



**LEWISHAM YOUTH THEATRE**



**NATIONAL  
LOTTERY FUNDED**

# BIG Impact

**An evaluation of  
Lewisham Youth Theatre's  
impact on participants'  
long-term well-being and  
life chances**

**JIM COE  
MARCH 2017**

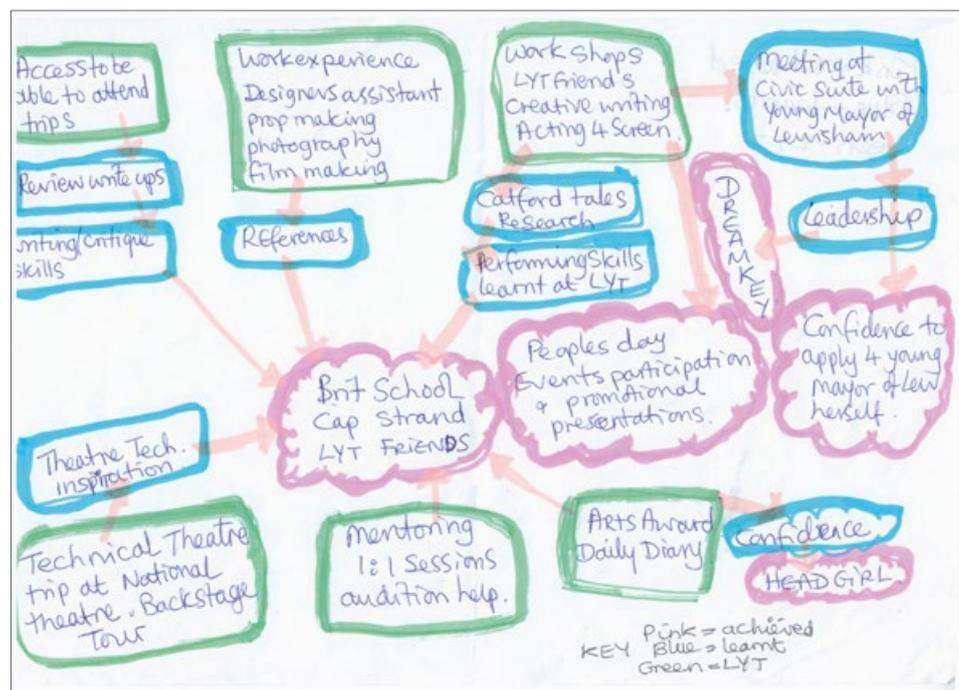
# FOREWARD

In 2016, as Lewisham Youth Theatre (LYT) neared the end of a 5-year grant from the Big Lottery Fund - Reaching Communities programme, we began looking for ways that we could evidence the impact that our projects have had over the grant period.

In some ways, it's easy for us to say this impact intrinsically exists. We see young people take impressive journeys every day. We can see an individual participant transform over the life of a project, come out of their shell and engage with others in ways that they never thought possible. In some instances, this change is so dramatic that it's hard for us to remember the young

person who first walked through LYT's doors. But we wanted to find evidence of this change beyond our own observations.

As we set about to plan the evaluation, we did what we always do: we asked for the input of our Members' Committee. Many of these participants had been taking part in LYT projects for several years, and were able to tell us immediately what LYT means to them. They told us how they define 'well-being' and 'life-chances', and how they think LYT helps them reach these goals. I'll never forget one member breaking down in tears as she told a focus group of teachers and key



Credit: Sally Iqbal

workers about her journey with LYT. Another member took it upon herself to create the images you see below, mapping what she has achieved and learnt from her experiences with LYT.

LYT provides a platform for young voices, and those voices are at the centre of all we do. Fittingly, the BIG Impact Report lays out the evidence of impact in the quotes of our

current and former participants, their carers and workers. We hope these voices speak for themselves.



Helen Stanley,  
Artistic Director

May 2017



Credit: Sally Iqbal

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# SUMMARY

## Introduction

Findings draw on **survey** responses (from 90 members and ex-members) as well as **interviews** and **focus group input** from members,

ex-members, parents, teachers and staff in referring agencies, along with a review of relevant literature.

## Headlines

The effects and results of involvement with Lewisham Youth Theatre [LYT] can be summarised as adding up to:

- a) A set of **specific professional and academic benefits**;
- b) A range of (overlapping) **skills and abilities gained** - and applied in professional and personal contexts outside of LYT;
- c) A broader sense of **participants' personal development**, that goes beyond specific skills - grouped here under the umbrella term 'resilience';

- d) An **enhanced sense of place** within the community.

Beyond, but aggregated from, these various more compartmentalised impacts, there are striking examples of LYT having had a much **deeper effect on the lives of some**, with some respondents clearly signalling that LYT has essentially altered the overall trajectory of their lives.

## Overview of programme outcomes

In response to an open-ended survey question "How have you used what you have learnt at LYT in other areas of your life?" over 40% of **respondents spontaneously mentioned the words 'confident' or 'confidence'**.

Some contributors identified that participating at LYT helped them reach conclusions about **the importance of drama**, for them, as a life choice. Numerous contributors

stressed that LYT had provided them with **skills and experience, and support, to pursue that choice**. There were also examples of specific support provided by LYT to securing qualifications.

Contributors also cited a set of (overlapping) skills and abilities gained, and offered some **good evidence of these skills having been applied in professional and personal contexts** outside of LYT. Feedback overall highlights

that drama is a narrow prism to look at the results; these are clearly transferable skills.

