doors (the doors were outside the house that was included) and you got to go in and there was storytelling and all kinds of holiday stuff. But it doesn't have to be holiday specific. It can be any number of things from there - eg how did that person get through the first World War?

Any number of different themes - let me tell you about my grandpa who built this house, And the audience is there on your porch and people will pay money to see

these things produced. And if someone in their community is the one who wrote it and you got directing and your cast is producing it that is the quintessential community building use of the storytelling model.

### **- Local Storytelling in Historical Settings**

I got hired to play Isabella Beecher Hooker, the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Isabella was big in the suffrage movement. I was hired to portray her. It wasn't fully scripted, it used guidelines and the whole idea was to interact with people and once they ask questions, go to them.

One of the things that was interesting was they wanted me to be in different places. I could be outside in the garden. I could be upstairs in the bedroom. I could be in the parlour, I could be in different places. And in a small community like that if you've got a family that lived in a house for 4 or 5 generations, there's somebody who's got a great story there.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Relaxed Performances**

Relaxed performance is part of sensory friendly performance and there's been a lot of different terms popping up for similar types of things. Lighting is set at a level so people can exit and enter as needs be. The lighting effects are modified - any strobing is taken out. Sometimes sequences are revised slightly so that they are less intense, and all of the sound cues are fitted within a specific decibels range so that it's not at rock concert level. It's at a little bit of a lower level that's a little more sensory friendly.

### **- Props**

The audience are invited to create out of card and foam stickers, a paper telescope that they can see the idea of going to the moon. And throughout the show, as the character uses their own telescope, at a certain points you see the kids all pull out their telescopes and they use it in that moment of the show.

The invitation to the show comes from a character in the play. And so it's: "Mr Fog is inviting you on the one thousandth balloon ride of the Fog Family Balloon Society. And so there is a pre-show video that is in that world of invitation. And for some of our workshops we had a postcard that was left in the classroom that said "Mr Fog is inviting you to their 1000th balloon ride

### **- Tactile experiences**

We give show bags containing fidget spinners that they are able to manipulate. It keeps their fingers busy and it helps their mind be free to tune in. Some people have that experience of having something to keep their fingers busy so that their mind can focus on other things. It may not appear to a neurotypical person that the person is paying attention because they are playing with that thing but in fact it is fiddling with the thing that is letting them tune into you.

We had a snugly blanket in the bag - it was a bit like a weighted blanket that they could use. There were moments when it was supposed to come out of the bag and be used for the show but if we had a young person who was very excited about the blanket, even though that's the last thing we introduce, we would say... "There's your blanket. Enjoy!"

Throughout the whole play, our puppets were all able to be hugged, pulled and grabbed. We had a whole sensory basket on the journey.

The audience member came and sat on the hot air-balloon and had a one-to-one interaction with a performer and then at a point along the journey we would use a fan to create wind when it was time for lift off. Sometimes we would use a parasol for the same effect.

We would have scented mists that we put in the air for various moments where we might come across a new smell in the piece. We would have egg shakers for a moment where the birds would have a concert.

We tried to think through all of the primary senses and how we might be communicating the story through those senses, and looking at them as support to the experience.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Promenade performances**

Promenade performances move around. The play is going to start in one spot and then we're going to move to other locations by the time that it is done. One example was within the Park Avenue Armoury. We had five different rooms and the audience went throughout the rooms as they wished and the scenes were on kind of a loop that would happen and then there would be other scenes that would happen all at the same time and then it would kind of reset. Different groups would move through in sequence, and actually at that particular one it was very much like choose your own adventure go where ever you're interested in you can see it from all different angles.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Pop-up Performances**

A pop up for instance is where you have a schedule of performances, and then something comes up where an author is doing a book tour. And they had another book that was made into a mini-series for television or that was used for young audiences. Or an artist, an illustrator that is doing something that relates to what you're doing too in the theatre arts. You can tie it in and say you are bringing in an illustrator to talk about what it's like to illustrate for a book. When an opportunity 'pops up' you go and it's exciting because it's not something that's on your schedule, it's something that's an added excitement.

The Abbington Playhouse has done it a number of times - they will announce that they will have a pop-up cabaret night in three weeks on Saturday. Out of nowhere you will get an email that says we just thought that, with the dreary weather, that we'll have a pop-up cabaret night. Buy your tickets here. And they are half the price of show tickets.

Also reach out to novelists, writers, people who have gone on to be everything from screenwriters to whatever, who have, like you were suggesting there, a connection there. We tend to call those 'Pop-ups' and they become fundraisers.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Repertory Theatre**

What we do is the repertory and what's different about that is that it's not the same plays repeated - it's the same company putting on multiple plays at once. We do two plays in every theatre and they are different plays from the afternoon to the evening so we have three theatres that are running and in a weekend you can see all six. We rep them - we move them in and out of the theatres like within an hour.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Community-scaled Inclusive Productions/ Spectaculars**

*Many great programs were discussed that utilized the leveraging power of collaboration with other types of community groups to support communities in partnership through theatre.*

#### **Community Spectaculars**

Lucy and Laura basically just started calling organisations that already exist in the area that have nothing to do with theatre. That was the criteria - that they don't have anything to do with theatre, because the other arts organisations have already kind of found their arts people. What we are trying to do is awaken that in people who have maybe not considered themselves artists.

They called places like the council and the youth centre. There was an organisation that was like a housing agency for previously housing insecure veterans. They called a day program for folks with disabilities. They called a hip hop dance group. They called basically other community pillars in the area and they said hey we think you're cool we want to hang out with you we want to be your friend. I'm not kidding when they would literally say that 'hey I'm just someone else out in the world who thinks you are interesting.'

We're lucky that we're in a position where the play is built, literally written, exactly for purpose, and the purpose is to create a giant spectacle. We want it to be big. Our first production had about 60 people, the second production had over 100 people and the third and the following have been more like the 75 range, which is still plenty of people.

It's a lot, (definitely a lot) to manage for sure, having that many people involved. I just mean in terms of logistics, like emails and phone calls and things. Once everyone's there - and everyone is there for the same purpose - then, if people get confident like you're saying it's not about managing them or teaching them, it's about making something together and honouring whatever anyone brings to that space.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Other Theatre-based Activities and Approaches**

*Of course, Theatre isn't necessarily limited to putting on shows. This section contains more important ideas for a theatre group.*

#### **Collaboration with other community models**

Right back at the start we also had this idea of doing work with Auckland Street Choir, because that fits really well with 'being friends with someone' and there were a number of people in that choir experiencing homelessness. We liked the idea of reaching out to a likeminded organisation and similar group. They would come and perform as well. They were part of the shows and were on stage at the same time and, because it was so song heavy, they could contribute to that as well. When we toured it to Wellington and Dunedin, we worked with local community choirs in those towns. That was a great way to meet people in those places, and to create local involvement, and with a choir, we sent them the songs beforehand. In both places we only needed two afternoons of rehearsals before we did the show.

*Bronwyn Bent*

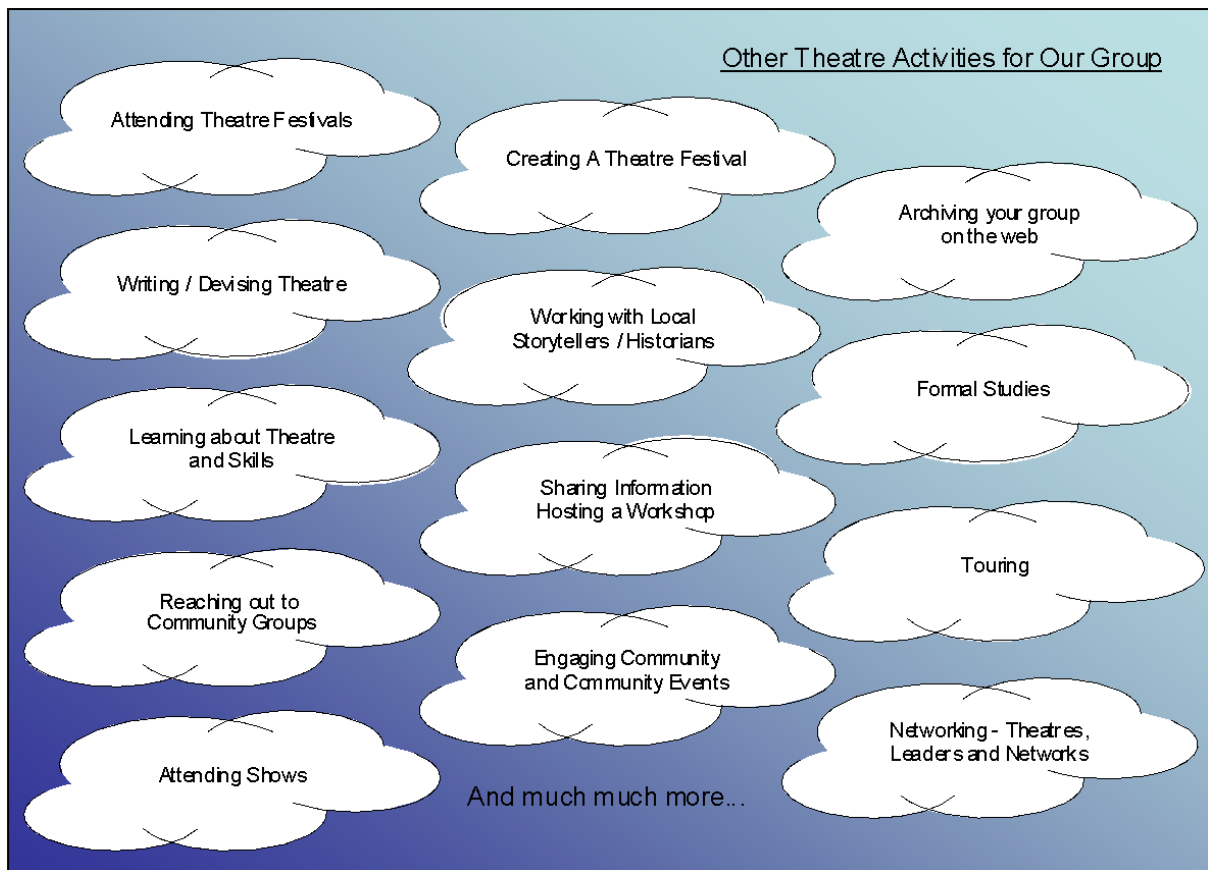


Figure 34. Other Activities

### Public Works through working with Community-based organisations

Public Works Dallas is a program which creates ambitious works of participatory theatre through long-term partnerships city wide. We start by building partnerships with community-based organisations. We have a family centre with us, a jubilee park and community centre and two recreation centres from the city of Dallas.

We focus on: supporting senior citizens; Jubilee is more educational after-school programming etc for children in the community. We look for those organisations with a mission of "community". Throughout the year we offer theatre classes and workshops at each of those sites. After building those relationships with those people and partners we invite them to participate in our community pageant in the summer where we come together.

The last time we did this pageant was 2019. We had 100 participants from the community performing onstage. Adding up with the production team and the stage management team, the whole company sums up to 200 people. We show it to 2000 - 3000 people per weekend.

*Maria Calderon*

### Using teams for specific portions of the performance

When Public Works started, the very first show was a musical adaptation of The Tempest by William Shakespeare, our first pageant in 2017. For every community centre we are connected to, the people who would come from that centre would be a team or a part of the ensemble that represented that side of our community.



For example, the largest community group was represented in a theme, probably 30 people, the *water spirits*. Then, when one thing happened in the play, they would have a certain choreography and a certain song they would sing. For the last pageant, "As You Like It", at the end of it in the wedding, there were rose petals coming down from up in the house with everyone dancing together. It was very useful to divide people into teams and not have to change from costume to costume every time, each team just sticking with their theme.

For our last project - the one that we filmed - we did the same thing where from each of our three community partners who participated, each of the three were part of a different group. Because of Covid we were limited on the number of people wherever we worked, so we had up to 20 people from each group. Once we hit 20, no-one else was able to sign up.

On each site it was on a different theme, with it's own different world and costume design and set design etc., all connected by the same article - which was an umbrella. The umbrellas were a big part of the project. That way we, you know divided and conquered!

*(Me: Did each site have leaders?)* The CEO or board member participated, as part of the agreement. That way we had someone on site to lead or represent the community members throughout the whole process.

*Maria Calderon*

### **Student Projects - Collaboration.**

Recently we had a collaboration with a university here who have a paper which is called Creativity in the Community. They have students who go and do some sort of a creative project within a community organisation. We worked with them for 12 weeks, which was the first time we had ever done anything like that. It was really fun and it was great for our crew to be working with a whole bunch of different people and lots of young people who came with a lot of different energy. The students did a lovely job, being quite open-hearted, going with the flow.

I'm sure you know that, when you're working with community groups, sometimes attendance ebbs and flows, depending what's going on. And for them it's just a normal thing. Even though people can be really enthusiastic they just can't turn up for a few weeks because of whatever else is going on. I think it was a good lesson for the students: it's not like university where you have to turn up otherwise you are failed. We're more flexible.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Festivals**

*One way of expanding on the achievement of community (amateur theatre) experientially is to give small theatres the opportunity to show their work to each other and collectively to audiences. Festivals are happening in the most unusual places and are creating amazing cultural and social exchanges.*

### **Little Festivals**

"Festival" doesn't have to mean a state sponsored event with a massive theatre and glitz and all the rest of it. There's a lovely little festival - a national festival - that happens in Belgium every year, in Flanders. It's at a little town called Westouter. And the little town opens up every space it possibly can to create theatre.

It might be somebody's garage, it might be at a shop. It might be at the public toilets. They create theatre around a space. A church vestry, a pub, a street, but mostly garages or barns.

They brought the world festival of amateur theatre there in about 2015. And they solicited applications, and selected companies who were prepared to perform in a garage for 25 people. Four times a day, for 25 people each time.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Liverpool, Nova Scotia, population 2653**

One of my favourite models is from the town of Liverpool in Nova Scotia - not a big town. (Not as wide spread as New South Wales, but) the communities are dispersed. Liverpool is the hub of the area. They have a theatre that was built in the early part of the 20th century, a theatre that they still wanted to use. Eventually, a little theatre company set itself up called the Winds of Change. And then somebody decided it would be nice to see theatre from somewhere else. It would be nice to see what other people are doing.

They decided that, every two years they would invite amateur theatre companies from other countries and that they would hold an international theatre festival. Somehow I got invited, sometime in the early 90s, and I fell in love with it, - with the town - and I fell in love with the festival.

They make it viable by hosting the companies. The companies from overseas stay in people's homes. They get to know the local families, and the local families get to know them. And bonds are made that last for centuries. Any amateur theatre company that goes to a theatre festival is used to getting there under their own steam. They might find when they get there they will find that they will be accommodated somehow and they will be fed and transported around.

Those are things that they had to find - enough food and money to feed them, for the duration of the festival; they wanted all the groups to be there for the whole of the festival week, They felt that someone in amateur theatre might devote a week of their holidays to their hobby.

They integrate the local schools, and do workshops in the schools. A company might do a singing workshop, or sing some of the songs they happen to have in their show. Or do a workshop on where they're from and what makes them tick, and what are the priorities for their communities.

They get the local businesses involved. Every single one of the local shops is allocated one of the companies, from whatever country. You might get Johnson's Shoe Shop will have a window dedicated to a company from Mongolia. You're building in the businesses - and those shops are given so many tickets free to see the production of the Mongolian company. The kids are all allocated the name of an actor in the schools, and they kind of adopt them. They work with them, and make things for them, like a bookmark, with Liverpool Nova Scotia on them. Or a Maple leaf, or whatever. So they build every element of the community into the festival and the town pays a ticket to come and see the shows.

They get companies from all over the world. Their website is called the Liverpool International Theatre Festival (LITF) and it's a very useful model.

The first time I went the regional mayor decided that I was important because I was from somewhere else and because I knew something about the administration of amateur theatre. He took me down the high street and introduced me to every shop. I thought to myself "this isn't for me, this is for them. This is not about me or my ego or me being from somewhere else".

It was them, saying "This is Alad Rhys-Jones and he's come to visit Liverpool and he runs the Amateur Theatre Association for Wales.." The local businesses were part of it. They weren't being asked for \$100, they were part of the infrastructure of it without having to do much work. It's a nice model. If you were thinking of travelling that is somewhere that I would suggest you go and have a look at.

Easy to get involved with, it's a feel-good festival and shares a compatibility of size with yourselves. Those kind of things can put a town on the map. You can start relatively small, invite two or three companies, and just see how it works. Just to see, just to get the feel of it. And you choose those companies carefully, through contacts, or you might just do it with neighbours.

You might choose another company from somewhere in Australia - it's big enough. One from New Zealand, and one from the Pacific Islands, or something like that. Make it manageable, so that it doesn't terrify people, because you've got to build your own community into it on a voluntary basis, so that they are willing to take a role (eg fundraising, outreach work etc.) But it's a model that you might usefully take a look at.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Novel Festival Ideas**

You can start a festival in many different ways. It's useful if you share some common denominator at the beginning. Not essential, but useful.

There was a lovely festival back in the millennium year. Three towns on the same line of latitude. One in Russia, one in Holland and one in Ireland. All the three of them on the same latitude had theatre groups. The one in Ireland had the idea, and went to see the local mayor or somebody with a bit of influence, and said "Would you be interested in making connections with this town and with this town, bearing in mind that were on the same line of latitude? We've done our research and I happen to know there's a very active theatre company at that town and this town. I can make it happen, I can bring those three theatre companies together. We can make a little festival here in Limerick. We will host them with local families. We will put on a weekend of theatre with three different productions. And next year we will go to Harlem, and then Russia.

What happened was the Mayor put a little town delegation together of businesses, restaurants, insurance companies, and they created a little dimension just between these three towns. The little dimension was about tourism, the business elements connecting together, printing companies, small but manageable connections. That's just one model.

You can have something based on three local playwrights or something like that. You use the work of three local playwrights you think might be able to work together. You could decide on a common theme, if that's something that would work for you.

You might decide to use a classical playwright. You might decide to connect with a company in Lithuania, a company in Alaska and we'll all do a performance of

Checkov's *The Bear*, an hour long play, and we will all do it differently because we will find different things to do - it just won't be the straight play we'll do it differently.

Or there's another nice idea - Once you've made those connections (which I can help you with) but once you've made those connections with say a director of a theatre company in three different places, you can decide to create a short video piece from your town with your local actors. Five or ten minutes. On a theme.

Send that clip to the other two companies and see how they work with it. Whether they can take it on and develop it further. And then you can bring it back together and work online and develop the idea a little bit further. There are all kinds of ways of doing this - there are as many ways as you can imagine.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Network Festivals**

There's another Latin American network which I am very supportive of and that's the Corridor Latino Americano de Teatro which is the CLT. This festival network covers the countries of central and Latin America and South America. (How could you transfer that model to Australia?) The festival I went to, in Santiago, that he's put together, he'd been working on it for about six months. The fee that he took out was \$500. To him that was "Yay, \$500!"

There were companies there from all the countries, all amateur companies performing at this festival, and then the following month there'd be a festival somewhere else, in Paraguay for example. The energy moves forward, so that they organise it locally, with small money, and the money helps fund the travel between countries. They build these little theatre projects that draw from the various different groups and what have you, and they just keep creating theatre. They just keep it moving around like a caravan. Identifying local pots of money and they usually are very small pots of money - there's usually a lot of hosting that goes on, staying in each others homes. And they run workshops locally. They go into university departments to teach a workshop or something like that. It's not strictly amateur. You couldn't say they were making a living out of it either. They are covering costs.

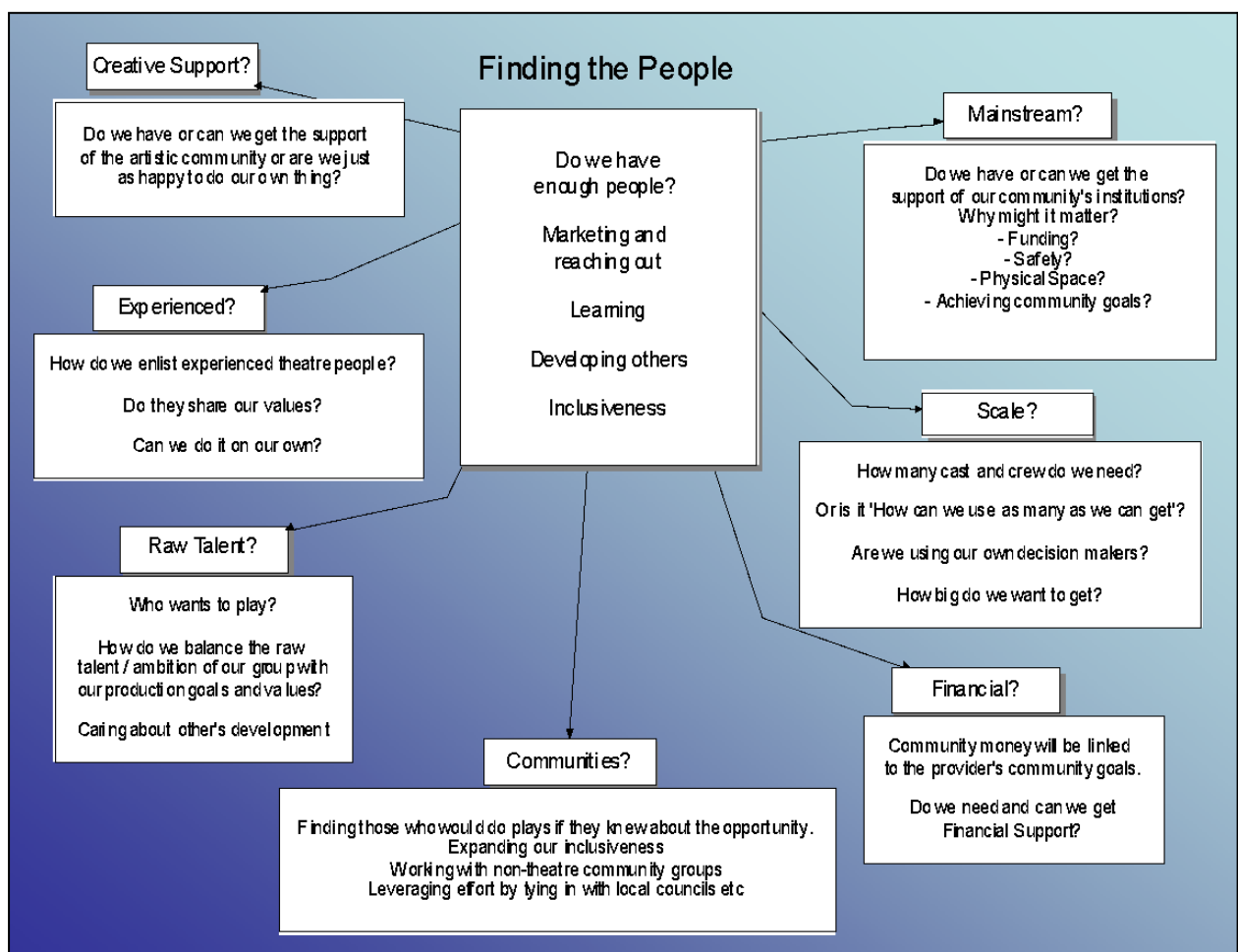
*Alad Rhys-Jones*



**Figure 35. Directing the Enthusiasm**

## Chapter Two - How to Engage Isolated People to Make Theatre

*The belief that involvement in theatre is positive for individuals and communities forms a foundational concept of this project. Depending on the show you want to produce, there are many roles that may be very useful to identify before trying to target the right person for the job – be they used to working in theatre or not. Especially considering they may not be used to being invited to being part of the community. This section is not only about inclusive theatre practice and accessibility, it is about putting on a good show through engaging these people in the process.*



**Figure 36. What Kind of People do we Need?**

*To balance this type of analysis, a devised show will likely have it's core of participants already involved. However there will still be more needed of all types of roles. This is where advanced skills in marketing, organising, negotiation and engagement will be most useful.*

*To be honest, achieving participation by enough people of any background can be a challenge in a tiny town, while ironically there are always those among us who would love to exercise their talents on stage, if they could only find an entry point.*

*Some of those who have been interviewed in this research spoke about running amazing special content or programs. This can help us understand what we can do*

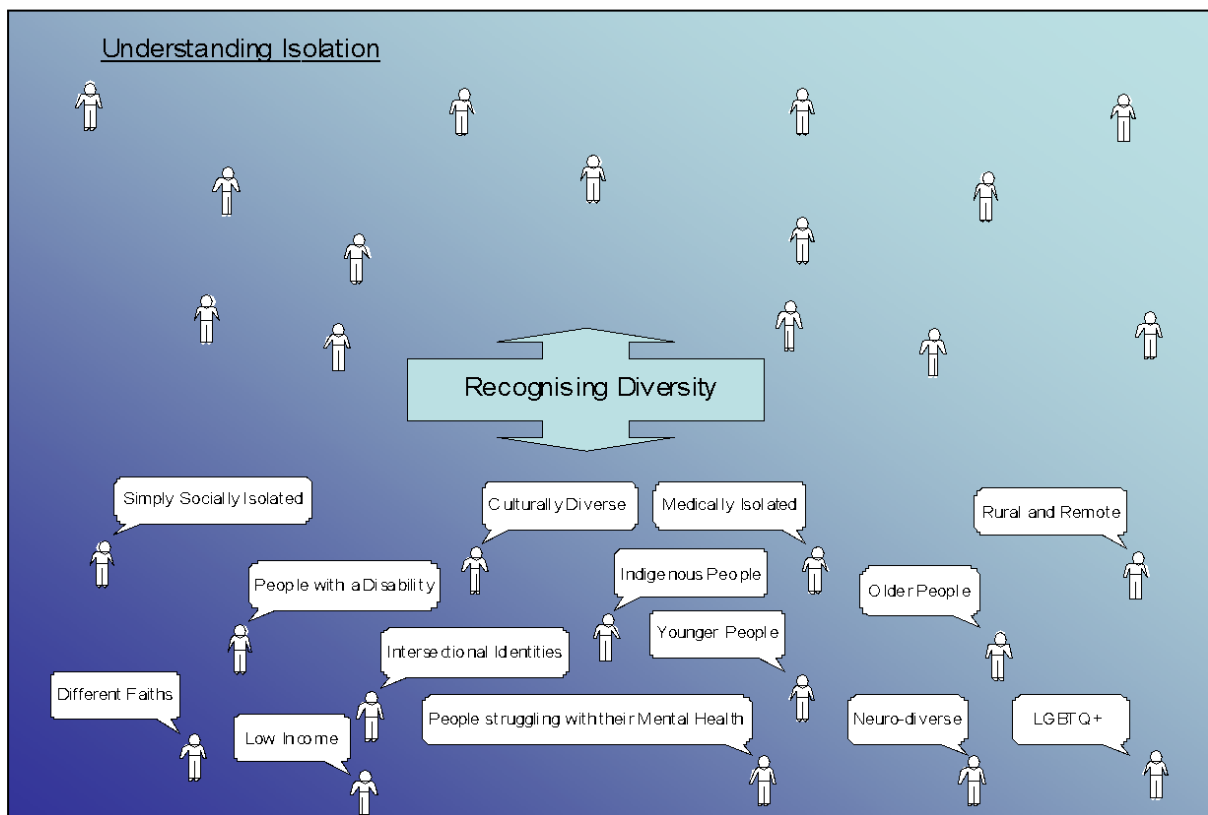
*to improve access and participation in our local theatre projects. Many concepts and principles have been discussed, so the reader is invited to sift through this section to find ideas that could be useful to apply at a local level.*

*We have looked at inclusion by those with physical and mental health challenges, those from diverse cultures, lifestyles etc., not as a charitable gift to them, but as a **gift to us**. Not only in terms of raw numbers involved in our group obviously, but also in terms of the richness of the experiences that we may ourselves participate in. Just as in the Social Definition of Disability, it is upon society to remove the barriers to participation by everyone. In making great community theatre, where can we find people to play with us? It is not about advocating for creation of special programs of inclusion per se, but that in designing productions we can better understand how to remove barriers to participation.*

*For example, in learning about theatre involving homeless people in Auckland, New Zealand from Hobson St Theatre Company, I knew that their project may not necessarily work in our tiny town. However, what I gained was a chance to reflect on how to include people who are perhaps facing financial and housing insecurity. It could be anyone. How do we create theatre in ways that anyone can access and participate? How can we engage with people from these market segments once we have recognised that diverse needs may be the barrier to full participation?*

### **Understanding Social Isolation**

*In the marketing sense, engagement is enabled through drilling down and recognising what makes people tick. This can relate to social engagement.*



**Figure 37. Segmenting the 'Market'**

### The principles of connection apply everywhere

The principles of connection apply everywhere: In New York (where we live) it's a big city with lots of people and a lot of people are isolated. A lot of people are segregated. It's a different kind of isolation and lack of access for folks that might live in rural spaces but you know sometimes people experience challenges around similar things in different ways.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### Theatre can Strengthen your Community

I do really believe in the power that using theatre to strengthen community has. I have seen it work. You can name off all the strategies you want, read all the books, but I think the thing that really matters is that you care about doing it. And you want to do it well you know? It's because you want the group to succeed and you want the group to have a great time, I would imagine that all of the successful projects that you've been able to get going, it's out of that that drive, that desire to do it.