Contributors widely cited the development of **leadership skills and abilities**. Feedback gives a sense of leadership being about state of mind as much as a set of specific capacities. And there was a strand of comment along the lines of leadership being about self-leadership/taking responsibility.

There was a significant amount of striking testimony, especially from observers, of **young people who had been struggling socially thriving at LYT**, with wider effects. Some pointed to their participation at LYT having contributed to an enhanced ability to speak in public.

There were numerous comments citing **enhanced team work abilities**. These focused on concepts of responsibility and of improved team functioning through recognition of team members' **inter-dependence**.

Parents (rather than necessarily the members themselves) saw signs of those involved having **enhanced critical analysis and critical thinking skills**. There was a strong strand of feedback citing **drama as a creative route for self-exploration** and self-expression. And there was very much a feeling of it being built on a sense of earned achievement (i.e. the sense comes from actual achievement).

Some pointed to a strong sense of participants' evolving development, with feedback giving a strong sense of LYT as

**a community that provides grounding for young people who might be experiencing difficulties in their lives** or battling adverse contexts.

Overall, participants gave a very clear feeling of being part of something, and that **sense of belonging** was highly valued. Many participants felt that through participation they had forged a **strong and reliable network**.

There was widespread feedback of LYT having helped members with what, for many, was a very difficult challenge: **managing their emotions**.

Many commented that LYT had helped **expand their understanding and promoted open mindedness**. Some stressed the positive value of mixing with people from different backgrounds. There was some feedback that LYT had helped to create, or foster, an enhanced sense of civic mindedness.

Over half of survey respondents signalled that LYT had had a direct, positive impact on their lives. And feedback from many respondents spoke directly to a sense of participants' enhanced self-actualisation. **Respondents gave numerous examples of how involvement had created a different life trajectory**, not just in the specific sense of academic or professional choices, but in a more holistic way.

## LYT's approach and ways of working

Feedback strongly identifies that **LYT explicitly believes in welcoming, and is set up to welcome, diverse individuals**, and that this creates a positive context for participants' development.

There is evidence that suggests 'psychologically safe' teams enable more effective functioning. There was **substantial feedback identifying LYT as a safe space** and as an organisation that invests heavily in ensuring that.

Participants identify **a self-reinforcing culture of mutual respect and expectation** framing, and so influencing, the way members understand and behave in the space, creating a 'chain of support'.

Some ex-members had strong recollections of LYT exhibiting **high expectations** and strongly valued that in terms of its positive influence on them. **Standards are consistently high, but at the same time individualised**, so it's about people finding their level, or more likely reaching just above their level.

**Although members are structurally involved in organisational decision-making processes, this feature came through less strongly in the feedback.**

The emphasis was more on LYT facilitating and enabling young people's creative and decision inputs.

In terms of how LYT operates, perhaps the most striking element of the feedback relates to **the sense of the investment that LYT makes in its members, and their**

**wellbeing** and prospects, not only during their time of involvement but also notably after.

In recruiting participants, LYT is efficient and **conveys a sense of professionalism.**

Parents in particular identify that LYT offers **high quality standards of support**. Many participants particularly valued the theatre trips and various respondents have noticed, and welcome, a sense of continuing programme development.

Most of all, there was **a strong and widespread sense of LYT going the extra mile to support its members**. This extra mile extends further after members have notionally left, with numerous examples of LYT **providing continuing professional and emotional support to ex-members.**

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Background and context

### 1.1 Review purpose

The scope of this review is to “Evidence the impact that participating in Lewisham Youth Theatre’s [LYT’s] programmes has on participants’ long-term well-being and life chances - not just immediate skills gained, but how these skills translate into better lives in the future.”

The purpose of conducting the review is to:

- Fulfil a commitment to assess the impact of LYT’s Big Lottery 5-year grant (2011-2016);
- Evidence LYT’s value, creating a stronger case for support from potential funders, supporters, partners and community members;
- Provide insight for future company direction.

The focus of interest is essentially on how involvement with LYT has affected young people who have participated, and what difference that has made to them and their lives.

In line with this purpose, the intended emphasis of this review is on impact,<sup>1</sup> which involves looking beyond evidence around (shorter term) outcomes.<sup>2</sup> However, the distinctions are not always clearly drawn, given for example that feedback has been gathered from people at different stages of their life

journeys and of their involvement with LYT, including current members (in relation to whom any comments around impact would obviously be premature).

In fact, the aggregated evidence across timescales tells more of a story, in that:

1. The impact illuminates the outcomes (giving meaning to short term effects, in the sense of ex-members’ testimony indicating what current members’ experiences might lead to in future); and
2. The outcomes help explain the impact (current members’ experiences help to showcase the likely genesis of the longer term effects described by ex-members).

## 1.2 Review methodology

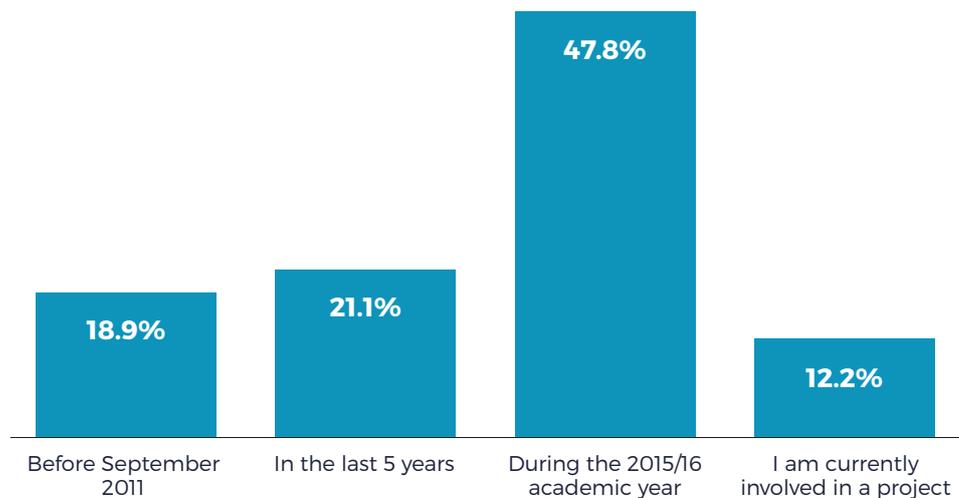
Main information sources for this review are:

1. A survey to members and ex-members that generated responses from 90 LYT participants.
2. Eight one-to-one interviews with current members, ex-members, parents, a teacher and a member of staff in a referring agency.
3. Six focus group discussions with (a) ex-members, (b) parents, and (c) teachers and staff from referring agencies (2 focus groups with participants from each of these categories).
4. Review of a small number of post-project case studies describing particular individuals' involvement and progress (which LYT routinely produces at project end).
5. A review of relevant literature.

In combination, this has generated a very large information set.

The majority of survey respondents were current or recent participants in LYT, although a substantial minority (nearly 20%) were last involved as a project participant more than 5 years ago.

**Figure 1: Survey respondents: "When did you last take part in an LYT project as a participant?"**



The survey was administered by LYT and the interviews and focus groups set up and conducted by LYT staff. The literature review was also collated internally. All interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed.

As the author of this report, I analysed, collated and coded all the available information, and have synthesised main

themes in the text below. I also gave some advice in the formative stage of the review around methods and the framework of inquiry.

Though I am connected to LYT and have written this report in a volunteer capacity, as a professional evaluation consultant in the voluntary sector I have sought to apply the same standards of independence and objectivity

## 1.3 Programme context

in analysing, interpreting and presenting the data that I would bring to any evaluation or review.

(The fact that findings presented in the report are overwhelmingly positive is a reflection of the evidence.)

This is not an academic study of impact. It was beyond the scope of this review to identify a representative cohort of participants, or to match the participating cohort against an equivalent sample of the wider population and draw conclusions about comparative outcomes. In that sense, findings are anecdotal. The inputs of those who contributed are not necessarily representative of wider participants, in that

there was inevitably a self-selecting element to participation. However, the fact that findings point strongly in common directions, and in volume, supports an inference that views expressed, and outcomes identified, are likely to be more widely experienced amongst LYT participants more generally.

Given the power and meaning conveyed by people's words, I have in this report mainly limited the authorial role to organising the information around, and drawing out, suggested common themes, with some supporting commentary where appropriate.

LYT provides participatory drama programmes to young people aged 3-24 who live or learn in Lewisham. All programmes are free to young people. Participation is based on commitment rather than ability, and participants must not currently take part in other out of school drama activity.

LYT provides a mixture of performance-based projects (where participants work towards a public performance) and 'workshop groups' (drama and social skill-based sessions). Performance projects usually run for 3-6 months culminating in an intensive full week leading to performance; workshop projects usually run weekly for 5-6 weeks.

Around these projects, LYT delivers a series of wrap-around activities that

supports the engagement and learning of participants. LYT offers participants opportunities to take part in:

- Theatre trips to performances around London (the 'See Theatre' programme);
- One-to-one mentoring to identify opportunities for progression;
- Work experience and peer mentorship of younger age groups;
- Youth leadership board ('Members' Committee') to consult on and plan activities, and represent the youth theatre.

LYT works with children and young people in Lewisham who face very challenging contexts, as some headline statistics about the borough reveal.

Households with dependent children are disproportionately likely to be lone-parent households<sup>3</sup> and to have no adults in employment,<sup>4</sup> for example. Almost 26% of children in Lewisham's primary and secondary schools are in receipt of free School Meals, a standard proxy indicator for child poverty.<sup>5</sup>

The quality of housing is a serious issue for many: Lewisham has high numbers of residents in temporary accommodation and 22% of households (in 2011) deemed overcrowded. Children living in poor and overcrowded housing are at greater risk of anxiety and depression, other long-term health problems, or poor mental and physical development.<sup>6</sup>

Low educational attainment is highlighted by a report in 2016 identifying that only 39% of pupils receiving free school meals achieved 5 A\*-C grades (including English and maths) at GCSE, compared to 59% of pupils not receiving free school meals. This gap in Lewisham is much higher than some better performing local authorities. Permanent exclusion rates in the secondary sector are almost treble the national average and over double the percentage in Lewisham's neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

Prospects around young people's transition to employment are also tough. Nationally, "In February 2013 ... Nearly one million young people looking for a job were out of work ... Transitions to adulthood are becoming increasingly difficult: because

of the economic outlook, growing competition for jobs, and the breakdown of traditional pathways into work".<sup>8</sup> And there are particular challenges in Lewisham, where the unemployment rate is above the London and UK averages<sup>9</sup> and the proportion of 18 to 24 year-olds claiming Jobseekers Allowance is double the UK average.<sup>10</sup> As a recent report puts it, "London is increasingly one of the world's most competitive labour markets, with many jobs in inner London at graduate level and above".<sup>11</sup>