*Haley Sherwood*

*Having developed your understanding of diversity in your community, the mission is to leverage the community – to capitalise on the asset that you have come to understand better. Although I am using the language of business, the values of community underpin the whole relationship. It is about enabling community. It will of course be much easier if you are clear about what kind of help you are looking for as you look around for participants.*

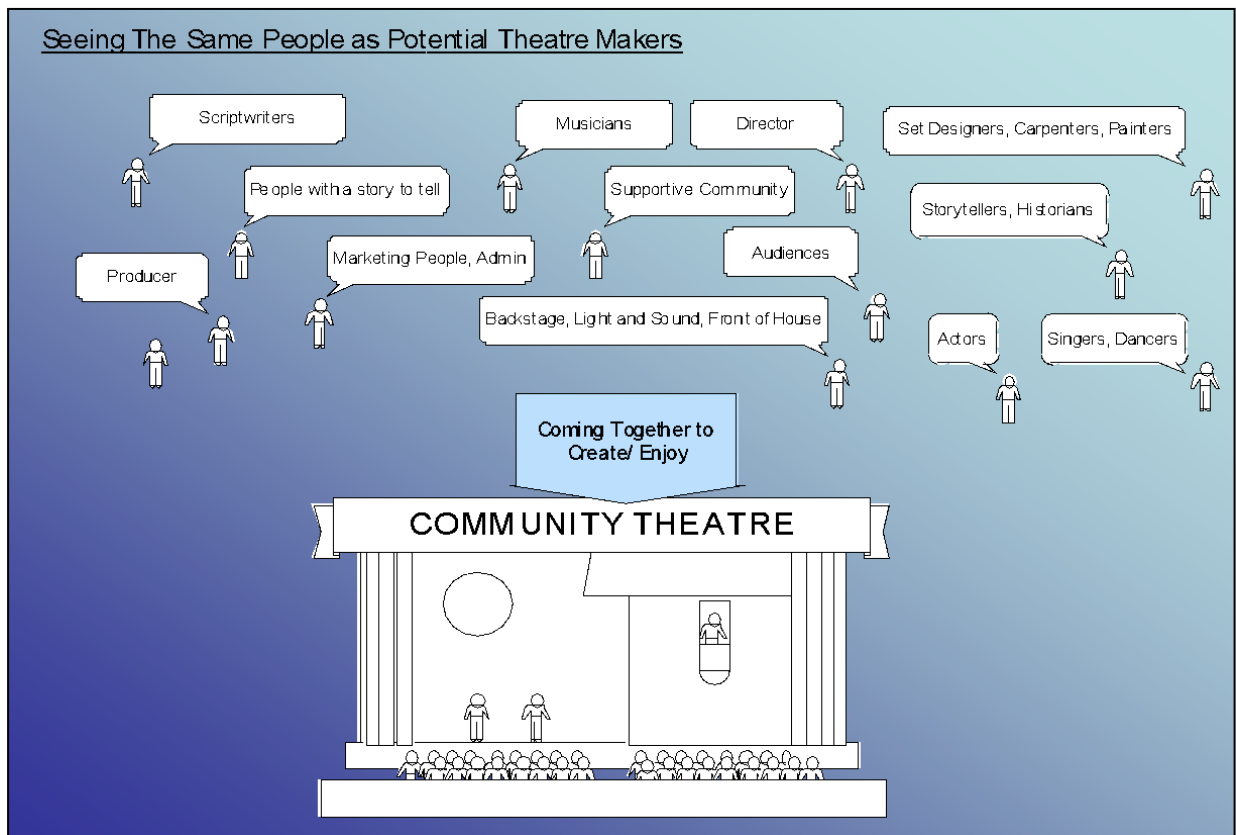


Figure 38. Reframing Potential – Diverse People, Diverse Talents

### **A Welcoming Mindset**

The starting point may be thinking about who are the individuals that are not already included in your work? Who may not feel welcomed in your work?

For me, as I was doing my research and work with Relaxed Performances, I became pregnant, I had a daughter, she would come to work with me and all kinds of things. I felt really uncomfortable bringing her to theatre, for me or even for her, if she was going to wake up in the middle and you know yell or make noise. Even in that realm, there's anchoring to the needs of individuals with disabilities, but there are always a whole wide range of individuals who might not feel welcome.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Fighting and overcoming Isolation involves recognising diversity**

We weren't seeing a lot of diversity in terms of the storytelling that was going on. *(The realisation prior to the creation of Hobson Street Theatre Company)*  
*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Learn to Recognise our own Bias**

We all come with things we have assumed/learned and need to unlearn and we can clearly state those. As a group we commit that this is the way that we're going to work. And so we list out the things including the ways we are going to agree to work. We're going to come to this work every day and so on.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **How people think about themselves and their own needs**

Consider a woman who walks with a cane, or who has knee problems. She will never say 'I'm a person with a disability.' But she is there because you fixed the environment in such a way that she doesn't have to ask for anything. She doesn't feel that she is a burden. She knows there is three steps and that there is a handrail. And she'll start coming. Suddenly you're disability friendly. I say it like it's super easy, but the truth of the matter is that it takes a long time to do that.

You have to get everybody on board. And say "this is our mindset from now on: Everybody in, and nobody out." And that means we have to build these environments that make you feel like everybody is in, and nobody is out. Even when they're difficult. When you get the person with Tourette's or somebody who has strange or odd behaviours. And you have to go "Everybody's in"

*Betty Siegel*

*As you approach people about getting their help, it will not be about their differences, it will be about what they can contribute. Make everyone welcome, but also show them that they are needed.*

### **Co-creating Theatre, not Doing Charity**

I'm more interested in "What are your creative talents and skills?" Where you are living at the moment doesn't really come into that. Of course sometimes it comes up, People say so you know, if someone is having a hard time it comes up. But we haven't gathered those people there because they are homeless, we gathered there because we want to make theatre work together.



It is an extension of what City Mission does in some ways because their aim is to uphold people's dignity. Being part of the creative process does that in so many ways, but it's not their core service. They are essentially there as the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. What we are doing is more at the top of the cliff kind of work.

We are not asking them, when they come through the door, what are you addicted to, are you gambling or are you homeless? There is not a test to do when you come through the door. You're somehow connected to the City Mission, that's enough.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Beyond the 'Charity' Model**

*(I was asking about Theatre of Community Engagement)* - Public Works is a bit beyond that. It's part of what we do. Dallas Theatre Centre is focusing on making it less of a charitable model. It can sound like charitable work and that's not what we're wanting to do. The dream or the offer is to make the community part of the cultural agenda and part of the season. And it's not something that the theatre does on the side to put butts on seats.

*Maria Calderon*

### **An Auditioning Idea**

Cornerstone do a lot of work with folks that consider themselves amateur or first time performers. They suggested that a way to do auditions is don't have anyone prepare anything, and they just lay out a bunch of newspapers and magazines and then, while people are waiting, have them pick out a line or a paragraph from the magazine and then they can bring the paper in. They don't need to memorise it or anything, just come and that's their text that they're going to work on.

You don't need to give them any direction about how to perform it because when they come in you get this amazing look at their personality, based on what they picked. They could tell you why they picked it and how they decided to perform it for the first time. Some people will just say it and it's like, 'ok, a subtle approach'. And then you know you need to try to get them a little out of their comfort zone. Some people will come in and they will announce it, and have all kinds of creative choices, because we didn't give them any direction and they showed up out of their own desire. They want to be in a play, which I think is one of the most brave things a person can decide to do. Then we get to see them and get to see what their personality is.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Creating a sense of safety for the Introverted**

*Inclusion involves creating a welcoming sense of social and emotional safety. Some people feel safer Onstage than in general life.*

Putting up posters inviting all to just show up? Those ideas are great but only for the extroverted - the introverts would never even sign up for that. For the people that can - the people that are more comfortable with it - it is ok, but inviting those that may not think they can, because they never have - inviting them to be active in some way that is safe. You won't know until you try quite often.

There is something about acting, being on stage where you are separate, you don't have to interact directly with the audience (unless you are doing direct interaction)

*Paula Alekson*

### **Balancing Inclusion and potential with Creative Focus**

*Question: Can you focus too narrowly on one thing, like disability, at the risk of your character as a creative group?*

Absolutely. That's really important. Your focus becomes what people can't do or what limits they might have. Creatively, you run out of juice pretty quickly on that.  
*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Stop and think about the people**

Traditionally amateur theatre is not very good at acknowledging or dealing with the impairments that come along. For example, with age related health: Betty might be the lead actress well up into her 50s, 60s and well into her 70s. Then she gets hearing loss and she can't hear her cues and suddenly she's relegated to making the teas in the interval.

When you find it tough to work with some people, you could be going into areas of diversity there. Ask yourself, where are they on the autism spectrum? But that's what we have to do isn't it? We have to look at this person and *say to ourselves* "What's your back-story here mate? Because I'm not really warming to you..."  
*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **"You noticed me?!"**

I feel like usually, in the cast, there's four or five people who wanted to do a play but then they find what they really needed was someone like me or someone like the director. That they were seeking a friendship or relationship with someone they could really talk to or that saw them differently for the first time. I memorise all the names of everyone in the cast before people come into rehearsal so I know I can greet them by name as they walk in. I might say "you look beautiful today" or "I love that shirt on you, such a great colour." People are like "Wwwhhat? You think I am cool?" They just feel seen and appreciated and they want to work hard.  
*Haley Sherwood*

### **Food and Celebration**

On the last show, they always have soup and rolls for a meal break, for everyone in the cast. The ladies in the town will all make pots of soup and they'll have that. When you are getting to the long rehearsals on Sunday where you do the afternoon then the evening, you have a break where everyone goes and gets their dinner.  
*Helen Horsnell*

Some specific Market Segments

### **Rural and Remote**

*As was observed earlier, isolation happens everywhere, and so does connection. However this project is primarily for addressing isolation through theatre in our local rural Snowy Mountains community (categorised as 'remote' by the state government.) Let's review what was said about rural and remote issues and theatre.*

### **Australia's Size**

Australia is such a big country and I think it's a lot easier in New Zealand because it's a smaller country and it works. I think you have to organise, either in your own area, or on a state-wide basis. That's the way to go I reckon, because NSW's big enough to be a country. If you had a (national) conference it would be so far to travel.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Rural escapes!**

We travel a lot, and go and see the shows and some are great and some not so great. But we go and we support them and that's what being part of MTNZ is all about.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Ashley's Obama Fellowship: People are interested in Rural Communities**

My studies and background have been about the role of arts in the community. Economic development in rural communities was my masters degree; the Obama Fellowship was about looking at connection and narrative shifting in small towns and rural communities through art and culture.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Rural Positive at Contemporary American Theatre Festival**

Shepherdstown, as it is incorporated and annexed, is very, very, very small and the larger area proper has around 23,000 people. We think of ourselves as a cultural gateway to the state. We think that when people come to see CATF they also are coming to this lovely little town in West Virginia and they're being introduced to the richness that is here outside of CATF and they then realise there is so much more going on here, both in the arts and in other ways.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Off- Off- Broadway in the Country**

There's a tendency within the 'Off Broadway' of New Zealand Theatre to be very community oriented at the moment because it's always existed as little co-ops doing shows. People go through drama school - they want to work afterwards and there's not a lot of work, so...

There's a theatre in Wellington which is purely there for co-ops to do their shows at. There's one at Christchurch. People are thinking about that community model a bit. But it's more of an 'Off Off Broadway' community model. But there's not a lot going on in the sticks really. There's television, bloody Netflix. Everybody's stuck at home.

*Paul Maunder*

### **Life Happens Everywhere**

I love to hear about people making work in places that are maybe a bit unexpected. People don't necessarily connect high-quality theatre with small towns all the time

and I think it is such a missed opportunity because there so many great stories out there in the world. I love that idea of how it is really integrated with everything that is happening in the community.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Big Things can happen in Little Places**

Where we live is kind of more in town around Abingdon - a little more populated but we are in what is certainly considered in our country to be a very rural area. We're not listed on the national metropolitan statistical analysis. We're the only LORT (League of Resident Theatres) theatre in the country not attached to a large city.

*Nick Piper*

### **Sense of Place**

I think it's really about helping recognise the assets of the place. This place is beautiful and there's so much to do here and the history is so rich and complex, and the people who are here are brilliant and maybe you just don't see it. How do we put it on the stage? Make it the stage - these beautiful parks and outdoor spaces. Or indoor spaces that you wouldn't think of to highlight.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Rural Cultural Work and the Isolated**

Large metropolitan areas end up with a lot of the resources. And looking back at how our regional theatres came to be and how the tours go around certain routes, there ends up being these large swathes of rural communities that are completely left out of the cultural sector and now there's a big movement to bring arts to those sorts of places.

There's a lot of scope there to build empathy between people, especially in a screen-driven world. And it seems so important to connect people in isolation, and building that connection.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Connection in the Country**

I'm finding that I don't feel like I have my little group anymore, which I did when we lived in a small town. We've been in the city now for over 20 years and I think you know there is definitely a change, but it is still there sometimes. And I still see it in community theatre.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **You can get a start, in the Country**

Way back when, I did plays in my childhood home but I lived on a ranch with no theatre nearby when I was growing up. Then I went to college and got cast in a play called *The Visit*, and got addicted to it. I found my group, my clan, my tribe and just couldn't help being at the theatre all the time. I did backstage, front of stage, anything I could do.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **How Rural Audiences Respond Connected Theatre**

Have you ever heard of Lucy Thurber? You should look her up. Her plays are usually very gritty - Maybe like three or four characters, long scenes, really emotionally intense and gorgeous, gorgeous writing.

And then, for her to turn around and write a giant spectacle! The first one was kind of like a love letter to the community. It was set in the Berkshires, the mountain range

surrounding this rural area. It features - well **she uses** places and names and things that are in the Berkshires. She writes it to take place in this area. We write original songs with words that we only speak in that area. It is super, super specific. And so I think that feels like the audience participation, because you can turn to someone and say 'oh! I know that place.'

To me, I know when it really feels an audience is alive and when they're dead. These (at WTF) are hands down, the most alive audiences I have ever seen. At every turn, they could see someone on stage that they know. And so you're looking out for things in the show that I think in a more traditional way you wouldn't be looking out for and so it requires you to be on the edge of your seat. What am I going to see?!

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Studying Theatre and Rural Community Development - a great combination**

When I was in England doing my masters of applied theatre program it was so great because we were focussing on the approach, the facilitation more than "Here's how to direct a really intense scene". None of that! It was more like "Here's how you hold really hard but safe conversations." And then we chose a track that we wanted to apply our theatre skills to. I chose rural community development, or community development but focussed on rural and remote communities.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Indigenous People**

*Bonding, and developing the relationship seems to be fundamental to how people of indigenous cultures engage with each other, and with other people. For example, when talking with Tainui Tukiwaho, the first part of the conversation was about family connections: "So you are a friend of one of my cousins eh? She spoke to me about you..."*

### **Healing History**

There's a lot of history between the two communities. I love how both parties committed and trusted the process... We take our time. We make an attempt, it's going to take a lot of time. Taking time to build a lasting relationship is the indigenous way.

*Janis Monture*

### **Cultural Self-representation**

The idea was not a novel one. In the '80's there was a "Maori theatre". I sort of say that with quotation marks because it was set up by and supported by Pakeha leaders (white people). Now we have built our own theatre company from the ground up. This is the first time we have been controlling our own space, which is why it was important.

*Tainui Tukiwaho*

### **An Increase in Diverse and Inclusive Mainstream Theatre**

I think we are seeing, over probably the last 12 to 24 months, a lot more ethnic diversity on stage, and not just those normal 'role models' you know on stage, like you see in Annie - the white girl onstage playing Annie.

It's been good to see the diversity of a Maori girl or an Asian girl doing it. I don't know if you have heard of Aotearoa the Musical, based here in Wellington. They have written it about a Maori land dispute. Rotarua Musical Society put it on as one of their Christmas shows last year, and it's about a Maori land dispute. In it it's also got the story of Tane Mahuta and the Earth Mother in it.

In the middle it's got a big dream sequence in Maori language and it's got the Haka and it just blew me away. To think that this is the first time in my 20 years of being involved in theatre, that I have seen such a diverse, Maori-based show on stage that's just been absolutely sold out! Maori musical is coming through - it's more accepted as part of what we do.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Consultation**

This is the other thing. Very important - if you going to tell a story of a cultural person, that's okay if you write it as long as you have consultants that are of that culture. And that the person portraying it has that culture.

You have to get indigenous people on board. There are some tribes here in the US, who don't want *any form* of their stories told except for their oral tradition.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Collaboration with an Aboriginal Playwright**

When writing about someone else's culture, I would suggest that you connect with someone in the community who comes from that region. To create a story with an important Aboriginal theme, I would suggest that you get together with the Aboriginal people, actually have a good conversation with the Aboriginals in that region and co-create a story.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **Preparation**

Have that initial conversation. Look in your back yard. Talk to people you already work with in the local art and cultural sector. Share visions not expectations. Come together organically. Be open, start talking.

Do some research. Support them, present them, follow them on social media. Play to your strengths then research indigenous artists with similar artistic talents. There are indigenous artists, radio stations, take some time to look. Keep your ear to the ground and look online

*Janis Monture*

### **Similarity to the 'Welcome to Country' happening in Australia**

We had a lot of grass roots performance with our indigenous peoples here. So now, when people are doing acceptance speeches, lectures, Zoom meetings or whatever, they will tell you who owned the land that they are on prior to when it became a colonised settlement. They will say "I am so and so from Mystic Seaports Aquarium: The indigenous land of the Matchentucket Peequats" and so they are acknowledging the link to the indigenous owners.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Indigenous Performers**

*Does engaging audiences with indigenous content engage non-indigenous audiences?*

Yes - it did, especially audiences that would not have much access to indigenous art.

*Janis Monture*

### **Culturally Inclusive Practice**

*The following quote is one of my favourite quotes during the study:*

Diversity is like inviting you to a party but inclusion is actually asking you to dance.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **Connecting with that Community**

That's what Theatre can do. When you're talking about trying to get people on board as to what can happen when you start at the community level, getting people interested in telling the stories of that community, and those people, and those occurrences, and that history - then you've got a springboard that you don't even realise you are springing from.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Inclusiveness led by Cultural Awareness**

The demographics of who is homeless in New Zealand show a high number of Maori and Pacific Islander people. Making sure that we are doing things that culturally are appropriate and finding space to make sure that we are - and it's even hard to find English words to talk about it - doing things that are recognisable as coming from a Maori place, that's really important as well.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Be Open to Breaking Stereotypes**

Just be open to taking more ethnicities in to your place and their other themes. Not just Shakespeare and the popular ones, but other things that help people start understanding other cultures as well. That's why I am thinking - that needs to break. We have to break stereotypes.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **New Immigrants / Refugees**

It's the local stories that create most interest, because when they are coming from somewhere else, they've decided to settle *here*. This is where they create a family, they made a business. They made a living though it wasn't easy to, and it wasn't hugely economically successful, but life happened and the bills were paid. It's the story behind that, the reason they came here, what they left behind, and how that's effected how they integrated into this community. That's a story that's worth telling. It's absolutely fascinating.

1930's had the Great Depression and what have you. People were arriving then - that was their story. People are constantly arriving. Migration isn't about today only. It's about yesterday and tomorrow. People move. Unfortunately that's the message that has not been put out there. People have always moved.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Diverse Age Groups and Participation**

*Creating theatre that is sensitive to the needs of participation of younger cast members, older cast members, and those in between is a juggling act. In our shows, which have included large community casts, we have structured our stories in ways that work with diverse age groups. Another way could be to break the group up into different stories, different ages appropriate to selected projects. But it is a point to consider when you say "All welcome" – you are going to have a diverse age range to work with.*

### **Young people Stepping Up**

We have relationships with two schools and with the youth centre. Kids under the age of 18, like people over the age of 65, don't all have jobs, they're the most involved for sure. Also, because our program is free, and usually the kids are at rehearsal when we do the show all day, it's free childcare for a lot of families. And they're really open to that, they're really happy to have a place for their kids to go.

I think what's so cool about having the kids involved is they just transform into adults in front of our eyes. Because they are in a room full of adults and the expectations on them are adult level. When we go to the middle school and do a workshop, we are teaching them all the same stuff as we teach in our adult workshops or public workshops and they're getting it. Again, it's because we just expect that of them and they're like 'alright now let's do it'. Typical discipline that would happen in a classroom – there's none of that in our rehearsals. They want to step up to the plate.

We have found seniors are the most participatory populations we have, because they don't have jobs because they are retired. A lot of people retire to the Berkshires.

We don't have any trouble with engagement with our senior folks. We offer free workshops that both of those places have hosted. We will go to the Community College or the Community Centre. We make the flyer super vague - it's like "Free theatre workshop. No experience required. This time.. See you there."

I'm not the type of person who would show up to something like that (before... Now I'm like what's happening?!) The folks that do show up stand in a circle and introduce themselves to a group of strangers, and admit "I knew nothing about this but I took 90 minutes out of my day to see about it." I just think that's pretty awesome that people decide to do that.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Senior Theatre Workshop - Health Benefits**

If you go to the senior centre, you're going to get dressed, you're going to figure out how you smell (I just made that up!) You're going to primp and preen and get up a little bit, turn up and say hi, how you doing. You're going to flirt with the guy down here, hug this woman here, and get jealous over that woman over there.

And then you are 'On' a bit. Because when you have to do a social thing you're 'on'. Then you do your drama class and then head home again. But you had that bit of adrenaline going. Whereas, if you're just walking in to your computer from your kitchen with your pyjama pants on, what kind of adrenaline rush are you receiving? Not much.

Performing is not like a regular rehearsal. There's more adrenaline. You're on, and off again, your head is working, you're making sure you get back on stage on at the right moment, Then you get all this adrenaline and it makes you feel really good. And then you get back to reality.

A lot of seniors don't have much need for adrenaline - they just go through their routine and go to the doctor. It's just kind of reality. And then you get to be on stage and you get applause, and all this adrenaline - it's a huge shot - who you are and what you did and making people laugh.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*



### **Intergenerational Programs**

Mind the Gap is about taking the building blocks of theatre and building theatre using your philosophy. If you need to seal the deal it would be a conversation between me and you about here's what you should be doing and here's what you shouldn't be doing. You'll stumble - you won't get it right first time round, but if you are true to the core of it, you will have something meaningful and substantive.

In terms of issues affecting this generation of young and older people eg Climate Change, there is a moment of realising that we are in this together regardless of age and that we need each other. This idea of division is not serving us. We need to go back to really sustaining communities at all levels, so that young people take care of the old and the old take care of the young. Its about how the community at large is about more than your immediate self.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **A Risk of Intergenerational Work**

Always, (and this happens even to people who are starting a new program) people always say we should do a program with young and old together. It would be so good to get the generations together.

Well the truth is that's the most difficult form of senior theatre, the least successful. The kids and the seniors have different energy levels. They are available at different times of the day. After school till 8pm is not an active time for seniors. This irritates me. Whenever I see an intergenerational program, there's the kids, and there's the seniors - the seniors are in the background and the kids take centre stage.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Mental Health**

*You could say that all theatre involves crisis, change and therefore by implication mental health. Participation in theatre means that you will encounter some who are struggling with mental health issues. Thinking of it in a similar way to physical health issues, not in a stigmatised way, but realising that maintaining good health, whether physical or mental, is a challenge we all face. Theatre can help with health through social engagement, reflective time and activity, to name some ways. There are also some definite risks to mental health because of the egos of some getting in the way of respectful social treatment of each other in the theatre. There are also other harms that can apply in this social context. (Note: Rochelle Nicholson's section in the "Itinerary" is very relevant here as well, but I have not repeated it here for brevity.)*

### **In the Now/ Mindfulness**

I think the other thing that is really cool about theatre is that you have to be in the now. If you are rehearsing a performance and you and I are meeting for the first time on stage, it has to be as if you and I are meeting for the first time ever, even if we have met a million times before. It's always got to be like the first time, so you have to be in the now. As a social worker you would know you have to be in the now. Mindfulness is a term a lot of people are using for it. I grew up in the concept of 'the power of now'. In the theatre, in every show, you have to be in the now. And I think that's really important and beneficial.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Connection – a mainstay of Mental Health**

Going back to Mental Health, if people are connected to somewhere then they're going to feel safe in that place and they're going to be their true selves. They're going to enjoy themselves on stage or backstage or whatever. I have seen so many people come in as a timid little person that didn't like to be seen. They just sat on the back row and didn't do much. Then they turn into to this person who is a lead onstage, giving it all they've got.