Young people who remain in education and training until at least 18 have enhanced employment prospects along with social and economic rewards. Rates in Lewisham of young people who are not in education, employment or training [NEET] are relatively low compared with national benchmarks but above London benchmarks.<sup>12</sup> But there are differentiated effects, with specific groups particularly susceptible. Young parents are "the group most likely to spend a long period of time not in education, employment or training (NEET)"<sup>13</sup> in which context it is relevant that Lewisham has the third highest underage pregnancy rate of any London borough.<sup>14</sup> Evidence indicates too that "Young carers, young people with physical disabilities or learning difficulties are also over-represented in the NEET group and have lower prospects of securing employment, as well as lower average wages".<sup>15</sup>

Considering mental health and wellbeing, evidence suggests that “most children in Lewisham are relatively happy with their lives as a whole, but 11% of children ... had low overall well-being. This proportion is similar to the national average”. But again, effects are differentiated, so that “children’s well-being declines with age” and “children who say they are disabled or have difficulties with learning, and those who live in workless households or say that their family is not well off have lower average well-being than other children”.<sup>16</sup> A Lewisham report also cites a Department of Health survey that revealed that “Among those aged 5-17 years looked after by local authorities, 45% screened positive for a mental disorder”.<sup>17</sup> It also specifically referred to the “huge issue in Lewisham of ‘peer on peer’ abuse”.<sup>18</sup>

All this is in the context of declining provision. Hence the analysis that “the borough is projecting a minimum 7.7% increase in the number of children with with SEND [Special Education Needs and Disability] over the over the next 10 years ... We are concerned not only by the size of the projected rise but also by the lack of emphasis on appropriate provision within mainstream schools – particularly secondary schools – for many of these pupils”.<sup>19</sup> There was also concern around “variability in terms of what is available in each school, including the level of investment applied to supporting mental health, well-being and resilience”.<sup>20</sup>

This comes together with more general “trends towards a decrease in participation by children in most cultural activities”.<sup>21</sup>

It’s not all gloom of course: “As one of the world’s largest economic centres, London is powered by the dynamism and diversity of the people who live and work here ...”<sup>22</sup> But it’s clear that the young people LYT works with face a range of difficult challenges.

Whilst LYT provides a universal service, it targets recruitment at young people in need, across a range of disadvantages. Over 70% of participants every year are identified as facing disadvantage, which LYT defines as:

- Coming from families in receipt of means-tested benefits;
- Having special needs (including physical/sensory disability, learning difficulty or autism spectrum disorder);
- Requiring additional support to take part (including looked-after children, young carers, those with mental health difficulties, English as an additional language; low literacy/numeracy);
- Referred from local partners, which include schools, pupil referral units, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services [CAMHS], Lewisham social care services, youth offending team, etc.



***much too worried about or shy to do before”***

[Teacher]

The word is peppered in quotes throughout the report too. Confidence is both effect and cause: it arises from a set of skills and competencies gained, and then underpins how those skills and competences are enacted, and how future situations are encountered and dealt with.

Based on feedback, the effects and results of involvement with LYT can be summarised as adding up to:

- a)** A set of specific professional and academic benefits;
- b)** A range of (overlapping) skills and abilities gained - and applied in professional and personal contexts outside of LYT;

**c)** A broader sense of participants' personal development that goes beyond specific skills - grouped here under the umbrella term 'resilience;

**d)** An enhanced sense of place within the community.

Beyond, but aggregated from, these various more compartmentalised impacts, there are striking examples of LYT having had a much deeper effect on the lives of some, with some respondents clearly signalling that LYT has essentially altered the overall trajectory of their lives.

**How have you used what you have learnt at LYT in other areas of your life?**

Detailed analysis of 55 open-ended responses to this survey question reveals the following:

- Over 40% of respondents spontaneously used the word 'confident' or 'confidence' [as described in this section]
- Around a third of respondents (18) mentioned drama skills and abilities, of whom 4 gave specific examples of how that had helped them academically and/or professionally [section 3]
- A number referenced professionally-oriented benefits other than specifically drama-related ones: 11 offered examples of such contributions, of whom 4 mentioned specific qualifications gained, and 6 mentioned being better at/more confident in interviews [section 3]
- Looking at specific wider benefits, 11 mentioned enhanced leadership-related skills, 12 mentioned improved social skills, 5 specifically cited public speaking skills, and 6 mentioned team work [section 4]

# 3. SPECIFIC ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL (PROSPECTS &) OUTCOMES

Some contributors identified that participating at LYT helped them reach conclusions about the importance of drama, for them, as a life choice.

*“My daughter always liked art and design when she was at school and stuff but she didn’t get to do most of her GCSEs and things, so she didn’t get to do any of that. And I think [LYT has] sort of like helped her to get back*

*into the zone with knowing that it’s what she likes, what she enjoys and that she can do it. And that’s now why she wants to... do more. It’s really helped”*

[Parent]

*“LYT has ... made me realise that drama is something that I would love to do in the future. Very soon I’m going to start a degree in drama and I think that’s because of LYT opening my eyes to the world of drama”*

[Member]

15

Numerous contributors stressed that LYT had provided them with skills and experience, and support, to pursue that choice.

The following quotes, among many, illustrate this:

*“It broadened my acting and theatre skills and gave me an understanding allowing me to learn more about film-making and take a step into that route”*

[Survey respondent]

*“She’s now at [a performing arts college]. She wants to*

*work in the industry ... and LYT has done nothing but help her. She always knows something else more than the other students. Like when she was doing her GCSE, she started talking to them about blocking. And everyone was looking at her all confused ...”*

[Parent]

There were also examples of specific support provided by LYT to securing qualifications

In some cases, this was specifically about drama skills

**“My drama GCSE ... is something I wouldn't have been able to do without my experience at LYT because it needed everything - it was tough to pass”**

[Survey respondent]

Or about drama skills specifically, but also speaking to something additional:

**“When he first picked drama I was worried about him because I didn't think he would be able to access the course at all ... I didn't know he was attending LYT but all of a sudden I saw him becoming much more confident - and it's something that I knew I hadn't done, and something**

**that hadn't happened with anybody else in the class ... He just became much more vocal, giving more ideas, and now, [seeing that he attends LYT] it makes sense now that's why that's happened. And it's fantastic to see”**

[Teacher]

Around 30% of survey respondents noted that they had received an accreditation or qualification from taking part in LYT, the vast majority of whom received the Bronze Arts Award. In qualitative feedback, various respondents specifically mentioned the Arts Award scheme as a means of securing a qualification and showcasing potential:

**“She did the Bronze Award with LYT ... It's made whoever she's applied to see that she's serious about what she can do, that she can actually put a folder together, daily diaries, and recording of stuff that she'd been through and done, in a sensible way that was understandable, and also made them see that she ... could stick to something and finish it”**

[Parent]

**“LYT gave me the confidence to go and audition to go into college. I wouldn't have done that if I wasn't here ... I took my Arts Award at LYT, I hadn't taken any GCSEs ... it showed I could achieve and complete something”**

[Ex-member]

In one case, the contribution cited was more of an indirect one:

**“I'm ... proud that I passed 8 of my GCSEs and was glad that LYT was my creative outlet for exam stress which continuously kept building up in my body since the stressful start of Year 11”**

[Survey respondent]

But there were examples, too, of LYT having impacted on participants' career development more directly through (in a recurring feature

of the feedback) providing a mix of broad inspiration and very targeted support:

***“I became a professional actress after the experience and confidence that I gained at LYT. My first professional acting job was thanks to being informed of the audition from one of the directors at LYT”***

[Survey respondent]

The example below is one of serendipity leading to unintended consequences (unintended but, presumably, more likely if the right conditions for this to occur are in place [as discussed in sections 8 & 9]).

***“In terms of building my ambition, especially with things like doing devised and other stuff, I think that definitely sub-consciously helped me with me now doing my writing ... Cause like ‘Six Lives of Somebody’ wasn’t just a normal middle and end play ... Do you remember, the guy that was supposed to be there wasn’t there. So we were like, ‘We’ll slot him in but we’ll just work around him’. But it actually worked out better that he wasn’t there because you got to find out about this man through his fiancé, through his ex-girlfriend, through his neighbour ... And it was just brilliant and it just got my mind thinking about how to do theatre in a not-so-linear or standard kind of way”***

[Ex-member, now a professional writer]

Over two thirds of survey respondents cited ‘Increasing my ambition (inc.

understanding my options for the future)’ as a ‘most valuable’ aspect of taking part (see appendix 2) and over half of respondents ‘completely agreed’ that ‘taking part in LYT has helped me ... make plans for how I am going to achieve in the future’ (see appendix 1).

Findings in relation to participants’ resulting or likely future academic and professional prospects are anecdotal - but their likely credibility is bolstered by findings in research presented by the Cultural Learning Alliance, which is based on cohort studies with large sample sizes and comparisons to control groups, and which “emphatically” concludes that learning through arts and culture improves attainment in a range of subjects as well as pointing to other professional and life benefits.<sup>23</sup>

## 4. WIDER PROFESSIONAL AND LIFE SKILLS

Contributors also cited a set of (overlapping) skills and abilities gained, and offered some good evidence of these skills having been applied in professional and personal contexts outside of LYT.

Many ex-members gave specific examples of applying skills learnt at LYT in professional contexts in different ways, as the following cases illustrate:

***“There was once, probably about 3 years ago, I went on a big conference, must have been about 100 managers, and senior managers as well ... The senior management team must have hired someone in to do some energiser sort of thing, warm-up for everyone ... After lunch the energy level dropped again ... So when we presented, I just started a call and response with the whole ... managers. At that point [the senior staff] noticed me more, because I was the one that sort of stood out”***

[Ex-member]

***“I worked in SEN, in a 1-1 school. We had a lot of training on different methods ... it was being able to bring in that role-play aspect. ‘OK, maybe we can do it like this, one of us can pretend to be a child’ ... And that really helped with training of people ... Using that kind of role play, which I***

***did a lot of, and improvising, having to think on your feet, and something completely new is thrown at you and you just have to work with it. You don’t say no, you’ve just got to accept it and build on it. And definitely working in SEN education there’s always something like, ‘Oh I wasn’t expecting that! Something bad has happened and I just have to get on with it!’ It’s a skill that I learnt here ... that you just have to keep going”***

[Ex-member]

***“All of the skills that I’ve learnt from being in LYT I’ve taken outside. For example, in the workplace you’re in a team where you have to take responsibility, also have to manage your emotions. For example, you have problems at school or work, or college, and you go into work and you have those same emotions or feelings, you’re not really going to work to the best of your ability. So LYT has taught me to ... push that to one side”***

[Ex-member]

One ex-member daily draws on their acting skills at work:

***“I work in a jewellery store. We’ve got to be all happy and bubbly all day, so that’s definitely acting, cause I work in Woolwich!”***

[Ex-member]

Feedback overall highlights that drama is a narrow prism to look at the results; these are clearly transferable skills.