It's so amazing to see that change in people because they just get that bit of confidence because they've got people around them, who are like minded, love doing what they do and they are encouraged and nurtured and their true selves come out. That's the most important thing about connecting with theatre is that we go there because we love it. We go there because we want to have fun and get better at what we are doing. Having fun, that's the most important thing. When you stop having fun then it's not fun any more and you find something else to do.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

*Below is an example of a production devised in terms of a mental health challenge*

### **The Manic Monologues**

If you're interested, we just launched a project that was going to be a play reading event - like a staged reading of this project called the Manic Monologues. It started in California. On the Manic Monologues site is the actual script. Check it out.

The way the Manic Monologues came about is that a PhD geology student at Stanford University had a bipolar episode. Suddenly he was unable to function in the way that he needed to do his studies. He had a partner who was there to help him and he getting through it. One of the things he realised was that there is so much stigma: I don't know anybody that's been in my circumstances - I don't know how to cope and I need help so I can get through it.

They created this project - he's from a geology background and she's a med student - and they created this project just to collect stories about other people's experiences - either as a person with a mental illness, or a caregiver or partner or child of someone who has mental illness, so that people don't feel so alone. They then utilised people in the community to make the stories and then people that are performers to perform them. They shared them by having the Stanford University students perform them.

It's exactly what you're trying to do - to make human connection - but this time on a very specific subject. That's what the monologues were created to do and then we couldn't do that, for readings (because of Covid), so we decided to work with a director who is running a lab here at Princeton called Innovations in Socially Distant Performance. Her name is Alaina Oraz. She is working with students to both research what works are being done now, and to do work herself. Actually her work might be really useful to you.

The Manic Monologues ended up as a website - a virtual experience. The intention of this piece is to disrupt the stigma and spotlight a conversation about mental illness. We filmed or recorded the performances. There are resources you can feel free to download them and share them with anyone they might be useful for. We are really proud of them because it's a work of art, but it is also a resource for the community on a very important subject.

*Paula Alekson*

### **Support, Debriefing and Focussing on Mental Health**

We've done some of that particular type of work, for example, surrounding mental health issues, we did a play that was focused on post-traumatic stress disorder, and another play that dealt with depression surrounding a terrible event that happened here many years ago.

What I found, when we do cover topics like that, that part of our mission is not just to present the play but then also present the context before the play, and then afterwards have discussions so that people have a way to talk about what they have just seen. For plays like that, after every performance, we have what we call "Talkback". There will maybe be a panel on stage, maybe including a social worker here in our community. Or, in the case of post-traumatic stress disorder, a veteran and a doctor and people who have dealt with these issues.

People who are in the audience can stay and share their story if they like, but mostly what it does is helps people realise they are not alone in their suffering. Talking about mental health is still very stigmatised around the world, less so than it was maybe 20 years ago, but this is why we think it very important that people have an outlet after those events.

*Nick Piper*

### **Health-Positive Messages**

In senior theatre we are working with ageing because ageing has really negative stereotypes attached to it. You can have someone who can't hear and one reader will think it's making fun of seniors while others will think it's comedy. It can be hard to know where that line is - where it is comedy where is it making fun. It's kind of a sensitive issue.

Secondly we do not have too many shows about death, dying or dementia. My serious misgiving is that I don't want someone crying in the audience. I talked to someone not too long ago, whose husband had just died from dementia. She went to a show about dementia at a local theatre. She said it was horrendous. In the audience she was going through terrible, terrible feelings about her husband's loss.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **LGBTQ+ and Intersectional Identities**

*Counter-cultural movements such as LGBTQ+ and their precursors have a long history of involvement in the theatre, including in the country, and in theatres small and great. On a local level, is your theatre a safe place for community people to play?*

### **Production Challenges of Serious Theatre**

About 10 years ago we did a show called Beer, that was quite controversial. It deals with teen suicide, it deals with rape, it deals with sexual orientation, body image, all those types of things. The music is amazing, but very controversial. But our director just didn't cope with the content. They weren't mature enough within themselves to deal with the content. It all went to custard and the committee found a new director and because they just weren't coping with it.

You think, 'how could the committee have done it better?' Did we actually look at the content of the play and think 'Is this going to upset people, our cast, or upset the balance of the community by putting those sorts of things on?'

We did Rent in 2007, still really early days when talking about AIDS, and we had a really good response from the community, so I think it just depends on your community and picking the right stuff.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Community Theatre supporting LGBTQ+ people**

Community is about doing something for isolated/ marginalised communities wherever you are. West Village ... has a long history of countercultural movements and the site of Stonewall, birthplace of the gay liberation movement in the United States. West Village is more the gay scene and East village is the rock 'n' roll - equally gritty. East Village is a place where artists go to pursue their art and are trying to change the form and find themselves.

Theatre doesn't have to be big to make a difference to your community. Small theatres can be useful in small towns. NYTW do 5 shows a year - either musicals or drama. They have helped to develop many important plays. Their 196 seat theatre is the birthplace of the musical Rent. Yet it is not "Broadway" or even about commercial success

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Connecting through Story**

Historical plays that show oppressed peoples, whether they are BIPOC people, or women, or queer people ... People do want to be able to connect with a story, and they want to see themselves within it, even if it is not their story. And it's making sure that you have variety, so that it's not just the tragedy.

*Paula Alekson*

### **Mixing it up – a little**

We already have this huge mission around Ageing. We are trying to build the image of Ageing. Ageing in different ethnic groups is more complex. Making our role more difficult and more complex (how complex you want it?) But if I can get people to have a better outlook on Ageing, that's good for me. And that's going to help people of any race, sexual orientation, etc - we have quite a few LGBTQ plays you know? We have a show about transgender grandchildren. We're not afraid of hot topics.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Intersectional Identities and full participation**

Inclusion can mean anything. Thinking about intersectional identity is so important because "anything" can be about queerness, about various cultural difference, age, disability.

Disability cuts across every single demographic - across age, across race, across sexuality - so thinking about that intersectionality is really important. For intersectional identities, it's about how you weave these individuals into the work you're making, into the organisation, thinking about really being a part of the fabric of community not just 'we make the thing and you come and enjoy it'.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Theatre People with a Disability**

*Small theatre groups are not likely to have huge budgets to build a state of the art stage, but with access in mind, performance spaces might be selected according to accessibility principles. Some key points on the use of and involvement in theatre for those with a disability:*

- We need to be physically accessible. Otherwise we are virtually telling artists, "You are not welcome on this stage" To people, artists in wheelchairs, we are saying "Your work is not valuable enough to us to include you."
- Be clear about the limitations of what you can offer. Don't over-promise, because when they turn up and find there is a step that prevents them from participating it is very disappointing.
- Be guided by the real experts in a consultation process. One way we did that was to have significant interviews with individuals with disabilities, specifically with autism and their care givers, to learn their needs and interests.
- The term used in Disabilities - "consumers" - can be problematic. People with disabilities are makers, artists, as well as "consumers" of that product
- If behavioural things come up, follow up. We say 'let's strategise' on how to make life a little easier for them.
- Because the needs of folks with autism can be more extreme, when you address those needs it is more encompassing of the needs of folks with a whole array of disabilities, Neuro-divergence, and other kinds of needs
- Theatre for blind people can include where actors take audience members in and show them and let them feel the costumes. They go through Q&A with them, and during the show there are speakers telling them what is going on.
- In terms of integration and bringing people with disabilities, bringing them in and integrating them into a theatre can be a difficult and different job and people get very scared of it.

### **Social Definition of Disability and Normalising**

We want to approach this through a Social Model lens. Do you know the differences between the medical model and the social model? We are trying to flip the United States from a medical/charity model to a social model where we look at environments and ask 'How do we fix the environment?' instead of "how do we fix the person?" Society changes in order to accommodate the person not the person changes in order to accommodate society. It's a mental shift and an important one.

*Betty Siegel*

It is constantly amazing to see when there is overlap between social work or mental health or combinations of those two things ... and the arts. It is such a fruitful combination because there are so many approaches to mental health, specifically, when we work with kids on the autism spectrum. In the States, where there is a whole lot of education about "Corrective behaviours", and where disability is seen as something to be "fixed" and that you are to "assimilate" into the Neuro-typical world instead of thinking about disability from the social model. It recognises that it is the social barriers that prevent a person from entirely being who they are. That there is nothing wrong with who they are.

*Paul Brewster*

If there is a performance you are inviting individuals into, normalising divergent needs is really important. If you have someone ordering tickets or reserving tickets, have a little tick marker or box that says are there any accommodations that you may need. Someone can write in there, you know, I would need such and such. And you could say "We don't actually have that right now, but thank you so much for letting me know, so that we can figure out how to do it later". The only caution there is not over-promising, that by asking the questions you don't people to feel like it's all going to be covered. But just let people know you're interested in what their needs might be.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Positive Change**

We went to a showcase at Whaketano on the West Coast. There were kids on the show that had cerebral palsy, and kids with Downs Syndrome. The kids were just loving it, loving being involved. They were taking the lead you know. And singing songs that they probably would never have ever got the chance to do before.

It's so awesome now to see that people are just accepting that these people are just the same as everybody else, even if they have a learning difficulty or look different. They are actually being involved as part of a normal cast. They are going to theatre school and learning skills that the other kids are learning. It's great to see this coming through as you wouldn't have seen that 10 years ago.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Becoming more inclusive takes time**

I really encourage anyone who is interested in doing that work to start somewhere! Think about someone in your world you would love to invite into your work, but you can't because of whatever reason, and figure out how to address that reason. Engage them and ask them about what their needs may be.

I had been doing this work for three years before I learned that masks - having a mask on your face, a masked figure - can be significantly problematic for individuals with autism. We had a student who ran out of the building terrified because there was a masked figure. His teachers knew that, and although I had sent them the guide in advance that mentioned the masked figure they didn't think to tell me it was a problem.

### **Inspirational Examples and Learning on the Job**

I was totally uncomfortable, I didn't know how to behave in that room at all. Debbie is just a genius at working with these folks. She doesn't treat them like children. She holds them to very high standards, and treats them like human beings. The respect and love that they had for her was so interesting to me. When I finished grad school, I said I need a job in *this* field.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Leadership at a National Level**

What I'm trying to do is get cultural organisations to think about how they create environments that do or do not support people with a disability.

There are three parts to accessibility when you talk about people with disabilities. There's the physical environment - and with old buildings, you're probably going to have to do something to fix physical access in that building before you can be welcoming.

The thing is that when we are looking at physical access we are often thinking of the extreme end of the need for physical access which is the wheelchair end of the spectrum. The truth of the matter is you can still be accessible to people who use walkers, canes or knee problems without having a ramp for a wheelchair and all that kind of stuff.

You can start the welcoming process and then slowly work to create an environment where you highlight the things that make you more or less accessible. And then you start to save some money to address the more endemic physical challenges for that end member person.

You can still start work on the welcoming aspect. How do we welcome people with disabilities into this space? You give them good information. Like "There are three steps up to the front door, but there are hand railings." Or "We have a side entrance if you really want to get in, as a wheelchair user, and we are working on wheelchair access but we are not there yet."

You start to look at what you've got that's an asset and you look at what you've got that's a deficit. You start to highlight your assets and address your deficits. You try to reach out to the community a little bit and really try to engage, and say we really want to involve you. You have to really mean that, it can't be a token pat on the head.

Then you suddenly realise that people with disabilities are very loyal. Once you welcome them in they are very loyal and they stay. Then you engage in a dialog with them. Talk to them and ask "what do you need? What do you really want? Get them involved in a conversation and dialogue and get them to understand that you really do want them involved. You want them to be a part of the process that involves them.

*Betty Siegel*

### **Supporting People with Disabilities to Grow and Develop**

There's a young man who attended his first Relaxed Performance 4 or 5 years ago. Now he doesn't need to attend a Relaxed Performance and he goes to the theatre whenever he wants to with his family. He kind of graduated in that space. Not everyone is going to graduate. For some people, the Relaxed Performance is exactly what they want. That's the space they are comfortable and that's fine.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Beware Making Assumptions**

I got caught out once at a festival. It was a really brilliant community play. Ages on stage included from a baby in arms to people in their 80s. It was a local story about a guy who went off to the First World War and didn't come back. It was very poignant, it was very honest, it wasn't clichéd. It was really well done. It was called the Dancing Fusilier, from a group from Scotland called Conittough, outside Glasgow.

I was waxing lyrical, talking to the group afterwards, and there was a guy there in a wheelchair. I hadn't seen him on stage. I thought "Why didn't they get him onstage!?" I went to him and said "I didn't see you on stage. That's a shame they didn't include you." He said "I was doing the lights!" They'd got there him, in that group he was doing the lights, he was the lighting guy.

Never mind he couldn't get up the ladder to work the lights. He had someone else to do that. They got around the fact that the lighting box is totally accessible because they piggybacked him up into the lighting box.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Hidden Disabilities**

'Disabilities' describe a whole host of things. Some people disclose to us, others don't. We have people on our staff, on our board, and we are not a "Disability Theatre." We (People's Light) are a regional, professional theatre. The realm of disabilities has become woven into who we have become as we have tried to reflect the wider community we serve.

We had folks on our staff with hidden disabilities who had not disclosed them until we did our first Relaxed Performance. Then they wrote to me and said 'Oh my gosh, I

haven't been able to attend the theatre, even though I love theatre and have done all my life,' because they had developed agoraphobia in adulthood, because they had another challenge. Two individuals wrote me like that.

For the Relaxed Performance, however, they were able to opt-in even though Agoraphobia was not on my radar at all. And this person had more space to move around, they knew what to expect, so they had more ability to opt in. We had people with hidden disabilities who now are sharing these experiences with others because they feel more agency.

*Marcie Bramucci*



## Chapter Three – Engaging Isolated People in Audiences

*If theatre is about connection, then what are we doing about overcoming isolation in our little theatres, in our own little communities? In my productions I have invited all to participate through as many channels as I could – but was that enough? Interviewees seemed to say that people can tell the difference between lip service and commitment to accessibility and inclusion. I decided to ask participants about their experiences with inclusive theatre and also ways of reaching particular audiences. Some key learning points from the interviews:*

- Use/share food
- You may need to be active as opposed to passive in ‘social marketing’ of your play, reaching out to segments, groups and individuals who might not normally feel, believe or assume themselves to be welcome to be part of your show as audience.
- Engaging audiences (and having them return next time) is significantly about gaining trust and that the audience is included and connected.
- The best way to engage audiences is to have them participate in the form itself
- Audiences can be part of the story telling (Including immersive experiences)
- Approach challenging themes through shared interest and collaboration
- There are many different ways to engage communities - in the crew, as painters, designers, in the box office – building audience interest
- Some things aren't for all ages, depending upon the subject matter
- Create as many access points as you can for your audience
- Schedule a ‘Relaxed Performance’ to include Neuro-diverse people
- Include pathways for sensory experiences for the deaf, visually impaired etc for example backstage tours before the show, allowing tactile experiences with props and costumes, or hearing loops etc.
- You can cater to different audiences in the way you plan your annual calendar
- Some plays that invite reflection or change do challenge audiences – some audience members may become offended.
- Some plays are just pure entertainment. Think broadly about your community and how your selection might work for them.
- Most plays contain both entertainment/ engagement as well as social reflection. Honesty without alienation of the audience is the goal.
- Q&A after the show can be useful for audiences to resolve or reflect on meaning and ideas in the play

### **Dinner Theatre**

In a small town dinner theatre is a great way to go. Because it's a struggle to put on shows in a small town, and there's never enough men you know?

*Helen Horsnell*

*(So, food attracts men Helen? – ed.)*

### **Audience / Community Buy-In**

I think the crucial thing is how do you get them to buy into the experience and feel like they want to keep doing it? Do you know the play *Our Town*? Thornton Wilder? That play is a very touching play about community, it's about the town it's about creating our community and they are even roles that were written into it for members of the community to play. I always feel like that's a great play to start off any kind of

new theatre experience because you can tailor it to feel like it is your community, you can involve community members and it makes them feel like 'this is us'.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Audience-players (Immersive experiences)**

In *Up and Away*, we had a flight to do. First is lift-off, and then we're going to go to 3 different stops and then we're going to come home and that will be the end.

Throughout the piece we had chapter markings of the play: eg "Scene 4, the Fog Bog." Then everybody checks their map. With the map we know where we are on our journey and it is there just to support our agenda and build it into the play.

It is breaking away from the structural forms of theatre that have developed. We want to break through that 'picture frame' that has existed around the story and lean into where young people are developmentally. If you go back to early Peter Pan and early childhood pieces they were all about interaction between audience and players. Punch and Judy and those types of puppetry shows were all about audience interaction.

Two to five-year-olds do not want to come to a show and sit and be quiet. They want to come and engage with the characters, so let's build in moments for that to happen. For older ones we lean on the edge of "scary-safe". We created a world - it's not a haunted house, that could jump out at you, but it is a little bit of a mystery and you're interacting with a character who is ... maybe up to something. How do we bring you into that world? You're not going to be just a passive audience member. You're going to be an engaged audience member. The Trusty Sidekick name of our company comes from, you know, near the hero of the show. The audience members are the heroes, we are their sidekicks and we need that audience member to complete something.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Involvement of Audience as Stakeholders**

One way we did that was to have significant interviews with individuals with disabilities - specifically with autism, and their care givers, to learn what their needs and interests were. It was co-creating the plan for how we would welcome people in, based on the insights of individuals with autism.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Relaxed Performances**

You are allowing folks in the audience to get up and move around if they need to, vocalise if they need to and you just let that permission be known at the beginning.

You tell everyone that 'this is an inclusive space for everyone that's there, to be their full self, with no apology! We leave the house lights up slightly so people can get up and move around safely. We have family changing rooms in the restrooms. If someone needs assistance using the facilities, they can have that assistance. We create a free performance guide that lets people know what to expect. We have some fidgets and a sensory library but that's not really essential. You don't have to have things like that. These things are cues to let people know what is acceptable and what's welcomed here. It helps them adapt into the experience.

The trademark is social stories but we give them pre-performance materials and it's a way of conceptualising what your venue looks like; what is the process when I arrive on campus; what is it like to get a ticket; what do I need to expect about the show; is there anything startling or jarring in the show. The thing with Relaxed Performances

is it's (still) 'The Play'. It's the same exact play that everyone else is seeing on any other occasion because it's also about having it be an equitable arts experience.

I'm not trying to dumb something down, I'm not trying to soften it, I'm not trying to change your artistic integrity. What I really want is to reduce the barriers someone needs for how they prepare themselves for the experience. And allowing people to opt in for what kind of content is compelling to me and meaningful to me or not. It's not as complex as people think and yet you do need to understand more about autism and the breadth of experience with autism and with other disabilities, in order to start that process to engage with folks. But the actual adjustments for performance are not significant.

*Marcie Bramucci*



**Figure 39. A Funny lot!**

### **Using Comedy to Engage Rural Audiences**

There is a NZ playwright called Devon Williamson. He writes great stuff, but it hasn't been picked up by the big players. I saw this funny one - it's called "My Husband's Nuts". People go just because of the "Oh, God!". It's about a farmer who has a quad bike accident, he's meant to open an agricultural show, he's gone nutty, the wife helps him because she can't let people know. He is thinking he is a Japanese soldier who thinks the war is still on - and I mean, it is hilarious, and silly. But really popular.

And then he wrote one: The Old People Are Revolting - about people in a retirement village who are revolting against something that has happened. He picks fantastic titles. Then there is another one about Christmas - "Twas the Fight Before Christmas". It's about a woman who's got terrible kids who are coming home for Christmas dinner and the French Psychologist next door who is about to commit suicide. He has this rooster that only eats Camembert, that he needs to find a carer for. It's just nutty stuff that's very funny and they go down really well with rural communities.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **The Q&A after the Show**

I love the Q&A session at the end but it has to be monitored, because people have strong views, and strong feelings. My Japanese actor doesn't like the Q&A either - it's funny, these two really great actors - the best actors I've worked with - neither of them like the Q&A. I guess I can understand that they don't want to break the wall and become just themselves.

It really behoves the process because the audience gets to ask this Japanese man of the 21st Century what it's like to portray someone who is racially profiled when he's an older man and has done nothing but love the United States for 40 years. What's it like for you to portray him?

You hear it out in the lobby a lot - people talking about "I saw Schindler's list" and I saw these other things. I would just stand in the lobby listening to people having conversations, but Q&A allows better feedback because you get to hear in finer detail or more succinct detail, some of those elements. You'll always have someone who says "you didn't make it sound harsh enough", and you've got the other side - "Oh my gosh, all you talk about is slavery, slavery, slavery. Can't you get past it?" Everybody in your audience is going to be on one side or the other of a story. But we have someone *of that culture* as well as of colonisation culture, who can stand in the room and answer the questions, after the presentation. None of us were alive in the 1850s, and I say this is the best we can do with the information we have.

You can tell those stories and they're really important to tell especially at this point where you're trying to bring cultures together after having decades and centuries of what has, for all intents and purposes, in all of these different countries become the apartheid of their age. It's a rough thing.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Picking your battles**

I suppose that's about finding ways to bring people into theatre that may not have experienced it much. If I say I'm going to do a show about local stories or if I say I'm going to do a show like Frozen – there'll be different reactions from different people.

If it's about building numbers or getting interest - or if it's transformative practice - if it's about mental health issues - it is about helping isolated people or totally using it as a pedagogy or a psychological tool to help them come out of themselves - that's a totally different kettle of fish.

And that's probably what the community is - if you're saying that you want something that family is going to be a part of and that they can go to and have family time together and it's a bit candy floss. Or are you wanting to create something within your community to build community and to give people of your community voice?

*Emma Bishop*

### **Hope through Honesty**

Truth, even hard truths, can be hopeful. It's not always so, but they can be. The thing about drama is, the more specific a storyteller is with the experience of the character or their own experience, or whatever they are foraging into, the more universal it becomes. There is something uplifting about knowing that other people have been here, and they have made it out.

Even though there is always something uplifting, sometimes there is trauma in the plays (and if all the plays you are seeing are August Wilson Century Cycle plays, you

might not know that someone like Dornea Moreso exists. And she is also like August Wilson in a sense but her plays are through her voice in her generation.)

When you said about 'the kitchen sink' - well, history can be The Kitchen Sink, or the drain, historical plays that show oppressed peoples especially, whether they are BIPOC people, or women, or queer people. (Although sometimes we just wanna see a good love / life story right?) But people do want to be able to connect with a story, and they want to see themselves within it, even if it is not their story. And it's making sure that you have variety, so that it's not just the story that's the tragedy.

*Paula Alekson*

## **Touring**

*Sometimes theatres reach their audiences by literally taking their show on the road!*

## **Educational Touring Program**

One of the things that I get to do in the job that I am now in is organising the Barter Players to do a tour for three months out of the year. We go all around the south eastern part of the United States. We see between about 30,000 to 45,000 young people in those three months. We do about 120 performances of those shows. It's amazing. I think my favourite part is we get to go to two of the most under-served and poorest counties in the nation and we see every single student in their schools. We are the artists, the plays that a lot of people in areas that are that are pretty close by us get to see during a year. And talking about actively being able to be part of seeing someone's life change and to be part of that - it's really something special!

*(Laughs heartily)*

*Barrett Guyton*

## **How touring used to be done**

Back in the old days there were little country halls everywhere and you had a wee community. My husband had come off the farm and they had their own school. They had the school and the hall, the rifle shooting club and so much happened in this hall you couldn't even book it. They could do things in their community hall.

And then farming changed - I look around and I think dairy farming changes killed a million communities in New Zealand. The shops are gone now. They all went and half the halls are just shuttered up.

But in the early days in these tiny little towns, we used to take our shows on the road and perform in these tiny little halls. You would be feeding 20 cent pieces into the meter to keep the lights going and you couldn't cook the meal and run the show at the same time as you would blow all the fuses, that sort of stuff. But while we were doing it, I learned certain stuff, and that was to take it out there and then they'll come to you.

For years people then travelled into town to see a show. People could see we had issues and stuff and so they started coming town in, and were building our support, because we went out there and bothered to do a show in front of them. You just needed a tiny hall with a piano. They just enjoyed it.

*Helen Horsnell*

## Chapter Four - The Importance of Home-grown Content

### Writing for Theatre

*Whether it is, as described in previous sections of this report, through a process of devising theatre with a community, or training new playwrights in an educational setting or community program, the value of original content was a vital element of interviewee's experiences. There is no shortage of people passionately fostering home-grown content in the theatres and theatre programs in this report, to connect with and better represent their rural communities.*

*While it is true that some of the interviewees expressed caution over expecting to be able to create quality theatre and recommended that a writing professional be consulted for the creation of the work, others embraced the development of new writing talent from the grass-roots of communities. This includes providing learning experiences for those who will give it a try. This latter model was held up as a process of creating community connection, as authentic, fresh, relevant and new storytelling and as a way of opening up awareness of and a love of writing in every-day people.*

### Curiosity about people and the World

It makes me think - what stories need to be told in the community? What needs to be shared in the community? What voices need to be heard that haven't been heard?  
*Paula Alekson*

### Own Stories

You may have heard that there is a lot of stereotypes attached to Appalachia and one of the things we wanted to do was to develop authentic Appalachian stories from Appalachian writers.  
*Nick Piper*

### The Real Stories v Under-representation or Misrepresentation

Being from a small town and being a rural girl, not seeing my story accurately represented in a lot of the theatre productions that I was a part of, and at least in American Theatre, being very stereotyped either as the hillbilly, Podunk community or the poverty stricken, and sad. It is those things but it's way more complex than that. It is way more nuanced.

I was interested in 'what does it look like to tell the stories of my people?' People growing up in the north woods that are trying to live their life. They live in a small town, they have dreams, yet they might not know how to actualise them or have the resources to actualise them in the same way as others.

And now knowing terms like communities that were built up of economies of extraction and resource stripping and all these different things that I know now, but also what that does to the psyche of a place. Having been taken from and then kind-of blamed for all the wrong that is happening in our country. And not having a platform or a stage to tell their story. I left traditional theatre to understand how storytelling - or using the performance medium of theatre - could shift that psyche of how people think about themselves, their places. That was the foundation of the theatre company.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Who Should Write?**

People who want to write have something they want to say: they want to tell a story. It takes a lot of writing, and reading plays, and watching plays before you start learning how to structure it and how a story can be most effectively told.

*Nick Piper*

### **A Story Inside You**

Over the years people revealed themselves to me as poets, or verbose, or interesting to speak to - people who clearly had a story inside of them and may be open to talking about how to put that story into a play. These are some rules of writing a play: you want to have this line break here; and don't write stage directions willy-nilly, put them in some parentheses. Those kinds of things. Then really interesting things like how do you make something dramatically interesting.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Getting Some Training**

The whole 10-session residencies would be the place where we coached the students in the principles that matched the criteria. They were never told 'this is what we are looking for.' They were coached in what we were looking for but they also needed the freedom to explore what it was like to write a play - that was more important, as well as creating a play that was dramatically compelling - that had a beginning, middle and end, completing the art. (I think that's always the hardest part. It's hard to know how the story ends, unless you know from the beginning how the story ends.)