***“The sort of skills and the confidence she’s learnt here, I think she uses when she meets new people, and literally everything she does, she’ll use the skills she’s learnt here. Just through life”***

[Parent]

***“Unlike school it made learning life skills fun. Also the skills you learn aren’t ... just for performing arts. I’ve used the skills in many places other than a studio or stage”***

[Survey respondent]

This point is further elaborated through the examples presented below.

## 4.1 Leadership

Contributors widely cited the development of leadership skills and abilities.

In the following case, as in some others, there is an implication of a near-immediate effect, with benefit derived from only a small number of interactions:

***“One of my BTEC [students] ... attended ... and I just could tell that something had changed in her. And then she came and she said “I loved that session!” ... The first thing she wanted to do was lead a game that she had learnt from the workshop. And normally they rely on me to lead games ... And since then, I don’t know what it is, but her confidence has changed; she always said she couldn’t, or she would look at other people in the group and say ‘Oh, but they do it better than me; they’re much better than me ... oh I can’t do it ... I just wish that I could really be like you, you do it ...’***

***But now, the praise that she’s getting, and it’s not just praise just for praise’s sake ... She has developed in such a short amount of time. She’s gone from being one of the lowest achievers in the group to now the highest achiever for this unit. And for me, it’s ... such a pleasure to see”***

[Drama teacher]

For others it has been more of a gradual assimilation, as the following contributors suggest:

[On leadership] ***“For me, I didn’t necessarily feel that here. But having then gone out in the world ... and you’re like, ‘Hang on, I know how to take charge of this situation’ ... [After being at LYT] I felt like I had that confidence and that ability to go ‘No, I can stand up and I can do something here and try something new”***

[Ex-member]

***“I have seen children who would hardly speak in week one and by the final show that same person has become a leader of the group”***

[Session director]

Three quarters of survey respondents ‘completely agreed’ with the statement that ‘taking part in LYT has helped me ... be more comfortable leading others in activities’ (see appendix 1).

**Feedback gives a sense of leadership being about state of mind as much as a set of specific capacities.**

This is clearly linked to, and achieved through, wider confidence-building effects of involvement (as mentioned above):

***“I didn’t feel like I had leadership skills ... But ... LYT ... taught me that I can be a leader and I can be respected in that sense, and I just need the skills and the confidence to ... portray myself in that way***

[Ex-member]

***“I feel more confident, less self-conscious, and if I do feel conscious I can pretend and***

***act like I am confident”***

[Survey respondent]

**And there was a strand of comment along the lines of leadership being about self-leadership/taking responsibility.**

***“Obviously there’s the direct leadership in leading workshops or activities and stuff, but also like self-leadership, having to make sure you know what you’re doing, and make sure you know what you need to know ... learn your lines, get off book, blah blah blah, and then you get towards the production and ... I really do need to learn my lines! So you learn to take charge of it yourself and not even wait for somebody to tell you to do it”***

[Ex-member]

***responsibility for the work she’s got to do. Like when she got her scripts, she was on it straight away. And she made sure that ... in a week she had most of it done. And she’s been taking it into school as well. Before they were giving projects where they had like one or two weeks to give back, and now she wants to do it straight away; she [doesn’t] leave it sitting there”***

[Parent]

This way of thinking is perhaps also echoed in participants’ feedback (cited below) essentially equating teamwork with notions of team responsibility.

***“I would say taking responsibility is a big thing that very early I’ve noticed; the changes on her. Taking***

## 4.2 Social skills

There was a significant amount of striking testimony, especially from observers, of young people who had been struggling socially thriving at LYT, with wider effects.

This is illustrated in the following quotes:

***We pick [to attend LYT]] the children that need that little bit extra ... They haven't got a lot of friends and they find it very, very hard to socialise, and so we pick those children. And the minute they start their drama their confidence grows, and then they're walking upright and they've got friends and you see it and it's wonderful***

[Teacher]

***“My daughter, before she come here ... she always found it really hard to make friends, when she doesn't know the group, and to get involved. So, so far in one year that she's been here I've seen so much change in [her] confidence and managing her emotions as well ... she used to bottle up a lot and she just expresses herself a lot better ... she finds it easier now to talk to people she don't know and before she found it really hard”***

[Parent]

***“Someone like 'J' [a looked-after child] has just blossomed; it's wonderful. He walks round with a big smile on his face and he just feels so proud of himself”***

[Teacher]

Alongside this more generalised sense of building social skills, a number of participants cited specific social benefits of taking part:

***“It has built my confidence massively and I've made many friends through the process”***

[Member]

***“She's found it easy to make friends here and maintain those friendships ... and they're quite positive friendships as well. There's no bickering and bullying, all things what goes on at school. Like maybe that's to do with the whole way things are run here as well”***

[Parent]

**Some pointed to their participation at LYT having contributed to an enhanced ability to speak in public.**

***“As time progressed, I slowly slipped into being very confident speaking publicly ... being on the stage and being here and having the support that I've had has definitely helped me speak publicly. I've done a few***

***public speaking events ... outside of LYT ... If I didn't have the confidence that LYT's given me to do that I probably wouldn't have done that”***

[Ex-member]

***"I learnt that whilst I had always been awful at public speaking, on stage I could act. This helped when I had to give speeches at university because I would learn it as lines and 'act it' instead of speak it"***

[Survey respondent]

***"It is quite extraordinary because 'til about Year 5, my daughter was absolutely terrified of anything like speaking in public, getting up on stage ... you couldn't get her to do it. She was terribly nervous about all that. Her teacher wanted her to do something up in front of the school and she was just terrified ... [it's] been this that's really helped"***

[Parent]

## Case study: A

A is on the autistic spectrum and took part in a short drama project that LYT delivered for service users at CAMHS (Child, Adolescent & Mental Health Services) which focused on developing social and emotional skills. He then went on to be part of the 'Catford Investigators' group (part of the 'Catford Tales' project, mentioned below). LYT staff report that in a feedback interview his mother identified significant improvement in his interaction with other young people, noting that he was now able to talk more readily to others, reflect on others' feelings and recognise social signs. She also observed, for the first time, A being able to express his opinion on how an autistic person views the world. She attributed these changes to his involvement with LYT. His mother reported that he is now in college:

***"He's doing really well ... nothing's stopping him. I'm very proud of him."***

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## 4.3 Team work

**There were numerous comments citing enhanced team work abilities. These focused on concepts of responsibility and of improved team functioning through recognition of team members' inter-dependence.**

***"In terms of my achievements and what I've taken forward in terms of work, I would say my sense of responsibility, especially to my team or to the group. I definitely bring that into my work environment. Knowing that everyone relies on everyone else for those ..."***

**...little cogs in the machine ... I've been in management, so those skills from LYT have helped me with that aspect**

[Ex-member]

**"I felt like I had a huge responsibility being an actor and the team relied on me to be present all the time and to be on point all the time and it felt ... I was part of a clock, and I was an important cog, just as everyone else, and if one of those cogs come out then the whole thing comes apart"**

[Ex-member]

**"Taking responsibility, so ... you had to learn those lines! When you're on the stage it's just you; no-one's going to come and say your lines for you! And obviously ... even though you might want to, at times ... but you know it's something bigger going on**

**and you've got to pull together and work with the people around you to produce what you've got to produce. I think it builds quite a lot of discipline"**

[Ex-member]

**"The children that come here ... you watch them and their listening skills are so much better. They don't fidget so much. They're far more focused and also the way they interact with each other ... they will give them a chance to talk, whereas before it was 'Me, me, me!' And yet they'll sit back and they'll listen - they learn so much in your [sessions]"**

[Teacher]

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## 4.4 Critical analysis

Parents (rather than necessarily the members themselves), saw signs of those involved having enhanced critical analysis and critical thinking skills:

**"I think now she's more concise. She wants to get a point over in what she's doing, so anybody who looks at her work can understand it, she wants to reach everyone with what she's doing, whereas before ... she had so many ideas ... getting it down and making it coherent, I think she's improved on that a lot ... She's more confident in getting from A to B**

[Parent]

**"My daughter now, when she wants to discuss something, she doesn't say like before she would just come out with it. Now she says 'I've got**

**a point to make'. And I'm pretty sure she learnt that with [LYT]"**

[Parent]

The importance of planning and preparation was a key lesson for one ex-member:

***“I’d say like preparation innit ... That’s ... a skill it’s fair to say I learnt at LYT and that’s helped me ... Like sometimes you might get an idea and you can’t just run with it and think yeah, I just need to put it out there! I need to sit on it, prepare it, develop it, beta test it, do some market research here and there ... and then put it out ... I’ve put out products ... It’s where you have to do research, find out who’s going to like it, what people like ... before you put it together. Obviously I learnt ... that skill from LYT”***

[Ex-member]

It seems likely that these improvements in participants’ critical skills could be being bolstered by LYT’s emphasis on reflective practice and encouragement of self-reflection, although contributors to this review did not specifically make this link.

Development of creative skills featured strongly in the survey (69% cited “developing my creative skills” as a most valuable aspect of their participation, see appendix 2) but it was not widely referenced in interviews or focus group discussions (although there was some mention of it). It’s difficult to know why it didn’t come out more strongly from qualitative input; perhaps the creative part of the process is presumed and therefore not so much a subject for discussion.

# 5. BUILDING RESILIENCE

In this section I use the term resilience to refer to "positive capacity we have to achieve good outcomes in spite of hardships or serious threats to our development".<sup>24</sup> I may be veering from academic definitions of the factors that contribute to resilience (though an – admittedly cursory – review suggests that these are not commonly identified), but hopefully it makes sense to group these perceived effects in this way under the umbrella of 'resilience':

## 5.1 Self identity **There was a strong strand of feedback citing drama as a creative route for self-exploration and self-expression.**

A number of comments around this referred specifically to young people who were experiencing disadvantage and/or low confidence:

***“Drama can help unlock creativity from children who may otherwise be quite shy or reticent. The freedom not to have to write or read but to be a character, someone else, can give them the confidence to explore and develop their creative side ... We were taken aback by the quality of the storytelling that emerged over such a short time. It was very powerful. For two children in particular, who are both very quiet in the classroom setting and with English as an additional language, it gave them a forum to air their voices and really speak out. For one of them, this is no mean feat as she is virtually an elective mute”***

[Deputy Head Teacher]

***“I liked the fact that even though at that time I was very very insecure and not confident at all, I was able to express my confidence on the stage ... When I started LYT I was ... incredibly shy and not confident. And I think it’s quite weird that my confidence came out when I was on the stage, cause the limelight is on you, essentially. But it did, and I felt like the team that I was working with at the time was really reassuring and they helped me build my confidence, so to speak, to the point where I felt that I was only confident on the stage. But later on we ... discovered that ... I can be confident elsewhere and we sort of developed that further. So that was the one thing that stood out for me”***  
[Ex-member]

***“There’s one looked-after child who had significant social difficulties. And so she didn’t have any joy making any friendships at school, so I think here [LYT] gave her an opportunity for that level of self-expression”***  
[Assistant Head]