*Paula Alekson*

### **Writing for your Region**

In Zone Two we do encourage original scripts and scores so we have our rural communities that do write their own plays and their own musicals. Helen Horsnell who's our president has a business called New Zealand Playwright. She has scripts and scores. She is actively promoting New Zealand scripts and scores all the time, not only for her business but so Kiwis can do Kiwi stuff. Helen's organisation does lower cost shows, not like your *ones* that cost a fortune. If you've got a \$1000 budget it's not going to break the bank to get your rights, your scripts and scores sorted.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **A Position of Trust**

It's a big thing to take somebody's story. You have to have their will, their trust and their collaboration. That's something that has to be built. You're going to take care of that story sensitively and to do it justice. There are so many stories out there.

*Aled Rhys-Jones*

### **A pre-production process.**

It's just me and Andrew and we do about six months of research about the history and stories of the place and then write a script and bring people back together and then have them help us fix the scripts so we are accurately representing their place and their people.

Then we do the same thing with the rehearsal process. We look at where these different scenes might be staged. We bring people into the space and say ok, so this is our stage - where does our character enter from? And your friend says 'there's a tree way back there' so we are co-creating what the choreography of the thing is, co-creating where the audience interacts with the space.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Training Young Writers Up**

Barrett and I both rely quite heavily on our artist in residence - Cathy Bush - and in terms of teaching young people how to structure a play. One other thing we just started doing in the last couple of years is a college playwrights' festival where we have tried to bridge the gap between young playwrights and professional playwrights.

We do workshops - we have done zoom workshops with students. I'll send you this document. (*Found herein as Appendix One.*) I think it might be helpful. She's put together a kind of "How to a write a play" type of document - of what's important - that is very accessible to somebody who either may have or who has never written a play before.

*Nick Piper*

### **Making Theatre without Bleeding Money**

The songs - we make them up. We just make up songs. All original. We may use Broadway stuff in class, as an example, but then we say 'we're going to make our own!'

And your example of those girls wanting to put on 'The Greatest Showman', I would have asked them why they like that moment in the show so much? Why is it so special? Let them reveal 'Oh she just seems like she's flying. Then we talk about other ways we could make someone look like they are flying onstage where you don't need all that. You are getting to the crux of what they want to do without having to pay a bunch of money for it.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Inclusive Writing Training Program**

We did this great workshop this year as part of our new initiative called "Black in Appalachia" supporting black Appalachian playwrights to create more diversity in our content and on our stages.

We had a workshop with black Appalachian writers or people who wanted to write a play. The first part of the workshop was led by a person who took them through content gathering using memory exercises. The second half of the workshop with Cathy was about how to take that content and turn it into a dramatic form.

*Nick Piper*

### **Working with the Educators**

Our playwright in residence gets quite technical with the teachers and with training, such as: Here's the structure of a play, a beginning, middle and an end; a late point of attack; things that a 10-minute play has. And then we put a lot of trust in the teachers knowing the students and really being able to spark conversations about what they are writing about and getting a student writing about something - they are going to bring themselves to whatever story they are telling. It's about really fostering that. The 'top eight' ones get performed in front of people.

And that's like every wonderful play that we all know - it comes from a true place and has a really great story to tell, and tells it in a really great way.

*Nick Piper*

### **A Playwriting Residency for High-School Students**

I ran a high school playwriting residency program. We would work with classes and the students would each write a 10 minute play. We worked with five schools. Then



we would take all the plays, and we would choose one play from each school and then do a festival.

Always have a play selection committee, so that one person doesn't take responsibility for which play is going to be produced. We developed a process for play selection (and I can share this with you at some point if it's helpful to you). We would typically ask six people on staff to read the plays. Every play got three people reading each play. The readers didn't have to read all the plays. We have scoring sheet about different dramatic effects, does it have an ending, etc. The readers could circle the numbers on the sheet and we would crunch the numbers and we would let the numbers and the scoring decide. We could say we had a play selection committee, based on this criteria. Then you don't have to worry about people's feelings getting hurt as much.

*Paula Alekson*

### **Protecting your Original Work**

*Bonnie Vorenberg of The Seniors Theatre Resource Centre spoke to me on the topic of Intellectual Property Protection and Distributors protection for my plays I had written.*

You are starting to get a body of work. My advice to you is that you protect your intellectual property. Even though you are writing plays for whatever purposes, you still have your intellectual property and that is worth protecting. You need to make sure that however you do it you protect it. Register it with whatever copyright office you have. How are you disseminating it? Are you charging royalties? If someone says 'yeah I loved your show', make sure you charge for cast copies and royalties.

You might be on the very beginning of a very prolific career, likewise with your resource guide. They are your intellectual property. How are you protecting that? You don't want to give yourself away. It's something that you need to be really clear about.

Send your copyright information and register it with the US copyright office. If you just put Copyright Michael McSweeney without it being registered then you find someone breaching your copyright, then you can send them a demand to stop using it but you cannot sue them for breaching copyright. Without it being registered you don't have total strength of your copyright,

The reason things are taken down is because you can't have copyrighted material on the Internet because of the intellectual property of the writer. People play with that willy-nilly and are not really strict about it - and it is really, really concerning. It's especially concerning for us and our plays, it is really critical that people don't keep anything online that is copyrighted.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

## **Chapter Five - How Networks Support Community Theatre in Small Towns**

*The reflections in these interviews about the power of networks to help organise, promote, protect and inspire community theatre was in contrast to my personal experience in my small town context in the western side of the Snowy Mountains NSW. I sought ideas to feed back into the networks I have encountered and was richly rewarded by learning what overseas nationally-based theatre networks and the International Amateur Theatre Association offer their membership. These networked functions included: resources, online educational content, support for networking, festivals, policy ideas around mental health, safety and inclusion, award ceremonies/ structures, discussion about business considerations and much more.*

### **How networks can support committees**

Zone two in New Zealand is really strong and it has been very strong for a long time, and I think that comes from your zone rep and your committee being at the top and being out there all the time, constantly keeping in contact, and keeping communication open with people. If you communicate the right information and you are there for them, supporting them, when they need it, I think that's the most important thing you can do for your committees.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Networked support for local playwrights**

In NZ it's Play Market New Zealand, and Play Bureau (run by Helen by the way) We (Drama NZ) put some money into an initiative because we had a lot of drama teachers who didn't know what New Zealand plays existed - they only knew big historic plays? Arthur Miller, Samuel Becket, traditional plays.

We did a project called "Behind the Page" and we reached out to a whole lot of New Zealand playwrights and we did zoom interviews that were 15 min's long - their histories, what they write - to try and create visibility.

*Emma Bishop*

### **Recognition at a Network Level**

We developed Diversity and Cultural awards and we like to encourage young people doing different things and we have the MTNZ achievement award. Societies nominate their people who have been involved for 20 years or more. The recipients are really proud of it and they wear them to shows. The diversity award may include the children with Down's Syndrome in the chorus that made us all cheer.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Law Changes and Policies**

Societies can adapt these resources and take them on. When the health and safety guidelines changed in New Zealand we wrote a guideline which then, the theatre clubs could pick up and not necessarily need to have the expertise but be able to sit with adapt and then adopt.

One thing we can do for community theatres is realising that volunteers have limited time. In the community you do have limited time so if there's multiple theatres we should be pooling our resources.

It shouldn't be that every society is trying to write their own constitution for example. MTNZ - NZ association laws are about to change. We're trying to write policies to help the grassroots people struggling. How many of them are mums and dad that

got into community theatre because their kids wanted to sing? And (the changes) are nothing about theatre. And the Conferences - we try to keep the price down low.  
*Emma Bishop*

### **Protection via Policy Guidance**

*The virtue of an established business structure is that you then work towards compliance with policy. This in turn leads to access to grants, hire of performance spaces, and most importantly the protecting of yourself and your members from liabilities incurred while failing to comply. Insurance may be available or cheaper. All these things take time and energy and distract us from our creative work. Policy Reform has had a big impact on community groups, including theatres. It has been a global trend that has probably had a negative effect on participation. Please keep in mind that the responses below are from other countries and legal contexts. They are not legal advice either.*

This is the same thing that happened in the UK back in the 90's when legislation started to toughen up. Compliance started to be a buzzword. Ticking boxes. Terrible stories were exposed about what had been happening in the 70s and earlier and forever, in youth theatre and children's theatre. Accidents that happened in theatres: Adjudicators who walked off the end of the stage because there wasn't a white line - she didn't see the end of the stage and broke both her legs. All those things going on.  
*Aled Rhys-Jones*

I think theatre groups are much better off having the protection that our (MTNZ's) policy frameworks offer. Just Health and Safety wise; and the whole thing. We have all the policy they need. At the moment we are just working on a child protection policy. Most people have a loose (policy application) but at least they have gained a robust policy and if something happens you've got to have all your ducks in a line these days.

With everything, nothing is an accident any more you know? It's always why? It's like with training your backstage crew - you train them exactly what they're allowed and not allowed to do with that piece of equipment and then they need to sign off that They've been trained in it. Then, if they do something wrong, then they're liable but if you haven't trained them and ticked that off, you are liable even if you've got some idiot that does something absolutely stupid that they've been told not to do. Because you haven't got a piece of paper with it ticked, then you are responsible so I think (theatre groups) do need to be aware and supported in a society like this.  
*Helen Horsnell*

### **What policies might we need?**

Our theatres should really have policies and procedures about:

- Health and Safety,
- Sexual Harm,
- Harassment and Bullying,
- A social media policy,
- A policy about the well-being of the whole team

It has become more and more prevalent over the last three or four years with mental, well-being and wellness in general. This has come to the forefront. I don't know what it's been like in Australia. And it's really become a culture that 'it's okay to be not okay'.

It's about really telling people, and not keeping things to yourself. The government has been a big advocate for that which has been awesome. But there's lots of tool kits and stuff that are around that, that can be used for that. Theatres have some guidelines and if people have issues in their theatre they've got those guidelines to fall back on.

I don't know whether you have seen these books? They are on Play Market. Go to New Zealand playwright's [playmarket.org.nz](http://playmarket.org.nz). They are a series of books. This is book four and it came out last year. "04 Working Together: Safety, Respect and Wellbeing."

It talks about sexual harm, and it talks about bullying and talks about wellness and talks about all those types of things in our theatres. It's written by arts people for arts people. I really focus on that as well.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **A Risky World**

You can't even laugh at anything because somebody is going to take offence. Even depicting television from a previous time period. (Theatre Companies...) think 'If it doesn't happen we won't need to worry about all of that. But they have got no excuse.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **You don't have to be an expert in all things if you can network**

We've also gotten involved in programs doing work with kids who are in not-at-home situations, or who have been housing insecure. I'm not a social worker – yet – so in those situations I need to have a contact who is comfortable with that individual's history and their home life. I can say to them "This person just sat in the corner all day, and I don't think it's because she wanted to. I think she was really feeling emotional today. I wanted to check-in with you because her and I had a talk." That comes up. Having that relationship with the partner organisations gives me the opportunity to recognise that I am not the expert on this. I can provide my most generous take on it, but I don't know for sure what might be going on in their life.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Networks can help with Organisational Level Leadership**

I think it's important to recognise that people have different levels of understanding about Wellness and about supporting Mental Health. I think it's important that we use the resources that we have nationally and that we keep building the networks.

I think we are seeing more and more of this. Just this year at MTNZ, the committee developed a Diversity and Inclusion award, so that's a new award. People can say we've done this play or that musical that included these people, and they can put themselves forward for a nomination for those sorts of shows.

MTNZ are starting to mark that more and more. We also have got a cultural support person on the exec so that they are putting the Maori perspective in, not just the white European/New Zealand so I think that's important that that's included.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **Adjusting to new Policy Requirements**

At the time that I started work a very important law was put into place that required entities in the United States that received federal financial assistance to be

accessible to people with a disability. Nobody knew what that meant. The theatres were like 'What do we do? What do we do?'

My boss put me in charge of that for the Arena Stage. I was really young and the work I was doing was stuff nobody else had done before. I helped make the Arena Stage accessible, with the help of my supervisor.

I left that job and I went to Texas and spent some time doing really bizarre things in a smaller town and working with people with disabilities, and helping cultural organisations be accessible at a city level. I started two non-profits while I was down there - it was lots of fun.

Then I came back to D.C. because I got the job at the Kennedy Centre as their director of accessibility. Basically they wanted the Kennedy Centre to be compliant with federal laws. At that time the American Disability Act had also been passed so we had two federal laws addressing civil rights issues for people with disabilities.

*Betty Siegel*

### **Online Training**

Last year we started an initiative called Reaching the Edges and Covid actually helped us. Because we've had all these geographically isolated rural people saying: "Workshops are too hard to get. It's a three hour drive to the city" or a 2 airplane hop aeroplane ticket. What we got with Reaching the Edges was we created a whole lot of online content.

We actually got money from the government. The ministry asked, regarding our face-to-face plans "Could we take our content online?" Suddenly we rolled out 35 online workshop and the most remote places were coming online. (e.g. Zoom)

Some were lecture style presenters talking, some of them were panels and some of them more practical workshops where we actually had the participant stand up and do choreography or stand up and do small scenes in master classes.

*Emma Bishop*

### **Online Community of Practice**

Virtual communities for artists are very exciting. After Covid, and considering the remote, wide dispersion of communities in Australia, creating communal spaces where creatives can interact, intervene, express their boredom, express their excitement, leave the room, and leave a mark is a very empowering thing. "It's a democratic experience, a social experience for people."

*Laurence Dauphinais Via The Siminovitch Forum*

### **Finding networks that can help**

There was an organisation that got going called the Voluntary Arts Network, now called Creative Lives. They started to provide a very basic package - a draft constitution, a draft insurance policy, a draft child protection policy - just simple templates. It didn't actually do the work for you, but they set you thinking about all these various areas. In terms of looking at my group, what do we have to take into consideration?

The majority of amateur companies, regardless of whether they are marching bands or whatever, they were run by inexperienced volunteers in those particular fields, not necessarily in the creative skills, but in how to legally run an organisation, doing the accounts, and all the rest of the boxes you have to check. That organisation set itself

up initially as a kind of a supporting organisation and then also went on to become a lobbying organisation in terms of responding to legislation when it was being made or changed.

You need that. There must be some sort of volunteer network that looks after small charities. If you think about a local Women's Institute, or (in the UK) there's the young farmers clubs, they all have to operate in that way. They would probably belong to an overall organisation. (I don't know about in Australia), an overall org who would be lobbying government and talking to government about the change in legislation and how they effect young farmer's festivals for example. Or Jam Making Competitions, whatever. The community-based work that happens but not in the arts, in many aspects. There must be some overall counsel of voluntary organisations. Something!

*Aled Rhys-Jones*

### **Learning from Sector-specific Networks**

I met a group called the Cardboard Citizens in London who have created theatre work with people in the homeless community for 25 years. Meeting them had a real impact on me and it was something I thought was really interesting.

I guess what I realised was that I had a fair amount of experience with people who maybe don't get to put their shows on a main stage, or who don't always get to be the stars of the show. I knew there were lots of amazing people out there in the world who weren't getting opportunities, or who had very limited opportunities.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Can Networks Help with Funding?**

MTNZ had started the capital assistance fund. That's a little fund where people put five cents for every seat they sold. It was voluntary. It was paid to MTNZ and was put into a fund. If they needed to put in a new roof, or something like that, someone could get a very light interest free loan. It's not for shows. It's been fantastic,

*Helen Horsnell*

### **A point for Networks Lobbying for Better Support**

How are we going to make it happen? Can we tap into some local funding or national or regional funding? Different ways for the same end.

A lot of former socialist countries still have very strong government organisations with huge budgets, just for the amateur arts. It's fantastic because it still exists and they have that as part of their national cultural identity. They tap into their traditions, it's attached to the fact that 'my mother was in this choir', 'my grandmother was in this choir'. It's something that's passed on, and it's knowledge of their songs, their history, their place in the world.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Great, but not sexy enough**

We have built up quite robust policies. We actually spent quite a lot of money last year on it. We luckily got a grant from Creative New Zealand - a government funded body, who normally give a million dollars to one Maori artist to write a play and tour it round the country. They think that's better than to give us twenty grand a year so that we could function completely. We are the grassroots - we are training all these people with the technical side.

Because of all the stuff we do - and it's really quite hard, we went to them and asked how we could gain access to some money. Basically, we are really just not sexy

enough! We went through a marketing program evaluation. They came back with 'you are punching way above your weight, you are doing this and this really well' but you need to upgrade your marketing to be taken seriously. We were too "Grass roots" and that was exactly what we were about! We were between a rock and a hard place.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Direct communication**

Sometimes it's actually getting the news past the committees, getting it out to the grass roots people. And it is about encouraging individuals to be our members.

*Helen Horsnell*



### **Designing a Network Web-based Resource**

I know that there are so many web sites and different things it's about doing it in the right way I suppose. Within musical theatre in NZ - MTNZ has it's main FB page, with groups for it's members and the zones have their own groups where we share ideas and resources. It's quite an informal way of sharing. The issue is with having a website - who is going to provide content, update it, make sure links still work etc. There's a lot of work in doing that? If you're doing it for love how long is it going to last? FB is better because you appoint a couple of administrators.

Have you got a list of all the community theatres in Australia? Have you gone out to them with some basic survey about what they want?

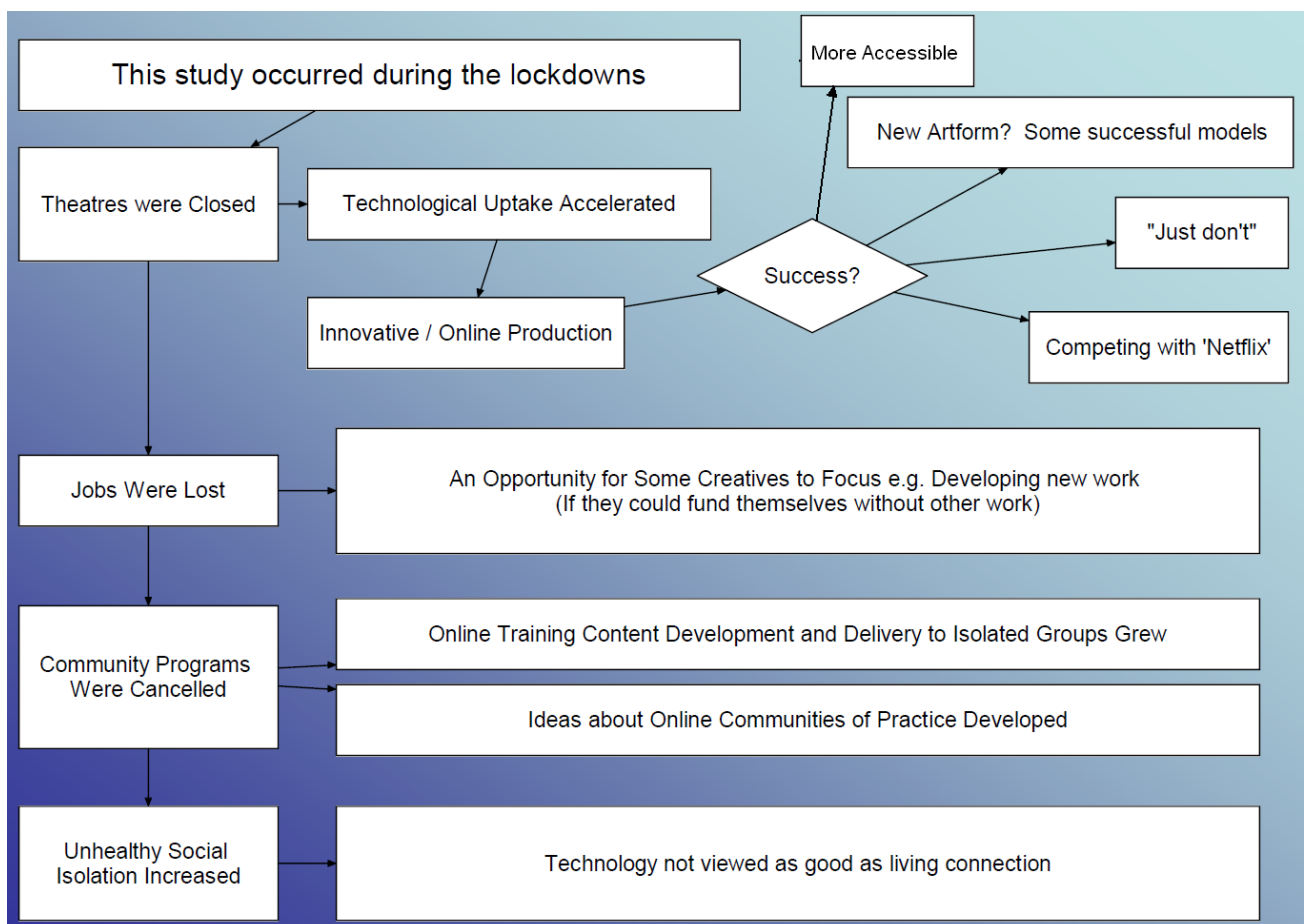
*Emma Bishop*

## Chapter Six – Overcoming Lockdown Isolation

*This Chapter is not covered by the original questions, but it is intrinsic to the context of what has happened to the world since the study started, and the issues were discussed by many participants touching on the isolation of the lockdowns, Covid, technological and other theatre-connected responses to the situation. It seemed the natural extension of the current study.*

*The lockdowns are seen as having negative impact on community cohesiveness in the interpersonal sense that theatre delivers, and in general social and mental health, being a radical departure from what is seen as promoting healthy connections, leading to isolation. A lot of fear was expressed about the effect of isolation due to the lockdowns on the mental health of the community. A sense of alienation was seen as a lasting result.*

*There is clear dissatisfaction on the part of many respondents with computer-based theatre work as a replacement for live theatre participation. Limitations of technological access, effectiveness and reliability and noticeable interpersonal disconnectedness and energy changes are seen as major hurdles to replacing live theatre with on-line.*



**Figure 41 Technology, Covid, versus Live Theatre**



### **That Energy Connection**

Whether it's psychic or physical or whatever, if he's laughing you're going to connect to that energy - maybe some kind of electrical energy that goes from person to person. But you don't get that if you are online.

You can see people online but you can't smell them, you can't taste them, or touch them. You can hear them and you can see them. Really you can't do much. We only see this much of them, not their whole bodies. And the image of their face is flattened by the screen.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

*Further, where online theatre is seen as successful, it was a widely-held view that pre-recorded was inferior to live-streamed, but that live-streamed held significant differences to the way that live theatre delivers a sense of connection. It was seen as an alternative art form with different values.*

### **Just don't.**

This medium - there is a number of different live theatres and I'm seeing another one tomorrow night. I've seen lots of them, perhaps you have too. There are certain live theatre things that should never have been put on Zoom. It's not the medium for everything.

There's a reason there are film schools. They know how to do this stuff. People who are live theatre people, who just put themselves in front of Zoom and it's like "Oh god, no, stop. Stop, please stop." And you know they can be so good, but it's the wrong medium.

*Kandie Carle*

*Comparisons were made about trying to compete with X-box and Netflix. Although they already had a role as a socially limiting medium in the opposite sense of community theatre being helpful, online theatre would be a difficult medium to compete for Netflix users attention. However there have been some very positive impressions:*

### **Shakespeare Via Zoom**

Seattle Repertory Theatre did their Shakespeare musical all through Zoom and the performers recorded themselves singing the parts and then they all put it together. It was this beautiful video and it was part of their ticketed season so one can purchase the link to watch it on demand. It actually turned out pretty well. It was a musical vision of Twelfth Night.

The costumes were made up of what people had at home. That was very great to see. I think that with Dallas, we are not that close to doing something like that, it would require a lot of coordination. But they demonstrated it is possible and it was a joy to watch. All the songs and everything. It was a great opportunity for a video editor to put their skills to work. It was fantastic.

*Maria Calderon*

*There are positives to the new technological approaches: Online script reading nights have become very useful especially as they help where there is physical or geographical isolation. As a medium for running theatre workshops, they have been very successful, especially where mobility and the ability to get around independently was an issue.*

### **The Future is Here**

My feeling and the feeling of a lot of people is that now that people have learned about performing online, some parts will continue. I mean there are some real positives. When we had our first theatre performance online we had 798 people attend that show. No way would you get that in a local community.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

*With theatre closures, some theatres have produced music videos of the cast singing (Dunedin were going to put on Les Mis, but have created a YouTube video of "Do You Hear The People Sing?"), overcoming the lag and connection issues very carefully. Some have kept up their rehearsal schedule by having a mixed-mode rehearsal – some via technology, some live, as circumstances permit.*

### **Mixed Mode**

For the showcase, for our recorded show, we had a 10 week total rehearsal process. Eight of those weeks were rehearsals via Zoom and only recording on the Zoom screen. That is material that will end up in the play, manifesting the difference between the Zoom world and the real world, when we are in-person wearing a beautifully designed mask. We try to use Zoom to our advantage.

We had a lot of lag, a lot of issues. At times people weren't able to connect. They may be in transit or able to connect but not be fully present in the rehearsal. I think it allowed us to survive, it allowed us to keep sharing experiences, sharing skills. As cohorts in the different theatres around the country we were able to have our monthly meetings and to share resources and encourage each other.

*Maria Calderon*

*There have been other great successes. Award Ceremonies have been done via Zoom events and meetings and organisation functions such as networking have occurred. Theatrical workers have also turned the pandemic into a way to show their students that they care for them by phoning each and every participant, not just talking business, but also showing genuine interest in each and every one and really checking how they are doing and being supportive.*

### **Online Classes for People with Disabilities**

There is something pretty magical between theatre and folks with developmental disabilities, autism or Downs' Syndrome. Their minds are so expansive and interesting. In class we say "Who has an idea?" Every idea we just say yes to.

We've transitioned all our classes to Zoom and I do a lot of teaching right here. For some of our folks getting to meet on zoom has actually been better for them! To not have to transition from house to subway to classroom and just know that everything they like is going to happen in one just space.

Our entry class is ensemble theatre and that's meant to be a tasting menu of ways you could create theatre. A little bit of improvisation, a little bit of writing, a bit of movement, and sort of play around with a couple of different things.

### **Example of Online Workshop Format**

Some of the classes are just about recognising things on stage. Let's look at this picture of a scene onstage. Who do you think in this picture has the power on stage? Who has the highest status? Why? And they will be like 'They're standing there with their chest puffed out.', 'they're at centre stage'. They start to figure out directing for themselves.

We make this list (I always have chart paper up), "this is a list of things that help a person have high status on stage". Here's our toolbox. Now I'm going to put you in small groups. You have these two lines and you need to use the chair, and it needs to be really clear to us who has the power. And then the power needs to switch. Then I'll just stop talking for 15-20 minutes and just let them work on things. And then we will have a moment of sharing what everyone worked on.

Then they get to be in the role of facilitator/teacher and say "This is what we worked on, this is our answer to that question and we feel this way about it." They have had to work in a group with strangers and get to know each other. Then they came back and see what we thought about it.

We say 'oh, you know what's interesting about that?' I liked this and this and I loved that. And we say 'next time you come back we will dive in a little bit more to this, because I would have really loved to see you use your whole voice. Let's do it one more time but 10 times louder'. Just to bring into the workshop space that we are practising the directions they might get in rehearsal. So it isn't the first time they are hearing someone tell them that they need to be louder, which inevitably will happen. That's typically like what the workshops look like.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **After Covid**

*When discussing the isolative impact of Covid on society, there were Recovery-related principles expressed that might have a positive impact on theatre making:*

### **Conceptualising Community Recovery in Theatre**

How will people come out of the pandemic? I've been thinking about this. Some are going to want to talk about it, some are going to want to write about it, or make a film. Some are going to want to totally ignore it and move on because they have lived it. Like those guys who fought in the wars. They don't want to act in that, you are not going to get them to tell a war story, and I think that's how it's going to be after the pandemic too. I think there will be a lot more severe ramifications than we realise, all throughout the culture.

A lot of publishers have put together a lot of things - pandemic plays, zoom plays - I just think to myself - most people are just not going to want to do that. Been there, done it, now I just want to move on. But there are some people that have stories they are going to want to share. Now will audiences want to see that? I have a feeling that they are going to want to escape.

I was talking to friends that were saying they want to travel and stay in hotels. They also want to learn how to ballroom dance - they have always wanted to do it and by gosh they are going to do that too. I think that's a lot healthier approach than having to go back and rehash the pandemic.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Hybrid Events**

After Covid we are going to try to do some sort of hybrid of online and in-person events because although there is nothing that beats being in the same room with people, drinking coffee, eating sweets, I'm totally sensing that we have created a new group - a community group though this. I know that a lot of the folks that attend are older folks who maybe don't want to drive at night or are concerned about weather.

*Paula Alekson*

## **Chapter Seven – About the Business End**

*What I hadn't fully thought through at the outset of the study, was about how theatre involves shrewd and lively business acumen, depending on the size of the group of course. There are a lot of serious issues to cover as a theatre group expands, and these business processes are often not optional. Even to be taken seriously by a council for a grant, or just to hire a hall, there are going to be things we need to have in place.*

*There are also plenty of issues that intertwine with the artistic side that people referred to in the study, covering everything from copyright, leadership, policy and community networking to business style considerations and measuring success. They don't fit the original five questions but need to be included.*

*I have therefore dedicated Appendix Three to this valuable learning. The list of headings in Appendix Three are as follows:*

- Some General Responses that Helped Ground Me
- Comments On Being under Auspices of another organisation
- A Journey to Respectability
- On Establishing your own Organisational Structure
- What kind of business do you call this anyway?
- Driving Forces and Cycles
- Leadership Roles
- A Developmental Focus
- A Team Approach
- Creating Opportunities
- Networking with the Community
- Community Buy-In
- Social Marketing
- Commercial v Other Models of Theatre
- Elite Market Power for Amateur Societies through Consortiums
- Intellectual Property and Original Content
- Measuring Success

*There is certainly a lot to do. The graphic below represents just one series of issues to be grappled with. Most likely, having an auspicing organisation helps alleviate a lot of this, especially if they happen to own a theatre. However, this might mean a loss of autonomy and freedom as well. The worry is what all this may mean to your creative focus.*

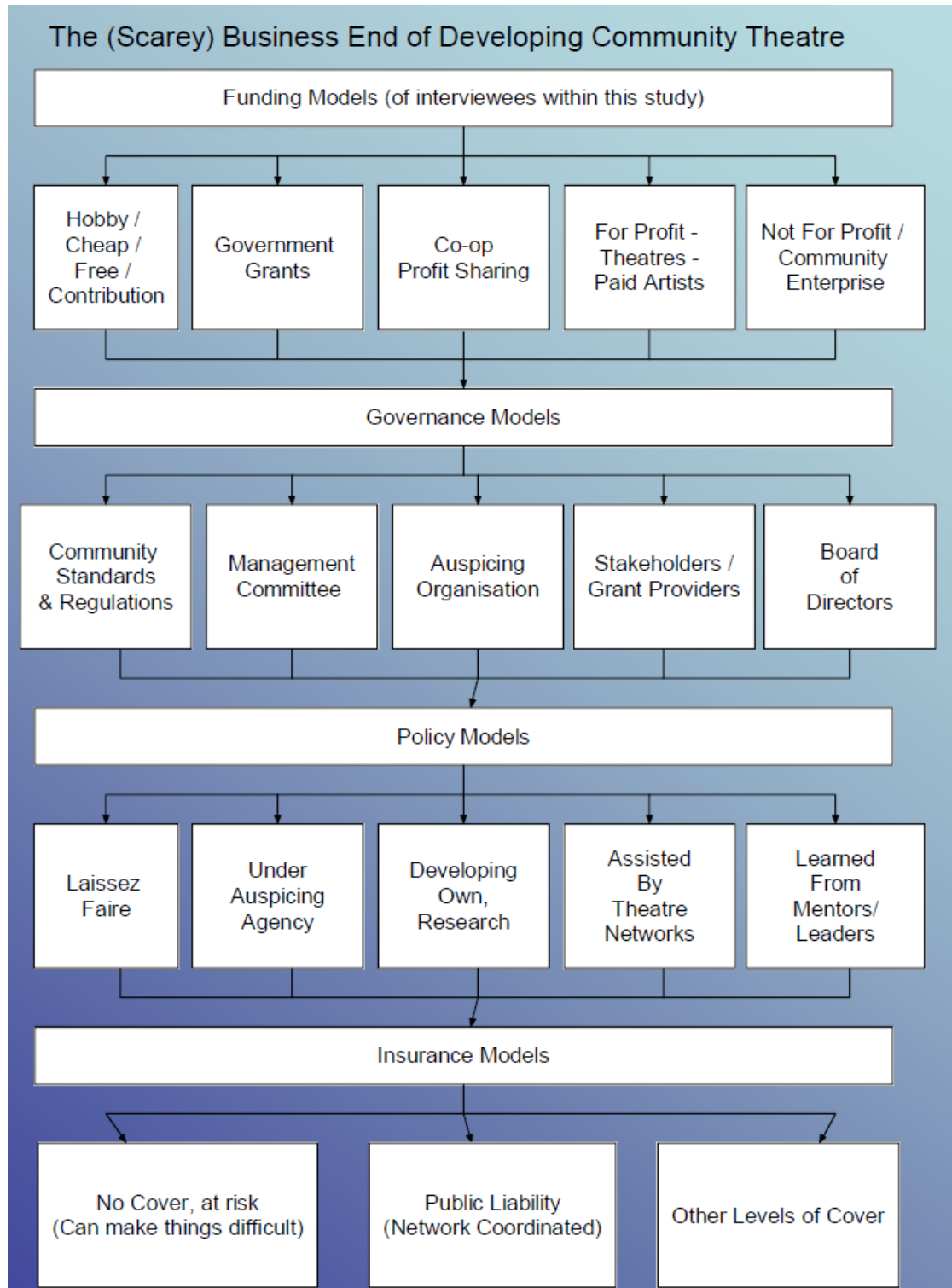
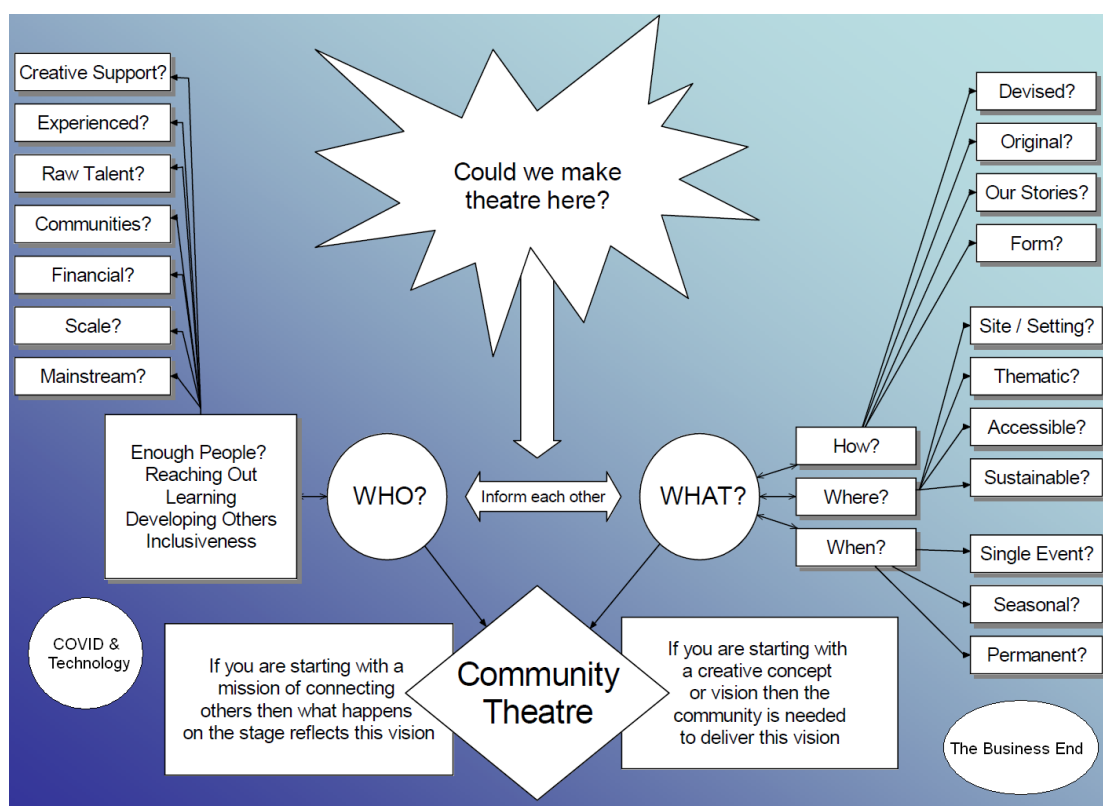


Figure 42: Decisions to think about as your group grows

## Conclusions and Recommendations

*Our fledgling theatre group (CAST Snowy) is doing really well in many ways when compared to the responses of the interviewees.*

*CAST Snowy's reason for being is that a dozen or so people who had been in productions I had written over a decade felt like doing more theatre-based activities. Our prior shows, about once every two years, had swelled to including around 55 people on stage in pageant-like local historical productions. We had people from community sectors that include mental health, disability, non-English speaking backgrounds, all ages, and indigenous players all in a big heap. As this group developed, I was awarded the Fellowship to figure out how to better do what I was doing, and the Fellowship started just as we organised into an Incorporated Not-for-profit organisation. We tried a few types of activities related to theatre.*



**Figure 43. This Study**

### A lot to learn!

*Add to this the other activities discussed, the ambitions to develop a festival, the structuring of a business, and the survival of the lockdowns, this study has presented a feast of learning to assist the sustainability and mission of CAST Snowy.*

*In retrospect, of course we have a lot to learn. To build a macro view of our progress, I have self-rated our attempts according to some of the categories of answers that resonated with me:*

<u>CAST Snowy's performance</u> (self-rated, so far - out of 10)	<u>Major Overall Observations and Outcomes of the Interviews</u>
Just learning – 3	How theatre relates to social and emotional wellbeing
10	Understanding that theatre people share and give a lot
Struggling through – 5	Theatre <i>is</i> Community Development
8	Getting started
7	Expert Guidance - what learning to seek
8	A range of starter projects, models, forms and ideas
Just learning – 4	About the processes of devising theatre
4	Understanding how theatre can help overcome isolation
4	Many ideas on accessible theatre and inclusive practice
4	Establishing or participating in networks
4	How networks may help community theatre – e.g. policies
Attended - not participating – 4	Establishing and participating in festivals
Just learning – 4	Writing for theatre
4	Promoting and protecting home-grown content
Including this report – 6	Sharing knowledge
10	Accessing free/ low cost scripts
Just learning – 4	Business decisions as you develop your group
Struggling – Zoom in Covid – 3	How technology may help overcome isolation in the future
6	Commitment to developing one another
It's been a tough year – 4	Chaos – Organised or disorganised?

### **Evidence Providing a Basis for Decision Making**

This study has found strong evidence of people around the world building and connecting their communities through an art form which, while subjective and personal, share commonality of values and observations of the human condition. This study, as an exploration of things happening overseas that might be usefully applied in Australia and in my community, was a successful, open ended, positive qualitative inquiry.

However when it comes to making plans using these findings, some concrete justifications may need to be examined. On the personal level, the family level, the community level, the network level and the general population level, critical thought must be applied in order to apply the wisdom of the participants.

For instance, Emma Bishop suggested in her interview that a survey be conducted to find out if small disconnected theatres around the country felt they really need anything, or what they need or want. I didn't reflect much on this until I tried making plans or recommendations around what networks need to provide. Further to this example, not all the communities in Australia are going to be thinking about whether community theatre might be something they would like, and indeed this leads to more unknowables about whether these findings is the sort of thing a community might embrace or use.

The issue of *demonstrable* value of the kinds of community theatre work examined in this study leads to other questions where the answer might simply boil down to, on one hand "because I want to do it". We want to build theatre; we want to build our community life. On the other hand, there is such a variance among approaches and ways of measuring success in any art, that a quantitative study might not find

measurable evidence that community theatre creates inclusion within the community. If art became statistically measurable, would it still be art?

The things that I personally wanted to learn more about through the study include:

- How can we better run our community theatre group?
- What would it be like to create a small theatre festival?
- Would I be able to build a shared resource and “community of practice” online?

This study fulfilled these types of questions and much more. People are doing amazing things around the world in line with my aspirations. Many of the values I started out with really resonated with the participants, and I gained a lot of helpful learning. I now feel a little more confident to try some more of these things. The following section links explore some of the realised ambitions of the study – great learning moments and recommendations coming out of those.

### **Great Learning Moments/ Analysis**

#### **Small is good**

In this current locked-down climate of discouraging / overwhelming anti-social feelings, additionally with the fear of Covid added to that, I have reflected that none of these factors actually stop someone who is determined from creating, and that bigger theatrical societies have had worse impacts. For example, at our small theatre group’s AGM (just last week) I was able to report that we have achieved a huge amount over the last 18 months, and only fell short on achieving a few of our calendared activities, while striving to remain Covid compliant. As a small group with open expectations, it was easier to be mobile and adaptive.

Larger theatrical societies, including overseas, had to cancel productions like “Les Mis”. I heard of a situation where the booking agent ceased trading, leaving the theatre with a very large problem. Meanwhile, we had a 14 year old write a pantomime and now we are ploughing ahead with it. It hasn’t cost us anything, just put us to the test emotionally, and we are winning. That has been useful knowledge.

#### *Recommendation*

- *Emphasise, within our group, the power of creativity and purpose, taking positive risks and making things happen, even in trying circumstances. Whether it be challenging contemporary theatre, comedy-musical, local history or children’s theatre... a small group has small budgets, light requirements, close relationships and low-key accountabilities. The challenge is to learn how to produce **art** like that, and to esteem the work properly and also to feel validated in the effort no matter what the size of the group or the budget involved.*

#### **Just Do It**

Despite a growing awareness of process and the need for personal and organisational safety through registration, organisation and policy, one of my favourite moments of the study was when Paul Maunder, PhD about Community Theatre, with a lifetime of service in community theatre, said “Just Do It”.

We all need a starting point. That starting point is delicate and is easy to get choked by the **have to’s** or the **I should’s** before you even get to the **I want to’s**. Theatre is



as old as humanity, and there are countless ways of doing it. You don't need a licence to act, to **play**, or to put on a **play**. And while your creative work may not be great according to someone else's formula, the energy may be terrific.

In some ways we had moved well beyond that, having done theatre under the auspices of the Montreal Theatre for years. We needed incorporation to obtain use of a hall, public liability insurance for grants, etc. However, it is singularly true that all these ancillary processes can distract from creativity, vision and can-do attitude.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Thinking creatively to overcome limits of being a fledgling theatre*
- *At the same time, get to know what the expectations are and what they are aimed at achieving*
- *Develop organisational vision and goals as well as creativity*
- *Don't be afraid to be small, it has it's advantages.*
- *Don't be too afraid to grow.*

#### **Knowledge about theatrical forms**

The more knowledge we can gain about theatrical form, the more resources we have to respond to an issue in ways that will connect with our audience. It becomes a vocabulary for expressing ourselves and our audience in deeper ways.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Watch, read and learn more about theatre forms, and attend more theatre*
- *Look for creative ways to do theatre e.g. outdoors, and in thematically connected non-theatre venues, in cemeteries or historical or social settings.*

#### **Linking with Indigenous People to create theatre**

For me, one brilliant learning moment was when I realised that I was approaching my study in a decidedly dominant-culture way. Thankfully I had people of Indigenous cultures who had done cross-cultural work contributing to the study who generously shared something I wished I had understood earlier: That often the indigenous way is to really focus and take time to build relationships before getting down to business.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Pay special attention to building relationships with Indigenous Artists and Performers, and generally with community members*
- *In the design of locally themed works, invite Indigenous perspectives, content and/or influences into the artwork through positive relationships*

#### **Human Connection**

I learned that all theatre is a **gift** or an **offering** from one or more humans to others, a performance to **serve** the audience through reaching them. The degree to which you open up your quest for connection through theatre, reveals how committed you are to theatre.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Participants should be recognised and appreciated for their contribution to culture.*
- *Governments should be introduced to the fact that community theatre is a vital indicator of community health*

### **Inclusivity within Connection**

Some may declare 'you can't please everyone', or ask "how are you going to just have fun?" or, 'who is going to *pay to watch that*?' These are good questions, and the answer is also a question - 'How far are you willing to go to be appreciated, to share your message with people?' You can just close the door to the 'others'. But do you understand that, by doing so, you are limiting the connective energy of your own performance, and, therefore, your own honesty, in a way.

If you can make an inexpensive local play with a script hastily written by aspiring writers, with costumes from the op shop on a budget of \$20, and a projected screen image as a backdrop, and then you make a special effort to include the community, and you succeed, there is magic in the air. You may never make a living out of it, but that may not be as important in the grand scheme of things.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Think creatively about inclusion*
- *Develop roadmaps to inclusion and roadmaps to accessibility*
- *Develop a strategy sheet about social marketing/ promotion*
- *All these techniques can be linked to building and leveraging community organisations*

### **The Difference between Inclusivity and Special Programs**

If your local theatre group puts up a sign saying "All Welcome!", then forgets to actively recruit participants through a number of channels or even gets to know people who would possibly be interested, how is it going to go?

That is not the same thing, however, as deciding to produce theatre to include a specific segment of the market – say Neuro-diverse kids for example. Does that fit with your creative focus? Limiting the work you do to one specialised group may not be as "inclusive" as one might assume, because if not handled effectively, it may contribute to the participants feeling like they are the 'other', and all the others feeling like you have lost your grip on theatre.

Whatever way you are thinking, inclusivity requires you to understand a participant's comfort, aspirations and interests, and how to include them in ways that will also benefit the overall goals of performance. Inclusive theatre is not about including everyone the exact same way at every stage, but about investing time in people who can mutually deliver a project, and understand how this can mean anyone.

While we explore the human experience, much of the theatre world is dedicated to a traditional concept of professionalism which is often hardly mindful of inclusion at all. Some theatre is designed by a certain group to represent their part of the community and the issues they face, to the broader 'community', which I suppose is a way of picking your battles and can be a very positive approach. Some theatre, on the other hand, involves concepts such as the social definition of disability, which is to remove barriers to full engagement in society by everyone.

Different groups can be at different stages within that social engagement, moving away from being treated equally to setting up their own institutions and narrative. Other groups, maybe professional theatre companies, may have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. For example, I was privileged to see an Australian production of Hamilton during my Churchill year. Framed around inclusivity, I saw people of colour acting and singing wonderfully. I saw no wheelchairs on stage... I guess you can't do everything at once. There obviously is

no one right answer, because diversity is an evolving concept and theatre requires innovation.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Create mechanisms that are active in seeking and responding to feedback*
- *This can be linked to building and leveraging community organisations who support isolated individuals*

#### **Community Theatre is fun. Seriously.**

If community theatre gets too bogged down, it can alienate its participants.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Keep it light – if the project is getting you down, turn that around*
- *Identify people who share the vision and can co-develop theatre that is fun and well grounded in vision and mission*

#### **Setting up a Festival for Rural and Regional Small Theatres**

One of the very clear directions that I learned about was about how small festivals can create unique opportunities for welding cultural links between dispersed small theatre groups.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Investigate and set up a festival for Rural and Remote Community Theatre groups from Australia or even elsewhere. Investigate how to include our community in it's delivery. Possibly even include travel to other places allowing them to host the event.*

#### **The Stairway to Stardom**

There is something called ego, and some people in theatre have huge ones, (believe it or not.) Odds are that you will slip on a dreaded banana peel before you hit those heavenly heights of international recognition and glory. What are you trying to achieve? Good question? There are many good answers – from “I just want to” to “I thought I could improve my talents a little bit”, to “I want to explore myself in a new way” to “I think it might be a good way to get to know people”, to “I’ll show that such-and-such from back in Year 3 who can sing”. I think the goal is not to be too precious, too grand in your own eyes, and not to expect everyone to take you seriously.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Pay special attention to building supportive relationships within the theatre group.*
- *Create policies that strengthen social and emotional safety and wellbeing among the theatre group e.g. appointment of a go-to person for pastoral care*
- *When reaching out to members who are not of the group specify the supportive, developmentally encouraging nature of our vision and mission and how relationships are at the centre of our creative connection.*

#### **Esprit de corps: Openness and Sharing, and Developmental Opportunities**

The spirit of my interviewees was, as a whole, open, generous and sharing. Their willingness to connect, their graciousness and supportiveness was extremely fortunate for me. They also told of mentors and people who gave them opportunities. They spoke of commitment and support for the values of my project. The work that

they are doing is specifically about developing others. It is in their mission statements.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Gather knowledge and experiences as we go, record and archive them, and share*
- *The dissemination of this report, the videos, process and decision making tools, tip sheets, diarised discussions and thoughts would all contribute to the principle of sharing and openness*
- *As members of our group desire to develop their knowledge and experience, try to create opportunities to do this. Identify those opportunities with reference to our purpose.*

### **Build Socio-Historical Perspective**

Through so many eras - the pre-colonial era, war, post-war eras, revolutionary eras, the neo-liberal (pro-business, anti-social) times through to now with cold, depressing and isolating Covid and the digitising of human performance - theatre contains keen reflections, reactions and responses to what humanity is and where it seems to be heading.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Create theatre that helps explore our world in the contemporary in the local and regional contexts. Delegate part of our seasonal calendar to creating*
- *Create theatre that celebrates the values that we care about and the stories of our roots.*

### **Build Networks**

Through this study I learned that there are many opportunities to develop theatre in local, regional and national contexts through connecting with others, networking, and developing resources that can be shared. The degree to which (often unpaid) people sustain other's theatre work with vision, collaboration, passion, and combined energy is amazing.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Connect with theatre networks and other networks*
- *Share these, and the network recommendations (below) with networks*
- *Evaluate what people feel is a positive network to aid us nationally, and what it might provide*
- *Create a website that promotes this research and findings and use that website as a channel for helping reach these goals*
- *Could this web-based network opportunity for rural and regional Australia become a platform for supporting a "Community of Practice" forum?*

### **Public Education**

The public education system is under a lot of somewhat ideologically-driven pressure, and should not be relied on as the wellspring or mainstay of community theatre where schools and teachers are under so much pressure.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Question: Would the network known as Drama Australia widen their criteria to include more than education-based theatre access to their resources?*
- *Build the profile of Community Theatre as an access-point to theatre participation, as distinct from Education-based access.*

### **Support for Mental Health**

As a mental health professional, I find irony in the way government shows support for mental health. As Bronwyn Bent eloquently conveyed, the welfare and mental health agencies are like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Through their theatre group, "What we are doing is more at the top of the cliff kind of work."

I reflected that if the government really wants to make a positive difference to mental health in the community, they just need to get out of the way in some instances, through creating a regulatory and policy environment friendly to small groups. The current social and technological bias has led us to more passive, less social answers such as Xbox/Netflix, which can't be healthy.

#### *Recommendations*

- *On a local level, the community theatre in Tumut can increase community connectedness and cohesiveness. The building of inclusion as explored in this study will contribute to this. I do not envision an art-as-therapy approach, and I do not expect that theatre will provide connectedness to everyone. However, in it's place it would increase mental health through cohesiveness. The unfortunate thing is the difficulty in measuring the benefit in a way that might please the bureaucrats and politicians. However, should an opportunity arise to measure or demonstrate the benefit of connection through theatre, to social and emotional wellbeing this evidence should be identified and used to influence public policy related to community theatre or to wellbeing in regional Australia.*

### **Onward and Upward**

Recently our local council cut a public liability inclusion scheme which closed most clubs and groups that were using it in our community. It was paid for by the community, but the council just turned it off, excluding small, tight groups but also larger ones such as the local Agricultural show, etc.

My view of this current, neo-liberalised society is that we pay plenty of taxes but are not supposed to rely on the government for supporting smaller social infrastructure. That is now the domain of big business and the "Free" market. Funding has been cut away from many small ideas, (possibly because they don't contribute to the GDP etc). Also, the regulatory framework and insurance climate for entities are an alarm for small operators. The volunteers feel overwhelmed and just give up, society wide and internationally. It is a disaster.

In this context there should be little surprise that kids (and adults) lives revolve around Netflix or X-box. The answer will come from very stubborn individuals who push through this inert culture-bed to produce theatre (or to make lace, or to grow a garden, or make cheese etc) until the locals in government realise what they are missing out on supporting.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Build our community theatre in ways that do not depend on government funding, whether it be through keeping things low-cost, achieving financial independence, or through using grants for projects.*
- *Art – in this case theatre, cannot afford to sit around until a program is invented by government to fund it. The boldness of creativity and commitment to craft has of course to be free enough to develop art at the edge of official support. The recommendation is don't wait.*

### **Theatre of Community Engagement?**

I learned about this mode of community theatre and had my approach to theatre described as this, because of its emphasis on engaging isolated and diverse members of the community in theatre production. However I heard a critique that Theatre of Community Engagement is more of a charitable model that is inequitable because of its emphasis on 'reaching down' to lift others. In our case I don't think that criticism applies because our group is neither professionally or financially 'up' but we are working from a model of including everyone as equally as we can, as one of us, both in shared opportunity and decision making capacities.

#### *Recommendation*

- *Learn more about theatre of community engagement model and its criticism. I have the benefit of the Public Works Dallas Playbook to explore an implementation model of a similar, yet more developed mode.*

### **Community Arts Worker?**

I have learned that some aspects of what we have been doing over the last 10 years place me in a position similar to the evolving Community Arts Worker movement that has been happening in the USA over the same period. I learned that this kind of role has happened before and that openness to these types of roles can be cyclic as workers see a need to address the cultural expression happening in rural and remote areas.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Learn more about how the Rural Cultural or Arts worker movement engages with rural communities. In particular read Arts Based Community Development (ABCD). By Michael Rhode and engage with the Rural Arts networks like SPARC and Rural Cultural Workers.*

### **Policies protect people**

Applying the interview responses to our situation, I have developed new respect for organisational imperatives and policies. Still not wanting to get bogged down and often wishing we were still at the "Just do it" stage, I have seen how policies will be needed at the stage we are at now, to protect our members. Fortunately, I have spoken to many people who have generously shared policy information through this study.

#### *Recommendations*

- *Obtain guiding policy examples from community theatre groups and discuss them with the committee, adapt and consolidate into our incorporation*

#### *Other recommendations*

- *Explore a personal quest of developing a network, including the website with resources, the festival model, the geographical divisions etc*
- *Host a festival for our region*
- *Develop inclusion and accessibility awards as well as national regional and local awards and a historical archive*
- *Look at personal and possibly, formal education to help me continue to grow and develop.*

*It may be incompatible or impractical for existing networks to implement the recommendations below. For this reason a network for rural Australia may need to be developed.*

### **Recommendations to Networks**

1. Networks could develop regional awards which can develop community achievements through theatre. (MTNZ Zonie Awards is a great model.) The recent addition of Inclusivity Awards has stimulated interest and excitement over there. These could be conducted during regional conferences. These could have educational sessions in a mini convention format, possibly put online for members.
2. Networks that support community theatre could create resources for building local community theatres. Our theatres should really have policies and procedures about:
  - Health and Safety,
  - Sexual Harm,
  - Harassment and Bullying,
  - Social media,
  - Managing the well-being of the whole team
  - Intellectual Property

The idea of sharable resources via a network that help theatre groups define their own policy frameworks would be a major protective influence which also facilitates the establishment of small groups (similar to the easier access to a public liability policy through ACTA).

3. Small festivals could be encouraged around Australia, and also on a state and regional level. Thematically or geographically connected, the models where small communities become engaged to support the festivals may add value and interest in the community. Even to the level of billeting arrangements, these become exciting opportunities for creating memories and widening people's experience and cultural exchange.
4. Networks could support an online "community of practice" where community theatre people can find each other and connect. Whether the people are professional, pro-am, amateur, metropolitan, rural or remote, people could post discussion points and questions.
5. Networks could consider organising a system where people can visit theatres to provide instruction, mentoring, or adjudication in geographical areas.
6. Networks could lobby government and industry to consider impacts of current policy on community theatre, and the value of community participation on wellbeing and mental health as opposed to the 'parking the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff' type model. One particular policy that I suggest needs reworking is how APRAH licences can cover a live performance of a song in an eisteddfod but for some reason it will not cover a local play that incorporates that same song.
7. Networks could consider supporting online performances to overcome geographical restrictions, especially with the lockdowns reaching however long into the future. Performances that could be shared over the network might create interest in this new sideline. Showcasing parts of performances that add to the knowledge base and could be used to stimulate conversations within the network might be useful.

8. Can we, through our networks, better support Australian playwrights by creating better access to plays by member societies? Can the drift toward high-cost shows be balanced by local content which adds to the Australian narrative?
9. Networks could develop and share one-page Tip Sheets, both user and network developed over time, on such themes as establishing theatre. (Similar to the resources to promote inclusive theatre that are available through the Kennedy Centre - see Resources, below). Our national network could also have a resource sharing system, for example, a page on "Relaxed Performances", a page on marketing, etc. These could be related to or edited "community of practice" online conversations.
10. Educational content around theatre forms, values, ideas and innovations could also be a useful resource base to have on hand on the network site, including a reading list covering useful topics. People could be encouraged to suggest useful materials. Other categories such as organisational and leadership content could also be organised in this way.
11. Consider how to apply group buying power through networks. This could mean supporting libraries of costume sets for a show, and marketing materials etc. In NZ the formation of consortiums as a buying group for purchasing shows with professional support – you just supply the actors and the director - has been of mixed success. It has led to a sense of exclusivity where some companies complained that other theatres who paid for inclusion were considered unworthy. There would not be many theatre societies able to afford inclusion and it seems to me to head in the wrong direction if one wants to really encourage local creativity in original content.
12. Linking in with other networks supporting theatre or arts and particular segments of society eg homeless/theatre, rural cultural work, disability theatre, the International Amateur Theatre Association.
13. The American Community Theatre association has a great little document on their website listing all the theatre roles. There were recommendations during the interviews for letting the theatre society know who it is in a pastoral role. Some of these organisational resources would be great.



## **Dissemination and Implementation**

On a local level I plan to present and launch the report to the local community. I hope to enlist the support of the local Snowy Valleys Shire council and local media to promote this event and I would also hope to present it at Tumut's Montreal Theatre, which is an iconic local theatre. I will present along with the report, a summary of initiatives that could be undertaken within the community from the report, along with the hoped-for benefits and possibilities.

Dissemination within networks has already commenced, in the sharing of these findings and recommendations with a Community Theatre network here in NSW Australia (i.e. Association of Community Theatre), and having some very deep and fruitful discussions with their president Roslyn English.

At present there is not really a national network in Australia to bring organisations such as the Association of Community Theatre, The Independent Theatre Association WA (Inc.), The Victorian Drama League, Gold Coast Theatre Alliance Inc, Darwin Community Arts, into focus with the benefits of networking mentioned herein. It would be an interesting next step to learn more about the Australian Community Theatre landscape and whether a national network could progress the wellbeing, history and future potential of community theatre in Australia.

This would also include supporting the development of regional and dispersed (online) festivals and awards, sharing of knowledge, advocacy, theatre-based education and developing of shared opportunities.

Creating a model of such a network with accompanying website that assists in networking, training, communities of practice and libraries of scripts and resources that effectively raises the profile and access to theatre information is seen as an initial step. Openly shared resources from overseas could also be included in a structured and accessible way.

## Resources

### ***First, A Reading List***

*This follow up email was sent to me from Paul Maunder in New Zealand who has a PhD focussing on Community Theatre and a life of service to theatre in New Zealand, working on many levels from the local to the international.*

Hi Michael

This would be my essential reading list:

- Cohen-Cruz, Jan Local Arts, Rutgers University Press
- Fotheringham, Richard, Community Theatre in Australia, Currency Press, Sydney
- Kershaw, Baz, The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as cultural intervention, Routledge; The radical in Performance, Between Brecht and Baudrillard, Routledge
- Kuftinec, Sonja, Staging America, Cornerstone and Community-based theatre, Southern Illinois Press
- Google Ann Jellicoe, The community Play

(Some of these may be available digitally; the Kuftinec book would be apt for you.) Meanwhile, here is a manuscript of mine attached; *Rebellious Mirrors* was a book based on my thesis... (*...about community theatre in New Zealand – ed*)

Regards  
*Paul Maunder*

### **Book about Arts-Based Community Work**

The term that has been floating around here is Arts Based Community Development (ABCD). Michael Rhode wrote a book called Arts Based Community Development that I found in 2005. It has all of these great exercises and talks about how these exercises translate into community work.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Relaxed Performances**

To get an understanding of what other organisations are doing and what the conversations look like around inclusive work, see Dupagne, Marie-Pierre, *Relaxed Performances, International Comparative Study - 2018-2020*, Ciné-ma différence, Paris France

*Marcie Bramucci*

To read a specific study about New York Theatre Workshop's Mind The Gap program see Gill Foster (2020) Mind the Gap A transatlantic, intergenerational theatre project, *Youth Theatre Journal*, 34:2, 146-157, DOI: 10.1080/08929092.2020.1842831. To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929092.2020.1842831>

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### ***Some User Terms and Definitions.***

#### **Community (in Theatre)**

The role of theatre is helping audiences explore the human condition and therefore understand people better. To your point about community, even in its most traditional form where there is an audience seated, theatre is about community. It is about people getting together to have a conversation. Even before you have that conversation in front of an audience, the people that are putting together the piece of theatre are in collaboration. You can't do anything in the theatre without collaborating, working together and dialoguing and having a relationship with other people. If you're pretty removed from community, then using theatre in its essential, most authentic form would it be kind of hard to understand what theatre is at its root.  
*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

#### **Community Arts Worker Concept**

The community arts worker is a pretty old-fashioned concept - they've been around and disappeared and then come back and disappeared. I just facilitated within the community but some trade unions had a community arts worker, just doing stuff in factories. Amazing stuff was happening.  
*Paul Maunder*

#### **Creativity wounds**

The creativity wound is about how so many of us have, throughout our lives, put ourselves out there in creative ways, or brought a new idea to the table or shared something that we thought might have been radical... and then were shut down time and time again. Every time that happens you get a little nick on your creative spirit. The more nicks you get the more you want to protect it and keep it from other people. The more you do this the less opportunity it has to heal - to heal it needs air and to be able to breathe. Our work is, how do we allow the hands to open enough just to let the air and the light in, to let the inner healing in to heal our creativity wounds, to help us go back to being in that completely youthful, playful, creative space.  
*Ashley Hanson*

#### **Ensemble Theatre**

The Network of Ensemble Theatres defines an ensemble as “a group of individuals dedicated to collaborative creation, committed to working together consistently over years to develop a distinctive body of work and practices.” (*Wikipedia*) Ensemble players will see the parts they play supporting the work as equally as important as the cast roles – they will strive to bring these characters to life on stage. Ensemble thinking encourages inclusivity and a team approach.

#### **Kitchen Sink Theatre**

Kitchen Sink theatre is a harsh, realistic style of theatre which is gritty and explores a range of social and political issues.

#### **Non-profit Organisation**

The difference between the commercial and the non-profit organisation is that we're in the ecosystem to fulfil a mission and, in our case, to support the work of visionary artists - our main mission. Even though we are still a very gritty downtown theatre, we attract some of the top artists from around the world precisely because of our approach. That's what defines us. What comes out of that is incredible art.  
*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Radical Hospitality**

Specifically, in terms of 'Radical Hospitality', the root of the word radical is actually being really "rooted" (like a tree). And it bends. This idea of digging deep in order to blossom is providing a space that feels as open as possible. Radical hospitality in the theatre world has become an approach to ticket sales or inviting people in. I know one theatre company in Minneapolis that has a radical hospitality approach where there is no ticket price! You just pay what you feel the experience was worth for you. If you really liked it you might want to pay for yourself and maybe three other people in the space because you felt their energy. It's related to an idea that there is an abundant amount of space, support and resources to share. And that we trust each other to bring that radical belief and openness into the space.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Radical Imagination**

We talk a lot about Radical Imagination in terms of how you dig deep to open up in a way that creates an environment for ideas that we never thought were possible, by giving people permission to play, to explore, to dream together in a way that they haven't been able to do before. They are doing it together in an extremely supportive space where they are, over time - because it takes time to build that trust and vulnerability - they are able to push the boundaries of their ways of being welcoming, their ways of hospitality, their ways of imagining to go beyond even what they thought was possible.

*Ashley Hanson*

### **Rural Cultural Worker**

Rural Cultural Workers utilize their different artistic practices to inspire community change through whatever community change means for their place.

### **Teaching Artist**

A teaching artist is a big thing in this city because a lot of actors who live in New York need work. Teaching artistry has grown as its own field and that kind of work is really popular. But then the specialisation in working with certain groups may be minimal. They are able to gain experience with different groups, disabilities, seniors, kids, veterans – many different groups.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Theatre as a Service**

This work is not for me but it's for that kid in the audience who needs this story, who needs to see this character do this thing, who needs to get that bravery to do that really hard thing that they've got to do.

*Barrett Guyton*

### **Theatre Definition**

My favourite definition of theatre is the definition by Spanish playwright Lope de Vega from the 16<sup>th</sup> century golden age: Two actors, a platform (and it could just be a raised platform in a aesthetic space where we direct our gaze) and a conflict. Drama is two people wanting different things... Drama is the intersection dialogue between two people and it doesn't have to be negative... Theatre is about dialogue, it's about human story telling, it's about relationships."

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### ***Overseas Networks and Leadership Resources Mentioned***

- There's study by Professor Hillary Nicholson, from Royal Holloway, the University of London. She's done various studies mapping and reflecting on amateur theatre, and she's doing a new study on amateur theatre and towns, not cities.
- Anne Gilmore, who runs the secretariat of IATA, is very active in the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain. A brilliant organisation from Questors Theatre in London, in Ealing. The Little Theatres Guild developed templates that the members could work with and created an insurance policy that the members could buy into
- At <https://aact.org/> The American Association of Community Theatres has a very good section under the Menu Item "Making Theatre" with some excellent resources for start-up theatre companies or groups.
- The European Network of Cultural Centres. Encc.eu – webinars. See Petree Michaleski, from Poland. He's been doing a lot of research into amateur arts in rural communities.
- An energy, for want of a better word, working in Latin American and South America is called Cultura Viva. They are going into the favellas and working with the informal groups that existed in those communities in terms of dance, theatre, music, film, photography and working with them to create infrastructures to try and bring young people out of those cultures and to engage them into creativity and to try and change lives.
- Another Latin American network which I am very supportive of is the Corridor Latino Americano de Teatro which is the CLT ([corridorlatinoamericanodeteatro.com](http://corridorlatinoamericanodeteatro.com)).  
*Alad Rhys-Jones*
- Cornerstone Theatre in the United States is doing wonderful community theatre work. They have a book called, I think, Defining America. It documents the processes of Cornerstone in rural parts
- Sojourn Theatre - a company which creates theatre within communities about the communities they are in
- Rural Arts and Culture Summit - Rural Cultural Workers. A super-strong, mighty little network.
- Then there is the entire arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed that trained facilitators to work with a community to make a play about the things that are happening in that community.  
*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### ***Play Databases, Catalogues, Licensing Organisations and Distributors***

- NZ Play Bureau Limited (It includes Samuel French and other catalogues, as well as developing New Zealand playwrights)
- Senior Theatre Resource Centre – ArtAge Catalogue
- David Spicer Productions (Includes lower cost scripts and licences)

- Music Theatre International – Australasia – Big Commercial Titles
- Kim Ransley at Origin Theatrics – Big Commercial Titles
- The Senior Theatre Resource Centre

If you are trying to figure out who owns the rights to a play you want to do, **Doollee** lists information on over 100,000 Modern Plays.

**Catalogues of free, Public Domain plays** are out there in Google land. Many downloadable plays are found at sites like Project Gutenberg or, for example, Ohio Wesleyan University's site called Plays In The Public Domain.

University of Montana aggregates a list of links to sites where Public Domain works can be found at <https://libguides.lib.umt.edu/c.php?g=275279&p=1836830>.

**Play At Home:** I wanted to alert you to this fun sampling of free and accessible scripts created since COVID-19 at: <https://www.playathome.org/> Created by Baltimore Center Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, The Public Theater, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Play At Home supports artists, connects people to and through theatre; and ignites imagination and joy in these uncertain times.

Free Shakespeare Plays are available at <http://www.freeshakespeare.co.uk>.

A site at **Theatrelinks** has 46 Greek classics you can perform.  
<https://theatrelinks.com/greek-playscripts/>

You can research and find Public Domain plays of all descriptions.

### ***Other Resources***

**Stage Whispers** an online newsletter from Australia about things happening in the community theatre scene.

**Tip Sheets and One Pagers** - The Kennedy Centre is the USA's national theatre and their accessibility department has been gathering and sharing resources on their website at <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/>. Following their links down from there can take you to a range of resources involving theatre and access for people with disabilities. They started developing tip sheets based not only on what people were asking them but on what they were asking each other and sharing collective knowledge.

**American Association of Community Theatre** have a list of theatre roles with job descriptions to work out who does what. (<https://aact.org/theatre-people>)

**Public Works Playbook** – I contacted Dallas Public Works and Maria Calderon generously arranged to shared a copy of their Playbook which is an amazing, beautiful document of 116 pages rich with step by step instructions on how to develop on of their pageant-like shows which incorporate a range of supporting community organisations.

**Siminovitch Forums into Innovations in Theatre** – Some wonderful discussions on various topics related to theatre. Available on YouTube.

**Virtual Community Reading Group** – Love theatre and reading plays aloud? McCarter hosts a virtual Shakespeare Community Reading Group—now in its 6th year!

<https://www.mccarter.org/tickets-events/mccarterathome/edps/shakespeare-community-reading-group/>

At The **Department of Public Transformation** website you could sign up for Ashley's regular newsletter at: <https://www.publictransformation.org/contact>. We are always doing digital events. Go to our website and then put in your email address at the top to sign up. You can learn more about the Rural Cultural Worker role as well.  
*Ashley Hanson*

## Appendix One – Catherine Bush’s Play Writing Primer

*Barter Theatre were very generous and allowed us to see Catherine’s primer as used in their incredible playwriting programs.*

**Catherine Bush’s definition of what makes a good play:**

***A heightened situation which takes place in a compressed time period involving high stakes, dramatic action/conflict and some sort of resolution.***

**A play consists of the following elements:**

### **1) Setting**

***The time and place of the action.*** Keep in mind that one of the biggest differences between stage and film is the ability (or lack thereof) to change locations.

My suggestion to anyone interested in writing for the stage is to KEEP IT SIMPLE. The fewer locations, the better. In fact, for the new writer writing a 10 minute play, I suggest keeping it to one location. (Again, this is just a suggestion, not a requirement.)

### ***How do time and place affect story line?***

Imagine your play is about a hostage situation – Bob is holding Bill hostage. What is the difference between Bob holding Bill hostage in the middle of the Sahara desert and Bob holding Bill hostage in a phone booth in the middle of Manhattan? In the first scenario, water and heat and remoteness play a huge role. In the second scenario, the population of NYC plays a huge role.

Let’s say Bob has demanded \$1,000,000 in ransom to release Bill. In order to pay the ransom, Bill’s relatives need to get to the bank. Here’s where time affects the storyline. If it’s 4:50 pm on a Friday afternoon and the bank closes at 5 pm and doesn’t reopen until Monday... well, you can see for yourself that Bill’s relatives could be in a bit of a pickle. That’s why we go to the theatre, isn’t it? To see people in a bit of a pickle (and to thank our lucky stars it’s not us!)

***So you see, setting – time and place – when used effectively can be a playwright’s best friend.***

**NOTE: When writing any play –it is essential to use a LATE POINT OF ATTACK.**

Let’s reference the hostage situation above: if we have only ten minutes to tell this story, we don’t want to waste time watching Bob wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, etc. **We want to get right to the action** – perhaps we open with Bob shoving Bill onstage with a gun to his head.

### **2) Characters**

***The people in a pickle.*** Again, KEEP IT SIMPLE. Only the number of people needed to tell the story – no more. And when I say “tell the story” I don’t mean to imply narration. In fact, characters in a play aren’t defined by what they say – they are defined by what they do. Here’s some great advice from television writer Aaron Sorkin...

***“Never tell the audience who the character is. Show the audience what the character wants.”***



In other words, actions speak louder than words. Yes, the characters speak – but every word they utter is used in an attempt to get whatever it is they want – which leads us to...

### 3) Dramatic Conflict = Needs + Obstacles

**Every character entering a scene has something he wants desperately.** This is the character's need. **In a good play, there is an obstacle preventing him from getting what he wants.** This creates **dramatic conflict**. Without conflict, there is no play. Instead, we are left with people simply talking to each other. **WE MUST HAVE DRAMATIC CONFLICT!** That's not to say that every play has to be a serious drama; comedy is fraught with conflict. In theatre, conflict is a good, good thing.

Another important thing to remember here – **KEEP THOSE STAKES HIGH!** The more important the character need – the more urgent – the more life-and-death – the better. Let's use the aforementioned hostage scenario as an example. If Bob needs money just so he can buy a big house and join a country club – who cares? But if Bob needs money to buy a big house and join a country club to impress his former high school sweetheart and love-of-his-life Sheila who dumped him in college because he was too poor and now their 20<sup>th</sup> high school reunion is coming up and he wants to exact revenge... well, now you've got something.

Also keep in mind that the greater the obstacle, the more impossible it is to overcome, the higher the stakes. If Bob wants to buy a big house and join a country club, why doesn't he just get a loan from the bank? Could it be that Bob has tried and doesn't qualify? Or perhaps Bob doesn't know how to read or write and filling out a loan application is impossible?

#### **Dramatic Action: What the character does to get what he wants.**

In this case, Bob desperately needs money. What does he do to get it? He kidnaps Bill and holds him for ransom. NOTE: **Do not confuse "action" with "activity."** We get a lot of plays where the characters are washing the dishes or perhaps driving a car. These alone are not examples of dramatic action – they are merely activities in which the characters are engaged. Think of dramatic action as the WHY behind the activity – for example, if your character is driving a car in order to escape capture after robbing a bank, *that* is dramatic action. Notice once again that **high stakes are involved.**

#### **Cause and Effect**

The idea here is to create dramatic action, which leads to dramatic conflict, which leads to more dramatic action, which leads to more conflict, etc. all the way to the resolution at the end of the play.

Another great bit of advice that has always stood me in good stead applies here as well:

***"Remove all random coincidence."***

Nobody just happens into a room. Nobody just happens to bump into each other. If two people bump into each other, it's because they both need to be in a certain place desperately and their paths collide.

### 4) Dialogue

**What people say to each other in a heightened situation.** The crux of playwriting. The story we are watching evolves out of what people say to each other. **Here are a couple pitfalls to avoid.**

**1) Casual language.** Words and phrases such as “I think” or “really” or “just” or “maybe” can really lower the stakes. Look at the following line of dialogue from our hostage story:

**BOB: I really think I might just blow your head off if I don't get that money.**

Now let's remove the “casual.”

**BOB: Give me the money or I'll blow your head off.**

More succinct, more active, more exciting.

**2) Exposition.** And what I mean by “exposition” is this: necessary information delivered to the audience by a character in a form which is not derived from the character's need to tell it. Here's an example:

### **EXPOSITION**

**BOB: I need this money to buy a house and join a country club. You see, my high school sweetheart dumped me because I was poor. I was broken hearted. My life was ruined. Now our high school reunion is coming up and I want to show her how wrong she was about me.**

### **NON-EXPOSITION:**

**BILL: Please let me go. Look, here's all the money in my wallet. You can have it. You can have whatever you want...**

**BOB: You don't got what I want.**

**BILL: Maybe I do.**

**BOB: Where do you live? Huh?**

**BILL: In Brooklyn.**

**BOB: No, I mean what kind a house you got?**

**BILL: I don't own a house. I live in a studio apartment.**

**BOB: See what I mean? I don't need no studio apartment. I gotta have a house. A big house! A mansion! And I gotta join a country club!**

**BILL: You're holding a gun to my head because you want to buy a house and play golf? That doesn't make any sense!**

**BOB: That's cuz you never met Sheila. You don't know what it's like to be with her... to love her... to be dumped by her – dumped just because I was *poor*. But I'll show her. Next week's our twentieth reunion. We'll see who's rich. We'll see who's on top now. And when she begs me to take her back... forget about it.**

Can you see the difference between the two? In the second scenario, Bob *had* to tell Bill about Sheila in order to justify his behavior. The same information has been given to the audience, but in a much more active way. In other words, a playwright's job is...

**“...translating everything the audience needs to know into something the character needs to say.”**

### **5) Resolution**

How does it end? There are no hard and fast rules to this one. Sometimes the character gets what he wants, sometimes he doesn't – but it has to end. Does Bob get his money? Does Bob get arrested? Does Bill wrestle Bob to the ground after revealing he is Sheila's husband?

“As usual in all the arts, formulas never work: **the best ending in any play is one that rises organically out of the characters and their actions.** There are, however, some strategies that have persisted from back in Shakespeare's time, by which authors have come to successful conclusions.”

~ Conrad Geller

### **FIVE TYPICAL ENDINGS (by Conrad Geller)**

1. **Epilogue:** either a spokesperson for the author or one of the characters steps forward to make a final comment.

2. **Song:** a distinguishing characteristic of the American Musical Comedy genre. It can be a person or people singing lyrics, or a bit of music reprised from an earlier moment in the show.

3. **Triumph or Catastrophe:** puts plot at the center of the drama. Rising action all the way to the end might be best if a character must finally reveal him or herself in a violent outburst, as in many murder mysteries, or when the falling action is obvious or unimportant. The best modern use of the climactic ending is probably in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Elizabeth Proctor, having failed to get her husband to save his life by compromising his integrity, experiences a peculiar mixture of both triumph and catastrophe:

“He have his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him.”

4. **Life Goes On:** “That's the way it is, and that's the way it's going to be,” The plot and the resolution of personal conflicts are less important than the ambiance of the play itself.

Perhaps the best model for the Life Goes On ending is in Thornton Wilder's monumental *Our Town*. The Stage Manager's comments throughout have formed a backdrop and antiphony for the action, and he plays the final coda:

“Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by--(to the audience) Hm . . . Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners--You get a good rest, too. Good night.”

5. **Setting It All to Rights** was Shakespeare's favorite ending, especially in the tragedies and histories. Typically, an authority figure comes to the middle of the stage to reward the faithful and punish the guilty.



## Appendix Two – Sample Values Statements

# **DALLAS THEATER CENTER**

# **PUBLIC WORKS DALLAS**

### PWD Values

- LISTENING
  - Asking clarifying questions, making curated responses.
- LONGITUDINAL INVESTMENT
  - Every person is a long term partnership
- EQUITY
  - Giving everyone what they need to succeed
- MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL
  - All parties gain respect & benefit from this process
- AMBITION
  - Pursuing artistic excellence
- RADICAL HOSPITALITY AND INCLUSION
  - Offering joyful support to each other

### Valores Public Works Dallas

- ESCUCHA
  - Preguntamos para clarificar, respondemos de manera razonable
- COMPROMISO A LARGO PLAZO
  - Con cada persona buscamos una relación duradera
- EQUIDAD
  - Damos a todos lo que necesitan para el éxito
- BENEFICIO MUTUO
  - Todas las partes ganan respeto y beneficio de este proceso
- AMBICIÓN
  - Buscamos la excelencia artística
- HOSPITALIDAD E INCLUSIÓN RADICAL
  - Nos apoyamos entre nosotros con alegría

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## Sample Values Statement

*Gosford Musical Society*

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### Values Statement

An organisation of fun and respect

Inclusive

Promoting the Arts in the community

Fostering talent and skills

Good governance



## **Appendix Three – More About the Business End**

*Apart from just making a start of it (which, let's face it is all about sheer grit and passion) before long, if you are to continue developing theatre, theatre makers face a lot of choices and processes:*

- Defining a mission and vision
- Deciding on a business entity type
- Establishing a business entity
- Getting insurance for protection and so that halls can be hired etc
- Finding the people
- Joining networks
- Finding a place to meet, rehearse, perform, store gear
- Finding money

### **Some General Responses that Helped Ground Me**

- “There are things you can do that are not going to cost you a lot of money.”
- You don't need to have all the fancy costumes and things. You can have your plain old street clothes - clothes you have in your wardrobe on stage! It doesn't matter as long as it sort of is in the right era, and it looks right. You become very good at op-shopping. You can do it on a shoestring budget and be fine. The audience won't care.
- It's about risk management. All it takes is one person to be careless with money...
- It's a part-time passion project for all of our team - it's a nights and weekends space for everybody. “My full-time job is at...”
- “Building institutions is a pain in the a\*\*\*.”
- Small is good. I mean the truth is, if you're at the Kennedy Centre, you don't have time to do that. You're like 'Nahh, forget it. Time is money! That's the beauty of Community Theatre. You guys have a lot of luxuries that professional theatre does not have.
- Being small means you don't actually have any overheads at all
- “For this current show we have a decent budget which means I can get paid! Probably for the first time, in terms of what you would get paid to work in any show...”

### **Relying on grants and funding**

- Grants are not for operations, they are for projects
- Don't forget that even though you're in the arts there are other sources, other avenues. Humanities: libraries and the historical societies for library and humanities grants. They have their educational grants. Go for those grants because what you're trying to do is educational.
- We have a general manager who we pay and the rest of us are volunteers. Her wages are the biggest drain on our finances. At one stage it was quite easy to get funding for the arts from different bodies (\*in New Zealand). That all dries up. It is up and down.
- We had funding in the UK, back in the day, for the amateur arts. It's more or less evaporated.
- I ran the amateur theatre organisation for Wales for about 15 years. I had seven staff on the payroll, just to work around Wales, running little festivals, that kind of stuff. Supporting groups, running workshops, and summer schools. Finding them plays, initiating playwriting competitions, and running a library. I left around 2009, something like that. Within five years the funding

had gone. It had been there since 1934. It had been funded for 30 or 40 years by the arts Council of Wales and then they just decided one day that they were going to fund things differently.

- Because we had funding for a majority of shows, we did some that were free, some that were by donation, and we always did some that were free during the day for local schools. It really worked because students were happy and we were happy because we had people in the seats

### **Strings Attached**

Where-ever you get your money from comes with strings attached. Things have been changed in the Covid pandemic in that that we have been getting more money for general operations but the majority of the grant writing fund raising that is done from private foundations and the government is for money that can only be used for the thing you applied for. We get about 10% of our money from individual donors from this huge annual gala that we do. We get it from the rich and invest in the not-so-rich or in those who are not rich at all. That's the scheme that we're in. It's a game every theatre has to play.

They are really supporting your mission. It's about getting people to support your mission and buy into your mission. The work you have to do is to cultivate people to your mission, to buy in for the ride and come along and support your vision.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Comments On Being under Auspices of another organisation**

- We fill our houses every time - at 400 folks per performance, and we have 4 free performances. We never charge any money. No money is involved ever. That's because we are part of an institution and they make money on their other shows.
- All my community engagement events are free. The shows aren't free, but my community engagement activities are all free
- The theatre company itself is governed as a charitable trust. When we are applying for funding it's through that trust. It gives a lot of independence from the City Mission as well.
- The auspice agency may have policies that you can use. You still need someone who is happy to sit down and work through a documents and define processes and policies. That can be the daunting part of running any kind of a community project.

### **A Journey to Respectability**

We were just going to have fun on stage, make some friends, and do our thing. Eventually you go on the committee, you get more experience, and you get involved in a few more things and realise 'It's a lot more work than we thought it was'. Then you just keep going because you do it for the love of it, and you deal with it. Then you know, s\*\*t happens and you walk away.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **On Establishing your own Organisational Structure**

- A function of committee is the start of it and if we have a fully functioning production crew that are on the same page... I don't know how you structure that in Australia but most of our societies have a production manager at the forehead of everything. They're the ones running the ship. Then there is the director.
- **Backup** when things go wrong:



- We have a non-profit company status - a 501 C3, so the business is not owned by any body - we have a governance board and I report to that board and we are tax exempt from the government.
- You think 'how could the committee have done it better?' Did we actually look at the content of the play and think 'Is this going to upset people, our cast, or upset the balance of the community by putting those sorts of things on?'
- **Meetings!** Talking about Drop box... All the papers I need for the meeting coming up! I get so frustrated. Our last administrator just printed it off and sent us a pack in the mail and everything was there. At our last meeting I've missed two important things
- You hear from all over the place where some people just try to take over or they are trying to do their best but they don't know what the hell are they doing. From a Mental Health and a wellness point of view, it's like, "How do I get these people to work together as a committee?"

#### **“Have you thought about going private?”**

- I did non-profit, and I got really tired of begging for money. I know a lot of the new theatre companies are now forming themselves as a business. I don't know how it's organised in Australia but here you can be a non-profit or a for-profit. The only real reason you may want to be a non-profit is for getting grants but the few that are available makes it very competitive to get grants anyway.
- We are set up to be a professional, non-union on purpose theatre company. We use non-union independent contractors for all of our acting, directing, and stage managers. You can get all the people that you need on a project by doing a number of different contracts.
- This has been a trend for a while now. Start it as a business. I tell people that because then you can just get started, you don't have a board of directors telling you what to do, you don't have to educate them, you don't have to write grants and you just get your money from performance fees which I think is a more dependable income stream than grants.
- A bigger problem for me is that the people that we get to be board members don't know anything about senior theatre because very few people know anything about senior theatre. The learning curve on what you can do in senior theatre is long and by the time you get the board members educated on what you do or want to do their term is up, and you have to get somebody else and educate them again.
- **“There's a benefit to funding, and there's a negative to funding.”** The negative to funding is that you become reliant on it. You become reliant on the government-funded organisation funding this festival, making sure that all the compliance, child protection, legalities, safety and all that is in place. If that goes in the wind of Government funding, then you're left having to find those skills that you need to have in place. That can be the daunting part of running a kind of a community project.

#### **Profitability**

- With around 50 to 60 people in *your* cast onstage - you know there are companies around that, just by doing that, generate enough ticket sales through the cast's family members that they make it work - it's not an uncommon process.
- When it comes to regional or community theatre, you have to decide between (1) lots of people, where the average talent may be lower than you want but you gain more of an audience, or (2) less people with more talent so the people come for the quality of the show. It sounds like the more rural you are,

the more you should rely on the larger numbers of participants to gain more audience.

- I think it's really important that people pay for stuff. If you don't pay you don't have a foot in the game. You don't have ownership and you don't love it as much because it's free.
- If they don't pay, they might come one week but two weeks later they will forget or say 'You know,..' And you have to have some sort of income stream.
- We could do shows in each of the three towns here. We could take them to the region north of here. You get an audience. We tried the cities a few times but it cost too much to market and hire the space. It's not the scene anyway.

### **What kind of business do you call this anyway?**

You can produce important work without having commercial hit-making as your primary goal.

*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **Skin in the Game**

I have had a theatre company for years. Me and my business partner still run the business together. We were looking for our own space for years - it took a while to find it and to have the means to sustain it. We were very committed on lots of levels, over the years so it is quite good now...

There was an existing space being used by a community theatre. Then they didn't need that space because the council built them a whole new theatre and the space was available. There was that space that they had left behind. I was fortunate to be working in a good job and was able to sustain the space until we were able to convince the government to get behind us and slowly support us.

*Tainui Tukiwaho*

### **It Takes Discipline**

It's from a lot of discipline Mike, it's not easy being in the Arts, and aging. It's the discipline of coming here and doing something all day every day. You really pinned it as to what we are when you said: we are a theatre network because we try to bring all these senior theatre people together; we are a theatre education provider; We not only bring them plays but we also give them information - and in the Pandemic also giving them inspiration to keep them going; we are a health promotion initiative (although I say I am doing my art I know there is community value.); and then you said we are business. Because we are!

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **A Social Enterprise business model from New Zealand**

I'm a business person in my day job and or my drama school, I run it as a social enterprise, not as a business at all. As I said, this is a passion for me and I can run it without being profit driven.

Passion is separate to profit. It can be profitable, but I have kept it as a social enterprise deliberately to not become too greedy. When you start earning money - I am not saying I would become greedy but there is a possibility that your mind goes toward the profit rather than the content and the creation of the show.

Social Enterprise is a really good way of doing something, a good combination of business and community focus as well. They see that we are handing all the proceeds back to the community, the teaching and the production.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **Co-op Model from New Zealand**

We are also paying our cast as well, so that is really important. We have always worked on a coop model before where the box office gets divided between the company because that's important and we want people to take it seriously. And part of that: How do you sell tickets? If you want to be part of a company that's doing professional level shows, thinking about the audience is another aspect of that.

What it leads to is some really good, robust discussions around what we are spending money on. It has made everyone a lot more accountable to each other because if you are mucking around or you're not coming to rehearsals or you're not learning your lines, that impacts me, and I'm going to be annoyed at you. People are a bit more responsible.

I've done a lot of it voluntarily. In the last few years, as we have done a few more quality shows, winning an award, we have now had some funding from creative New Zealand which is our funding agency here. For this current show we have a decent budget which means I can get paid!

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Driving Forces and Cycles**

*The following section is sound-bytes from different interviewees stitched together into a cohesive section due to the commonality of their responses, to be read as one.*

I think you just do it. I hate to say this but you need someone who is enthusiastic. There has to be someone like you, who is like "I'm just going to do this". At two o'clock whoever shows up at my house, you're in the play. If you're late we'll take you anyway. I think you just do it! You make it fun, and then hopefully others will see that those people are having fun and then they will want to have fun too. Your idea of celebration and joy is a really good starting point, and as long as there is somebody in the community that is willing to be the leader, the instigator, who's like 'let's do it'. If you don't have that person then that's when it falls apart.

*Betty Siegel*

I think I had been thinking about this type of work and then suddenly I had the opportunity to do it and I think that's where I learned a lot, but then all the work I do is very related to what I learned and those values.

*Haley Sherwood*

I think we are all a bit crazy, to be honest. I don't think we're all normal. We all have our own ticks, our own quirks. You get into theatre because you're with like-minded people and you love what you do. Although it's stressful and you hate it, you get to final night and that feeling of 'Wow, we've done it.' I think it's the same all over the world. Volunteers are involved, then there are the big egos, the divas, those that want kudos. Most of us are just there for the fun of it thinking "Yep I'm doing this and it's going to be awesome!" Bloody hard work to get there but it's awesome.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

Oftentimes people will replicate that "professional" pipeline. They might say I'm going to give you training in the vocal techniques of this great studio from New York. It's all rooted in aspiration verses to-make-a-thing-just-to-make-a-thing. And it also reveals itself in the narrative of the play.

*Paul Brewster*

To a certain extent we create our own path, we carve our own course. It's where we find a response, and where we respond to whatever resonates with us. If it's about stimulating, inspiring, about making a tiny change, that becomes important to me - making a tiny change and putting energy into it and seeing what happens.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

It really comes down to who is the driving force at that stage, a good president and executive. There are good years and then someone will leave who has all the knowledge and experience and then the club will crash and burn. Then, another club will come up, and seats are full.

*Emma Bishop*

About being a 'driver': almost anything begins with somebody's idea and somebody's passion about that idea. However I personally do not believe that the idea or that passion survives without a partner. I would not want to do what I do alone, and what theatre is a collaboration and a collective. It is the only art form truly like that and if it is only led by one person it will never be true intrinsic to the nature of the art that it is for me. I think you need your team.

*Peggy McKowen*

We were founded in 2011. I have been in this role for five years. We are in the process now, at Trusty Sidekick, of re-imagining our leadership structure, re-imagining our organisational structure with an eye on sustainability. The challenge is to design a company that can live on to encourage the next generation of folks that have similar passions, to make it their own and to see what happens from there.

*Paul Brewster*

What sometimes prevents succession planning is when you get someone that sticks at it for so long, who might be the driver but who actually turns people away. Some clubs handle succession really well. When I was the chair of one of the local clubs - We had a plan - we bought young people in and gave them a portfolio. They became secretary, then maybe vice president, they maybe became president. The big thing now, with the busy-ness of life, is the volunteer community is getting thinner and thinner.

*Emma Bishop*

There used to be amateur theatre in every town in New Zealand. It was huge. There were tour runs hosted by those theatres. They have pretty much dried up. There's still some musicals - they do Grease and American musicals. I mean I find it ok...

*Paul Maunder*

## **Leadership Roles**

*Some important principles of leadership were discussed by interviewees:.*

### **Connection**

You have to tell people that you think they're interesting and be sincere. I think everyone is. Maybe that's me being naive. But I do really think they are. And you can reveal what you think is interesting about them.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Liaison**

I end up doing a lot of the liaising between folks who are maybe having a hard time with their schedule and like fitting this in, or maybe feeling nervous or have - all kinds of behaviour still come up, right?

### **Encouraging and Supporting**

I'm not saying that just because we do a 'play' that everyone's habits, neurosis and trauma doesn't arrive as well. It certainly does. I end up being the person who is usually saying "hey why don't we go chat for a second and 'check in' and see how you're doing?". Usually the thing I have to remind them is that they're doing this because they want to.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Keep it Real (Don't be a snob)**

They get to see these incredible relationships, ... working on the play together and investing themselves in something outside of themselves. You see over and over again how those relationships get built. If you just aren't a snob, and keep it real, then people feel they don't have to pretend. I can be honest and be myself.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Ego Trips**

You often get people on their ego trip that doesn't allow others to progress. It's gross because they don't allow others in

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Patience and Love ... and an Agreement**

It takes a lot of patience. It takes a lot of love. We are supported by a very professional staff. We make sure to check in constantly with our participants for the pageant. I want to share with you our list of values and community agreement. Those are established at the beginning of the rehearsal process every time.

They include: active listening, hospitality, respect for oneself, for the space, and for others. That is very clearly established. We have a very bi-lingual community. For a vast majority of them their first language is Spanish, so all our communication is bi-lingual by default. Once all that is established at the top it makes our progress a lot easier.

*Maria Calderon*

### **It's ok to know stuff**

To do community theatre, you need to have a good theatre vocabulary. That's very important. You need knowledge of what other people have done. If you are the director or facilitator you have to have these things that you own. People don't even have to understand them conceptually, it's just what you are doing, it's how you're working. It's your own thing in a way, it's your own skill.

*Paul Maunder*

### **Using What You Have**

You don't need to be someone with a PhD, but you become "expert" by just knowing a little bit more... It's not about being the world leader in this particular thing.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **You may want to be democratic, but sometimes you need to lead**

It is hard sometimes, and you want to be democratic in your decision-making, but the reality is that you might have more experience than me, just having seen more work or read more stuff, and just having a deeper knowledge of what is possible.

One way that we can get around that, is to talk about it starting with some quite big themes. "What are some themes, what are some ideas that you guys have been mulling on lately?" Sometimes I will go away and find pre-existing work that is connected to that, or sometimes we will devise work, but it's also about me suggesting: "I think that we could do it in this kind of format. What do you guys think?" rather than saying "hey the format's wide open", because you don't know what you don't know, right? It's hard when you're being asked to comment on something and you feel "I don't know what I am talking about"

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Leading Volunteers**

It's just the way the world is now. I worry they won't have any volunteers. Some of the young people are so unappreciative of anything that anyone does for them. They just expect it.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **The School of Life**

At that same time I was pursuing my masters in educational theatre at NYU. I technically have that degree though sometimes it feels like the degree I really have earned is actually in meeting people and working with people.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Conflict and Forgiveness**

Conflict is a huge thing! I am part a society here, on their committee. I was president and decided to leave. I had knives coming out of my back at that stage, and we were obviously after different things and not united. I wanted to leave in a nice way. I hadn't done anything with them for years. I went back and did a TV theme show for them last year.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **When you could have done better...**

Don't feel bad, you know I have put my foot in my mouth before. If it's coming from a place of passion, if it's coming from a place of reality and truth and you're not trying to put somebody else down to make yourself feel better, you were telling the reality.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Positive Directors**

When you direct, one of the things you do is give positive directions. Always direct from a positive point of view. You never say "You're not talking loud enough" because that's a bit negative. You always say "Talk louder". It helps with healing, to leap over that challenge, and repair who they are internally. I think everybody needs to heal. The community, the world, I think everybody needs healing.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Be humble: An Outside Eye is Useful**

I have really close networks, and I love being able to reach out to them. If you're telling your own stories and it might be something that is quite close to your heart and quite poignant that outside eye is really important. For example, if I am directing any show, I like to ask people that come in as an outside eye. It is really important. I call them to come and see it. The person that comes is completely blind and says: guys what does that bit mean - I don't understand it at all, or ummm it's a little bit long, or those transitions are bit clunky. You get so invested as a director or as a writer.

*Emma Bishop*

### **Stillness**

You can stand still. This is something that I really encourage when I work with actors. This is especially with actors who don't have a lot of experience. It's not only the words that you choose, but the way in which they're shared.

*Kandie Carle*

### **A Developmental Focus**

*Theatre wasn't invented in schools as we might think of them. As Professor Santiago-Jirau observed, theatre, spawned around primeval fires, including whole communities. It has developed, like acting, as a practice, and a craft, handed down through cultures. Teachers were elders, children, and peers, families and nature. Since then schools have systematised theatre, professionalised it, but community theatre arises to return theatre to its inclusive, humble, connected roots.*

*Great actors were inspired by others, and also inspire others, though the product may be very different. Devotion to craft implies, in the context of theatre, to create opportunities for the development of others as well as the self. It is a growth mindset that is tied to the group and community.*

### **Supporting Volunteers and Amateurs with Opportunities**

What I do is pretty much a one man band - producer, director, choreographer and project manager. Fortunately I have a team of volunteers who come and help me put this together. I acknowledge their expertise and their background in the brochure. I pay them a small fee in recognition of their contribution.

I scout them. I really research. I talk to people, asking "Do you know anyone interested in playing violin for our performance?" I just keep my ears and eyes open all the time to identify talent. I'm always looking out for youth. These people need mentoring and they need the platform to showcase them. As well as just to try it. It is about identifying talent, developing talent, trusting them.

Enthusiasm is good but I channel them in a way that does not let them feel too lost. Some might come along just for one experience and may not think that it is for them. That is fine. But they would have done their bit and they would have still learned something in the process.

I'm a great believer that anybody can dance and anybody can sing and anybody can act. These are not professional theatre people but they are people who are interested. I pick those who are developing themselves. I tend to normally go for young people who are hungry to learn, who are really keen to understand how things work. For me, that group is much more engaging than general professionals who have very limited time.

Professionals want to give you a short time and then they are off. It becomes a bit difficult for me. These people - I develop them, I nurture them, I give them an opportunity, I showcase their talent. From there they have got a lot more opportunities with professional companies, which is fantastic! That's the way I reward them. For most of my musicians for example, most of my stage managers - I will be the first one to have given them that opportunity. I develop them, train them and then they would've done 2 or 3 of those roles in my productions... My trainees who have completed their training - they are my graduates. I have taken them on board as my trainee teachers and one has become a permanent part-time teacher.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **Trying New Things**

I don't think Public Works excludes from doing that job. We highly value self care and taking personal time for doing our own thing and living our own lives. Many of our team members are actors in their own time outside of Public Works. I myself was able to teach a Zoom workshop on Improvisation with my colleague Asher as my assistant. I had never done that before, I'm only an amateur improv artist but it was like that beautiful give- and-take, of having a community that you can teach your skill to so to speak.

*Maria Calderon*

### **Theatre as a Service**

The Barter Players are our non-equity players. I think of it as our training group. I started as a Barter Player, along with Katie. For me, I was out of college, I wanted to grow a lot more in my acting and I wanted to really take this thing out for a drive and learn every day how to do it better.

To me it was like going to graduate school but I got to just do plays the whole time and learn that way - really hands on learning which really changed my life. It's really hooked up to what Nick was talking about - theatre as a service. Like this work is not for me but it's for that kid in the audience who needs this...

*Barrett Guyton*

### **Creative Incubators at all Levels of work**

McCarter does new play development... They have been doing it for a long time. They call it their Creative Incubator. We never stop developing. I realised I might have been born a little too late and realised what I should be studying was dramaturgy and criticism. I had a conversation with a professor and he said I was really great at theatre history. He said I should do a PhD in that. I loved every minute of it.

*Paula Alekson*

### **People need an opportunity**

At high school, in the 70s. I did a couple of shows and it just happened that my form teacher was the music teacher. I would've never have gone there, would never have thought I had any ability. I always got the comedy rolls, but that's because I probably didn't have a lot of talent - I can sing in tune but I don't have a soloist's voice. But this became my love of theatre.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Learning It Then Using It**

There are now several former Barter Players around the United States who have started theatres exactly that way. Three of them started doing shows for young audiences - exactly that model - a person in a room with a phone, and actors they wanted to work with. When they had enough people excited about seeing it they had the funds to build it.

*Katy Brown*

### **A Non-audition Intake Process**

I don't believe in this concept of audition. I have never done audition for my productions. Never. Some people discover themselves, that they do have that hidden talent. I tell them "Come along, Come along and do a small role" and they come along and do a small role and they see how that goes. And if it goes well, great!

If they don't want to be on the stage next they can be backstage in the next show coming up. I tell them if they can't be on the stage be backstage and lets see how



that goes, and slowly, once they have done the backstage work they think "Yeah, I can do a small backstage role." and they slowly gain confidence.

*Prabha Ravi*

### **Opportunities and Mentoring Relationships**

For all of our pageants, the theatre creates opportunities for intern production assistants and stage management assistants, to give skills and also to create relationships. It is an opportunity for them to be part of something extraordinary in their lives. We have had Senior Citizens who thought they would never be able to be part of such a great thing. They are happy to be part of a play with their friends to be in something that they can share with their families and friends. It is a very intense week, during the summer!

Five of our performers are professional actors, most times from the acting company attached to the Dallas Centre, and most of them have taught workshops in the past. Our community members look up to them not only as performers but also because of the way they behave in the space. These are very valuable relationships and it is wonderful to see how a professional actor can have a very casual conversation with a child from the community, for example.

*Maria Calderon*

### **You never know...**

You don't know if Joe Blogs, who wants to be a director but just doesn't have any idea or the confidence, could go away, do a weekend course and come back with all the essential skills.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **The YES House**

The value of Play to the individual and the community that I want to cultivate is these spaces where people feel they are empowered to share their ideas. What ever needs to happen. Calling the building 'The Yes House', I think about the idea of having a big sign that just says "Yes!" in the main street. Can that actually change the attitude we have towards new ideas? It's just the theatre model of "Yes and..", "Yes, lets..." and instead of shutting it down, allowing the space for people to say "yes lets explore that."

One of my favourite things was when a farmer walked in, he was in his late eighties, and he says "hey, I was told if I had an idea I was supposed to come to this building?" He had an idea for a Main Street diner I was like "Awesome! Success!"

*Ashley Hanson*

### **What if someone just isn't up to it?**

Not everybody is a playwright... There is training on how to write plays. You could use local historians to gather the data about local history or local whatever and have them work with a playwright and have the playwright develop that show. If the memories are good, the play will stand up and it will be good.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

You have to be realistic, you can't tell someone that they should be the lead when they can't sing.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Sharing Knowledge**

I had a really good friend that was fantastic at painting sets. I learned so much from him. He doesn't live here any more, and there's no people around, so quite often they go "Helen, would you paint the sets for us?" I am not talking about big murals and the like, but things like doing cobblestones on the floor, or doing sets, like doing marbling or something like that. And I go "Ok. I'll give it a go."

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Using what you have**

"You know how to sew? Oh great, why don't you do all the costumes, and you can have a little role over here." I have always been very grateful for that because it allowed me to do what I love

*Betty Siegel*

### **A Team Approach**

*Some team-centred thoughts about producing theatre:*

#### **Acknowledging the team's contribution**

The driving principle of it is that we all have skills and abilities, we all have strengths, so let's make something that builds on those. It's not about me coming in as the expert - I have certain experiences and skills but so does the person sitting next to me who might be living rough at the moment. That's what we are trying to do all the time with it.

*Bronwyn Bent*

#### **Clarity Please**

I was involved in a show a few years ago. They all just 'mucked in' and did everything. There was no clear guidelines about who was doing what, what budgets were or how they allocated budgets to what. I was doing costumes for Chicago. I asked how much budget I had, and they said \$1000. I thought 'That's doable' but then I wasn't told that out of that came the hair and makeup costs, my petrol cost and any other costs that the director or whatever wanted to take from it. I think it happens everywhere that there are no clear guidelines and frustration kicks in and that's where disconnectedness comes in.

#### **Team Expectations**

With your and your cast and your crew's first get together it's really important to set expectations with them. I have seen so many situations where the cast come in for their first rehearsal, but then they don't get any information about their rehearsal schedule. If they're not feeling well they just can't not turn up - they have to let someone know. All of those sorts of things. We need to know where people are, where they're at. If they're overloaded and they are not coping then they need to tell somebody.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

#### **Looking after the team's needs**

We have childcare for every rehearsal as well as for workshops in our community centres, otherwise, it would be very difficult for mothers to join the workshop. It is important that we look for ways that being in our program is not an obstacle to being involved in the other aspects of life.

*Maria Calderon*

#### **Pastoral Care**

If things come up for people as they do in creative work, I don't want to place someone into a position of harm - it's really important that there is that pastoral support for people. We have one staff member, a social worker. He is part of the group. He participates on the same level as everyone else. It's not like he's sitting to the side.

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Responsibilities in care for the Cast and Crew**

It's having that person on the production team, nominating that person from the cast and crew to go to if you need help. Or, if you just want to talk about something, come and talk to me. We have that confidential support for you if you need help.

Thinking about how we treat one another and the committee not caring about the people in the cast. They are there just because they need to be. It's really about connecting the committee together so that they are there to support the cast and crew as well and not be there as part of the committee.

*Rochelle Nicholson*

### **The Production Team**

Having a team that is on board is essential. It doesn't take a large team. Usually my production teams are 4 or 5 people. I've got a cast of 2 to 5 people in some of these things so I am on a smaller scale than what you're talking about doing, but when you get them interested they will do wonders for you.

*Kandie Carle*

### **The Consumer Consultation process**

With the guidance of individuals with autism and their caregivers and with Occupational Therapists who work closely with individuals with disabilities. These were centring voices.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Creating Opportunities**

#### **Start Small**

It was true of Barter at large too - originally it was one guy coming down with his friends from New York City during the Great Depression because they didn't have food to eat. They said "These people have extra food, we'll do some plays and see if they will give us some fruit." What I am saying is that, you have all of the pieces to be able to start, it's just about starting small. You are just at the early piece of it.

*Katy Brown*

#### **Multitasking in the Country**

I have done a bit of everything, like manage the productions we were having. I used to be in the chorus, and would take a small part, just like you do in a small town. I used to do the publicity... just about every job! Whatever needs to be done!

*Helen Horsnell*

#### **Favouring Inclusion over Elitism**

That's the way it is. People are now the 'Triple threat'. I look at the shows we do here and I worry that some really good kids miss out. That's why I like to go back and do Theatre Restaurant and provide somewhere for them to shine!

Look at things you can do - Like 'Gundagai's got talent!' or whatever, and form your own thing. There are lots of different "Stars in their eyes" type shows. Do a

compilation show where you get a whole lot of people together, do auditions, and make a show around that.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Keeping the mission clear**

With the Trusty Sidekick shows we make sure the parents know that the this is not an hour of us babysitting, this is an hour of actually engaging with a story with your kids.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Great Partnerships**

That's why our partnerships were really, really great because we were able to take our programs to a new audience and in a new space, a space that would accommodate our artists and their needs.

*Janis Monture*

### **Developing a following**

What we found is that people who love coming to our theatres cross over between our two theatre spaces. It's not like 'I'm only this type of person or that type of person'. They have learned to love our work or our company.

*Katy Brown*

### **Inspiring the Next Generation**

That launched into one of the students wanting to become a poet (whether they become a great poet that's another thing) but it got them going in performance poetry. When she went off to college it was part of the thing that she wanted to do.

*Kandie Carle*

### **Hidden Passions in the Country**

Often it was people who had experience of that sort of theatre who happened to be here and yearning to work in that sort of space again. If you have that core group, others will get into that sort of culture, and learn by osmosis really. In an interesting way, the day audience will be mixed. There tends to be those who have got some knowledge and experience of theatre. People travel nowadays and yearn for that experience again. There are also those that are taken by the local content. It's quite interesting culturally and there's some contradiction involved.

*Paul Maunder*

### **Small Towns Can Create Access**

The experience of being isolated in a small town also means an increase of access and direct connection and ownership of the artistic experience in a way you don't get in other places.

When you are in a city and you go see a play there are 12,000 other people there! The advantage of rural isolation is they are there, immersed in the experience and, while they are here, they have access to the artists.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Keeping Engagement Happening**

You have to keep the momentum going, or other people will forget, and say "Oh I don't have to show up for that theatre workshop anymore. I was sort of scared to do it anyway." If you don't keep presenting opportunities for people to stay engaged then people lose that spark and the institution can get in the way sometimes.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Engaging Men in the Rural Community**

A lack of men is really a big thing. You have to pick shows around the people you've got which you do have. With this small town - because I'd seen them up the road I said 'hey look you've got this guy who is nearly seven feet, a really good singer and I said why don't you think about doing Fiddler on the Roof? It's about a village, and this here is a village. And you have the older people there. You will get the older people and I think we will have enough. And for the Russians, just down the road you have a bunch of guys that do Judo and Tae Kwon Do.

Just approach them and say in a month we need 3 or 4 guys who will come in and break up a party, and be the Russian soldiers. You would be surprised if one of them doesn't carry on. Or, you go to the local Rugby club. But it just needs someone to go in and say 'hi guys, just wanted to see if anyone can help us - we will give you a free beer afterwards. It's not just looking at problems and doing the same thing!

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Fulfilling Personal Passions**

From the age of five I knew I wanted to be involved in theatre. My mum ... saw that it was a passion in me. She encouraged it. She got me into this theatre company and that theatre company, and community theatre as I got older. I was working in community theatre when I was in junior high, high school and then studied theatre for college. Then mum said "I'm not so sure about this theatre thing. Don't you want to be a dental hygienist?" No. I don't. She said "Go into the medical field you'll always have a job." I wanted to be in theatre, so, too bad, so sad. *(laughs)*

*Betty Siegel*

### **An alternative to the virtual world**

...Children are interacting in a different way. They are coming together. They may even put something online - some sort of performance they have done in their bedroom, some sort of drama. That may be enough for what they need. Until you actually offer them the facility and say 'this is a space where you can do exactly the same thing but you and your friends are in the same space, in the same place. You can make those noises. You can express your voice and your opinion, and it's fine.

*Alad Rhys-Jones*

### **Networking with the Community**

*Themes from the interviews reflected on the importance of relationship building as you undertake community theatre.*

### **Consolidating with Supporters**

Not necessarily the people that are going to make the art with you, but who are the people in your community that believe in what you are doing? You need to gather those people to you.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Community of Practice Group**

What I love about networking is the Community of Practice idea, where you're bringing together a community of people who share a passion for something and who are eager to share with one another: Just bring people together - really powerful.

*Betty Siegel*

Every theatre in the United States has their different way of doing things. It's great for us to share resources and learn from each other. We do the same things with our different flavours.

*Maria Calderon*

You'll find that within this (arts/disabilities) community, folks are incredibly generous with their expertise and their sharing. I've learnt from other colleagues in the field. It's always wanting to pass along and share where are you are, what you're learning, knowing that the work is never done. It's always evolving... Welcome to the journey!!  
*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Networking for Strong Community Partnerships**

We go visit them, they come and visit our theatre and see if we consider each other, according to our missions and if they align with our values, and with the mission of creating and supporting community. If so there is an agreement that is signed between Public Works and these organisations.

Part of our agreement with our community organisations is that a member of their leadership team - where it is the co-ordinator of the centre or the CEO, or if they have a board we would like a member of their board of directors **to be part of the show**  
*Maria Calderon*

### **Healing Broken Down Relationships**

Laura and Lucy, who had that relationship with the area said, 'We represent this big institution, and we're here to say we are sorry that this has not been a welcome place for the people of this area and we wish it had been.' I think that admission, right at the start, was part of building that relationship and what actually helped to build the trust. And then we have to stick to our word.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Thinking about Healthy Networks:**

How?

- Take time to build the relationship, get to know one another better
- Be open with one another and really be honest with what you want out of a partnership
- Sometimes we go in with our own (I don't want to say agenda) - our own perceptions.
- Think about what allows them to feel at home, and welcome in that space?
- It is really key to remain open, with a good mind, just to see where it takes us
- Keep communication / information flowing
- Maintain relationships and renew contact with the organisations every season
- We need to be in places other than our own theatres, not expecting people to always come to us
- Whenever inviting others to share their information, explain who you are, prepare them, and ask how you can better support them.

Who with?

- Try looking for Connectors in your community - there are always people who are really good at this
- You need relationships with your town leadership
- You need your business community and a sense of relationship.
- "We've always been the first at the new mayor's office..."
- You may need help sometimes, e.g. with paint, lumber etc
- Build on strengths and commonality
- The only way you're going to get those people who seem to be in shoes of cement to support you is to find what they have done that is a 'yes/and'!
- Once you've got that kind of thing going with those cement block folks, sometimes you have to just discover and become friends with people that you wouldn't normally be friends with. They become advocates for the work too.

- You need sponsors
- Invite sports people and teams to get involved

### **Igniting Excitement in a Small Town**

Don't underestimate the value of ego. They don't want to get involved, they're tired, been there done that, had our glory days. So you say 'You must have so enjoyed it back in the day', then their ego will kick in and they will say "Well I don't want to be left behind, I want to be part of this. Maybe I can capture lightning in a bottle twice" However it's going to take a special person that doesn't then just want to come in and crash the bubble and recreate you know, whatever it was from 1980.

*Kandie Carle*

Why?

- You need those relationships.
- The relationship part of it is really key in Community Theatre
- It can be really overwhelming to do these kinds of things alone
- You're not doing it alone. That's the most valuable part of networking.
- Develop a contact list of social media groups to keep people up-to-date
- It's a philosophy of 'community centric' - "We will make this happen", " it's valuable and this is why"

### **Be Genuine, not trying to dazzle with Lingo**

Whenever we strategise and think how to do something. Just "be a good friend". Be a good person. How do you build relationships in your life that you want to last? How do you treat a partner, a family member, or friends? You hold yourself accountable for promises you make to them. I think that in business, and in nonprofits and institutions, we think of it as a whole other language that we have to speak. But it's not. We can just use the language we have to build strong relationships that matter to us and do that in our work.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Finding Networking Opportunities**

I have groups that get together now. Presidents of theatre groups that have coffee every 3 or 4 months just to chat and share with each other what they are doing. In the old days, people would be not telling everyone what they were doing because they didn't want anyone else to copy them. Now we share resources.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Community Buy-In**

*Starting a new theatre venture can be intimidating. Spread your excitement around – that can be infectious. But there is a way to do this – the direct approach can be too much if people don't catch the vision. First, get to know the community and be known by them. Your group could sponsor different things in the community just to build connections: Story times at the library; supporting individuals with dementia; going to senior centres and talk to individuals about their experiences; disability pride celebrations, autism theatre classes,*

It is absolutely a fact that when an audience is involved in creating an artwork, their relationship to the theatre deepens.

*Paula Alekson*

- Become a part of the fabric of that community first before you ask for people to come into your organisation

- Look in your own back yard for people you already know.
- Learn to talk their talk
- Get potential audiences involved so that they become invested and help
- Be open, start talking
- Share visions not expectations
- Food is the great common denominator

### **Strengthen your connection with the community**

We are one of the only truly resident theatre companies left in America. The people that work here for the most part may have come from all over, they are people with incredible careers but they wanted a place where they could have a home where they could know the ground that they are performing for and the stories of the place and the people that they are performing for.

That attachment and its true relationship is shown when people come up to you in the grocery store and you are both the local person that they know but also like a star in this area and they want to talk to you about what they have seen. They want to be a piece of that in a way that is incredibly special.

*Katy Brown*

### **Creating Economic Opportunity for the Community**

We hire about 9 people in the front-of-house department. We engage community as ushers so they can see the plays for free. A pool of them help us year after year. They also help with concession or signage direction or sometimes we just have ambassadors in the parking lot, to try to help people figure out where the going and things like that. The local community is engaged actively in that way.

The town and the community have evolved over time. When the festival first started, there were people who did not like the plays. They walked out, very upset about some of the concepts of them. There were people who thought we were bringing traffic and strangers to their idyllic home and we were messing it up. There were people who felt that we were not important enough, that what we were doing was not that important for us to be a significant partner in the community.

We are on a university campus so we consider ourselves partner with Shepherd University and all of our marketing goes out to say we are at Shepherd University. There are some people who couldn't see the difference between us as a professional company and student work. That was a little challenging in the beginning.

Since then, although some of those people still exist, it has really shifted significantly because we have become such strong leaders for the community. The businesses downtown think of us as their Christmas in July - they make as much revenue when our festival is happening as they do at Christmas. They rely on us for a group of people who will come and eat and shop and spend the night. Now we are staple in the community and this year with the Pandemic, it was really painful and very different and they missed us. With the artist that we bring here - not necessarily movie stars but we have had Tony Award winning actors, and we have a lot of actors who were in commercials - we have a lot of people who think we bring a certain quality to the community. Even the university thinks of us as the jewel of the campus. It's changed.

*Peggy McKowen*



### **Social Marketing**

*Social marketing is marketing designed to create social change, and in the case of Community Theatre I link it to enabling participation, welcoming diverse audiences, and just getting your activities out there to excite and enliven the community. Marketing is never about just one strategy, and some principles discussed below can fit with community theatre in a number of ways. I asked how people about their strategies in this department:*

#### **An ongoing part of the work**

It is something we deal with all the time and I don't think there is one answer to social marketing. We try to look for different things to do. I guess we have to just keep doing it. There's no easy way to magically know how to find people that might be interested. You have to keep reminding people "here's this activity that you might want to do"

*Bronwyn Bent*

#### **Reaching out to understand how create Inclusion**

Just by saying "inclusive - all welcome!", that doesn't do anything. More often than not you want to be reaching out to those thought partners who give you the insight into what barriers you need to be reducing... It's about finding out where they are comfortable, E.g. "Are they up for coffee, or me going to their house?"

*Marcie Bramucci*

#### **Social Media**

I think Facebook and all those different social media platforms are really critical as marketing tools. I sort of hate them but I think a lot of people get information from them, it's how they get information, it's public information. We've just got Facebook as a public facing medium and then we have a WhatsApp group for the participants so that we can stay in touch with each other,

*Bronwyn Bent*

#### **Building Trust**

It is different for the folks, for individuals with disabilities. You can't just put out a flyer and then they come. You need to build trust with that community. If they don't know you they're going to think:: It says it's for everybody... yeah - that doesn't mean everybody!. 'Everybody' doesn't mean 'me'.

The biggest pitfall for theatres doing this work - like one theatre in our region - is outsourcing the marketing. When you do that it's not the same thing. They know us. They don't know this other entity. It is absolutely about trust.

*Marcie Bramucci*

#### **Leveraging on existing channels**

So much of it is about being able to get teachers or parents to understand in advance, what it was, why this was going to be such an incredible experience for their young people to see the show. It was frequently only one person in a room and a phone saying we're going to do this incredible story, and we were working on the script. And you have to sell that before it exists in your hand!

Barrett Guyton

#### **Creative Marketing Ideas Emanating from the Story**

It's fun - from the perspective of the managing director - thinking about the marketing of the show through the world of the story rather than just the target demographic.

*Paul Brewster*

### **Inviting...**

We have had a couple of new people in the last three months which is great. We did a little 'open morning' and we made it at a time where people were coming to have morning tea at the City Mission. People were kind of captured (laughs) in the drop-in space, with cups of tea and biscuits! And we were like 'hey guys we are going to run a session, come and join in.' We got some of the staff members at the Mission to kind of shoulder tap people and say 'hey Mike, this thing's going to happen in 20 minutes and I think you would have a great time, Do you just want to stick around for a bit and check it out?'

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Keeping the Doors Open**

I think there's a danger when you've been going for a long time that people can feel a little excluded from it because they didn't join in five years ago. It's finding a place to say 'Hey you can still join in and you can jump on now you know?'

*Bronwyn Bent*

### **Testimonials**

You were asking about marketing. We did a video campaign and had people sharing testimonials but not with their experiences. People want to hear what your reservations were, how did you overcome them, and then your experiences. Then they are really listening.

Putting up quotes from audience members saying "The show was great" - That's not what potential audience members with disabilities want to hear. What they want to hear might be more like: "My son has this particular need and I totally assumed that this organisation was not up to accommodate him. I thought this was not going to work, and that was going to be a problem. But when I arrived, this, this and this happened, and it was amazing how they overcame my hesitation and trepidation." You may say we have this really inclusive show, and they might think, 'That's great, but you don't really know what our needs are'. It's about allowing folks to help demystify the process and become your advocates.

*Marcie Bramucci*

### **Word of Mouth**

We love doing Shakespeare - this is our 6th year, so we're making our way through the canon. What I'm also interested in and McCarter is interested in is hearing BIPOC voices as well and stepping away from the white classical male canon and engaging other voices. So, sporadically, I'm trying to pepper in playwrights from other cultures. For example, for two months, instead of doing Shakespeare we read The Recognition of Śakuntalā by Kālidāsa the great Sanskrit playwright. As soon as you announce that you're doing something that is culturally significant to a specific segment of the population they are like hey they're reading Kālidāsa next month, to their friends. Anyone that loves Kālidāsa that gets the word out might join my Shakespeare community reading group because now they are reading this play that means something to them, and the experiences and community that's been created through this virtual reading.

*Paula Alekson*

## **Commercial v Other Models of Theatre**

### **Theatre's Community Roots**

I think it's so important to remember your roots. For whatever reason there is a kind of snobbery between professional theatre and community theatre. However you have to remember your roots, and also remember who you might touch by the way you do what you do. Let people see what you are doing because people will be charmed by what you are presenting and maybe want to find out what you're about.  
*Paula Alekson*

### **(Commercial) Theatre Is Weird**

I started in theatre and thought "theatre is weird". I didn't want to be an actor, I didn't want to be a director. I liked what theatre is doing, but traditional theatre wasn't for me. I say I am a community organiser that happened to pick up the tool of theatre. It could have been a different tool but I saw the overlaps with community organising. As I got further into my journey I realised "I am a theatre artist that happened to fall in love with community organising." I switch between both.  
*Ashley Hanson*

### **Commoditisation of Theatre**

Unfortunately, at the other end, theatre, with capitalism, and with the markets, has become a commodity, extricated. The rights to perform something have been removed, or to study theatre. In my work, which is different - I work at a producing theatre - but my main job is to work in community. It is not to help community members create the work that ends up on our screens because that's the work of professional artists.

It is do theatre in a way that is useful to them (*the community*). I'm in that because that has value in itself. One can learn to see you, one can see what you can do. To them it is some self reflective work in the art form. You can see yourself even when you're doing it, better than through any other mediums  
*Alexander Santiago-Jirau*

### **'Legitimate' Theatre takes risks v. Just Showing Off**

I think it's more legitimate than all that bulls\*\*t fancy theatre, because I think (and I don't know if *theatre buffs* will want me to say this, but) theatre has been commercialised and made into a sort of market in a way that so many valuable things have been sacrificed. The real value is not in how beautiful and compelling a singular person is at fitting into that celebrity model of 'who is the star'. The thing that is more interesting is the actual relationships and the risks that people are taking. The most compelling performances, for me, are when I'm like Woa! that person cares so much about getting this and doing this well, really committing themselves to it. That, I think, is so much more artistic and interesting to watch than something that has a \$1 million budget and is just showing off.  
*Haley Sherwood*

### **Geographical Isolation from Commercial Theatre**

I think the little guy is still at the base of going toward the bigger part of theatre in New Zealand because we don't have a lot of professional theatre. Every so often we will get a show from Australia but usually just Auckland, occasionally to Wellington. We get very little here in the South Island.

While sitting in the audience, as in performing, you can feel that heat rise. You don't get that when you're watching the big screen. I started theatre because I love that. I still do it because I love it.

Everyone has to start at the grassroots level, everyone has to start learning somewhere. You don't step into 'Professional' straight away. Without

non-professional clubs and societies and passionate people, we wouldn't have the amazing professionals we have. However we also have to look after those people at the grassroots level and not take them for granted.

Community theatres have to work out whether they are they going to stay grass roots and low budget. In Auckland a lot of the community theatre is Pro-Am it is competing to be almost pro, and putting on shows you know people will pay for. (We wouldn't be performers if we didn't have egos.)

*Emma Bishop*

### **Each to their Own**

When I was president of the theatre club, we would do a big crowd pleaser – a 'bums on seats' show - and then we would do something that is a bit risky or *avant-garde* that might make a loss. We might do Sound of Music, then Spring Awakening or we would do a next to normal one or one of the more challenging ones that is not everyone's cup of tea. We would do a youth production then every 2nd year a normal play. There are theatres that only want to do Disney plays... It comes down to who is driving the club at the time. Then there is the importance of knowing local playwrights or plays about local history where a lot of people don't know that exists.

*Emma Bishop*

### **Grand theatres linked to community theatre**

Winchester Theatre Festival has a 67-68 year history, and it has had a history of all these fancy celebrities coming out to this more rural area. It's gained a reputation over the years of sort of being elite. The ticket prices are pretty high, but the area where the theatre festival happens is much more rural, a lot more like middle class economically. There's has been tension which was in part why this program that I help to run began.

*Haley Sherwood*

### **Elite Market Power for Amateur Societies through Consortiums**

New Zealand has something called Consortiums. They haven't been without their problems, but they have allowed people to have their dreams. It started off when we realised that we all had to travel to see Les Mis, you know? The first consortium was Les Mis. It was amazing. If they couldn't get someone good enough to play a certain role, they would import someone from overseas, a Jean Val Jean etc.

The sets and costumes and half the marketing etc, comes with it, and it all looks very professional. You gain more interest. More people get involved because of it. What they did is lift everyone's standards way up. Now we have a lot of 'Semi-Pro' or 'pro-am' theatre.

*Helen Horsnell*

They are made of 10 or so societies. When we have conference we are told what shows are available to become a consortium. Societies then bid to become part of the consortium. For example Les Mis was a consortium with ten societies each putting in \$50,000. We had \$500,000 to build a set, props and costumes. A schedule was put together and each of the 10 societies would have the opportunity to use those costumes and props. You just supply the actors and directors.

You make that money right back. It's a good system, but it has fallen over a little bit in New Zealand because there were a couple of clubs who started taking control, and the politics of what clubs were allowing one another to do, burned everyone.

Not having to develop your own professional costumes means you also don't have to think about storage afterwards or what do with it. My heart bleeds when beautiful sets have to be destroyed because there's no storage space.

*Emma Bishop*

*Entry-level theatre won't be doing this! In Australia, Consortiums like this don't happen. We do have some costume shops, such as at Gosford, that can do your costumes for an entire show and may be able to develop a system of booking an existing package. Recently we purchased an entire show's costumes from Victoria, second hand for \$200. I wondered how often all this work goes to waste and if it could be recycled, or lent out like a library.*

### **Intellectual Property and Original Content**

*In Australia, for some reason, the APRA music performance licence does not extend to using other people's songs within your performance if it is part of a musical or theatre production. There are bots on the internet constantly scanning YouTube and such to find people breaking copyright, so you really can't put your shows online, and if someone in your audience does, you could be in financial and legal trouble.*

*As far as scripts go, there are cheap scripts available through online businesses and free scripts as well, and old classics that are free of copyright by virtue of their age. To me, an obvious solution is to get creative and make your own original work, but that is not going to be for everyone.*

### **Fair Pay for the Artists**

Every show from a kindergarten show to a Broadway production pays for cast copies and royalties. Community theatre at any level is required to pay these. We have upward of 400 pieces in the collection now. We have a couple of theories on this. We want to keep the prices reasonable so people can do the work - we don't want price to be a barrier. We also want to pay playwrights what they are due for their intellectual property and their artistic work.

If you are going to set up a library of scripts for community use - how are you going to police that? If people are going to use the plays in your library, people should pay cast copies and royalties if they are going to use them. Some companies insist that you pay if you are going to have a class.

### **Risky Business**

I hear it all the time 'We're just a little group of older people'. The little group I spoke to last week live in this amazing, luxurious and huge retirement community. They used a Walt Disney image. If the Disney Corp find out about it, they'll know they have plenty of money and they are going to go for them. That's the thing about everything being online now. You can't trust anymore that nobody is going to see it.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **The Play Bureau in New Zealand**

I own the Play Bureau. I basically license plays and some musicals for overseas. It's amateur rights to all the Samuel French catalogue, Neptune Dramatic Publishing, and a lot of overseas publishing houses - all the plays and some musicals for some of them. I have to fight off Origin and Howard and others that are always trying to muscle in and pinch everything and tell people they can do it better than what we can

do in NZ for our own people. That's what I do for a day job and I've had it for about seven or eight years.

For example a cheaper one here for a 120 seat theatre, you are probably looking at \$130 or something like that for some of them. Agatha Christie is about \$190 for a performance. People do them all the time. Samuel French have the rights to those.

### **The Big End of Town**

The Government funded Play Market here in New Zealand look after the well-known playwrights in New Zealand. They only take people on if their play wins an award somewhere. Then there are all those other people. Quite often I will take them on, then after a couple of years when their play takes off, the Play Market tells them they can help develop them a whole lot more, because they get funds from the government whereas my business is totally self-funded.

### **How about a Library of Free Scripts?**

Quite often people do put on free stuff out there. It is really hard, once you have written something, to get your name out there. I wouldn't sell myself too short either - Make it so that it's not free: Have them make a donation. Cheap, but not be the cheapest you know - like a one act play might be 60 bucks per performance or something like that.

*Helen Horsnell*

### **Respecting the Written Word**

Agreements become very important. Our agreement and understanding with our playwrights is that we will not change a word unless **they** choose to change them. The writers are in rehearsal with us and an actor will say "I'm having a hard time with this line" or "I don't understand what it means" and then there's conversation with the playwright and in the playwright goes away rewrites it. That is the understanding that we have within our process and we make it clear to everybody that this is the way that we will work.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **Measuring Success**

#### **Commitment to your Art**

People have asked me more than once: "What are you doing in the middle of East Haddam. It doesn't have a traffic light! What are you doing?" And I said I want to create something here that is organic. It's real, it's healthy. It's not going to be done just because this is the way everyone does it. It's not like there is a prescription of how theatre needs to be done. Do you have to go to New York City, or to Boston or to LA or you're not worth anything? (I got out of that too:)

They think "Well your career is over", and I'm like: Watch me! I knew that if I didn't serve my own heart and soul in the work I did then everything I did was going to be tainted with regret.

*Kandie Carle*

#### **Surprising Results**

It's amazing! We have a good, finished collection of plays. We counted up and we have had 740 performances of our shows. I have extrapolated that - and let's say there's 10 people in each show - that's like 7000 people who are performing our shows! Lets say 50 or 100 people in the audience, the number gets to be quite

considerable as to what my passion, my work and my calling has been able to deliver to these people, in all these different audiences.

*Bonnie Vorenberg*

### **Tangibles and intangibles**

There are some really tangible ways to measure success and then there are those intangible things. CATF (Contemporary American Theatre Festival) is in its 31st year this summer. I've been here for close to 13 years. When I arrived there was the founder, Ed Harradine, who is our producer and director, one other staff person and myself.

We were doing, at that time, four plays of repertory. In the time that I've been here we now have a full time staff of six (plus Ed) so we've literally tripled our staff. We have grown from 4 plays to 6 plays of repertory. Our attendance has increased every year since 2008. It kind of held steady for a while but after that it's increased significantly every year. Syndicate sales have increased dramatically, individual contributions have increased dramatically.

One example of that is that when I first started if we got a \$10,000 gift from somebody that was like a \$1 million gift to us! Now we're at the point where we receive several \$30,000 gifts per year and if we didn't get them we would think something was wrong. That's how far we've come in the scope of how we see things - those are really tangible things about success.

The really important measure of our success is this - I work really hard to ensure that when the audience goes to a play, that every play feels like it's had the same level of commitment of resource and investment. I don't want an audience member to go to one play and think 'they put all their money here and this play got nothing.' Or that it doesn't have the same artistic risks and challenges. Since I have come here one of my big things was to work on consistency so the play and the audience experience was really special and consistent every time they walked into a theatre. I feel that we have achieved great success in that way.

They might not like one play, or they might disagree with the message of a play but they will say that all the plays are really well performed, really well produced, and that when they walked in the theatre they felt so welcomed from the front of house staff that they feel the experience (every time they have it) was terrific. That, for me, has been a real measure of success.

*Peggy McKowen*

### **The Payoff: (Touching Other's Lives)**

I will leave you with this, because this is exactly the kind of thing that I'm talking about that sometimes we don't realise.

People. You get in front of them and they leave and you wonder if you had an impact. Did they feel what I wanted them to feel? Did they feel anything?

One of the things that I always bring up is, if there is anyone under the age of 18 in my audience, boy or girl, I ask them all to raise their hands, and I ask them to commit to a pledge. (I do it in a fun way, which is another thing that I suggest people do. Sometimes if you do something in a fun way instead of lecturing people, they are more ready to accept it.) I have them raise their hand, and repeat:

"On my 18th birthday.. (they repeat)... I will get up, and after I have breakfast (they repeat)... I will go (I will go) To the Town hall, (To the Town hall) and register to vote! (mblmblmbl register to vote). Everyone applauds and thinks it's really great.

A few years ago I went back to do a performance six years after I done one at a school and there was a tall statuesque woman in her 40s who came up to me (she was so shy), and she said:

"I just wanted to tell you my daughter would've liked to have been here today but she's in college. But she wanted me to tell you the story of her 18th birthday, when she came downstairs and told us she had to go to the town hall and she couldn't remember why. She had been 12 years old when she saw the show. Six years later on her 18th birthday after six years of not having a conversation about it, she comes bolting down the stairs and she says I got to go to Town hall!"

When you get those moments, hang onto them for dear life because that's the kind of impact you can have. We have cherry trees at the State Park as a gift from the Japanese that are tied to the gift from 1912, because someone came to see the story of this one Japanese-American man. (*These are our community's stories!*)

Going forward, I cannot commend you enough. Those of us that do this at the smaller level, there are more of us than the massive ones. We don't get our names out there as much, but our success is that girl coming down those stairs, on her eighteenth birthday saying she needs to go to town hall to register.

*Kandie Carle*

**- End -**