These inputs very much echo findings from academic research, which identifies that “the creative processes of rehearsal and performance encourage participants to explore, experiment with and express ... aspects of self, ways of playing a role in the world within a stable context and structure. Learning to recognise, interpret and discuss feelings in this context equips people with the ability to better understand and articulate their feelings in other areas of their life”.<sup>25</sup>

**There’s very much a feeling of it being built on a sense of earned achievement (i.e. the sense comes from actual achievement):**

Eighty-seven per cent of survey respondents completely agreed that ‘Taking part in LYT has helped me ... be proud of what I can achieve’. This was the result that scored highest. This finding was very much corroborated in interviews and discussion:

***“Being a teenage girl perhaps in particular, you’re beset by being told you’re a bit crap at everything. When you see this list of things that you’ve done here ... it’s hard evidence that ... you’re capable of achieving and that you have achieved as well”***  
[Parent]

***“Because you’re at a theatre innit and the aim is to get to the main stage ... Everyone’s aspiration was to perform on the main stage and have their friends and family come ... It’s like you’re one step away ... If you just walk through that door, you can get there! Sometimes we’ll go there just to go and look ... and say “Yeah, we’re gonna be there one day!” ... but first we have to put in the work”***  
[Ex-member]

***“I proved to myself that I can do anything that I put my mind to; with a bit of push from the staff”***  
[Survey respondent]

Again, feedback here echoes academic research that “Performance can be an opportunity to be someone else and young people use this opportunity to explore, practise, experiment with and extend their awareness of self and the world around them ... this helps some young people feel more in control of how

they project themselves in the social world. They come to experience themselves as responsible members of a community, capable of meeting the demand of working with others and taking risks to achieve a performance that is valued by an audience”.<sup>26</sup>

**Some pointed to a strong sense of participants’ evolving development.**

***“I’ve seen them from when they were nine, and now they’re like fifteen; I’ve sort of seen them grow and it’s ... special to see. Especially one girl, and I saw her and she blew me out of the water. I was like ‘wow’ - you know, a few years ago, you didn’t even have that confidence, and now you’re ... centre of attention***

[Peer mentor]

***“If you saw her here when she did the play; it was like you wouldn’t have known [her disability] would you? She was just oozing confidence. Yeah, brilliant. And yet at school she would sit there, like this, and she wouldn’t interact with others. So she really did come out of herself and her mum, she was just beaming because of the change ... But that’s happened to so many of our children ...”***  
**[Teacher]**

And a sense of developing respect, and self-respect:

***“I came along to LYT AGM, after the first set of workshops, and seeing some of our young people from***

***CAMHS [Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services], they were presenting and they said ‘We’re the group from CAMHS’ ... Sometimes young people see CAMHS as, you know, for people not like us, with mental problems, so for those young people to stand up there and announce they were from CAMHS, to talk about it like that in public, was a great sign that they had confidence and was helpful for the other young people that were going there because they could see CAHMS young people were not separate or different”***  
[Family therapist in a referring organisation]

## 5.2 Sense of belonging

**Feedback gave a strong sense of LYT as a community that provides grounding for young people who might be experiencing difficulties in their lives, or battling adverse contexts.**

***“For some young people who have been very isolated and not been able to feel part of a school community and sometimes families can be quite fractured as well ... knowing the youth theatre ... there is a real sense of community that I think is something that for the young people I work with is quite special and something they might not have much of in their lives ... Some young people with mental health difficulties have not had many opportunities to have fun in their lives - life can be pretty tough - so having the chance to have fun, have a laugh, to play to be playful***

***using some of the games drama offers, I think can be really beneficial”***

[Family therapist in a referring organisation]

***“I used to perform and stuff a lot ... but when I had my daughter I kind of slipped away from college and became ... really socially isolated. And when I came to LYT it was just like ‘I belong somewhere’ ... So yeah, they did help me a lot and they do still help me a lot”***

[Ex-member]

As part of this, some comments positioned LYT as a sanctuary, something to rely on and build from:

***“It’s a place where even when I’m sad I go there and I forget about the bad times***

[Survey respondent]

***“The young people I’ve seen, once they’ve felt that sense of belonging, they’ve been able to build friendships, make relationships, be helped by other people to regulate their emotions ... They haven’t had that sense of belonging, a lot of them, before they’ve come here”***

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in a referring organisation]

This feedback positions LYT as an archetypal example of youth theatre as a “protective factor for young people experiencing social exclusion/growing up in contexts of high risk”.<sup>27</sup>

**Overall, participants gave a very clear feeling of being part of something, and that sense of belonging was highly valued.**

***“There’s always that jump-in of everyone’s willing to help each other ... You don’t even have to know someone. Everyone’s always on hand to help. And it makes you feel a bit more confident in***

***yourself ... And you’re like, I don’t need worry about all these other things because I know that there’ll be someone here ... It was really good, really supportive”***

[Ex-member]

**“Ever since my very first little workshop project almost 5 years ago as a tiny Year Seven, I can't imagine my life without it. I feel like I've made lifelong friends here, who I even consider to be a crazy little family ... Without LYT, I really do not think I would be the person I am today**”

[Member]

**“And it's just one of those things that you feel proud to be part of - the group, the company - that invisible badge ... I wear that badge proud because I am a product of LYT”**

[Ex-member]

**“If you're shy, then everyone is gonna make you feel comfortable because that's just how it was. It was a family. And definitely with the group I came with, we**

**stuck together for quite a long time and everyone that joined in ... we kind of accepted anyone”**

[Ex-member]

**“I remember being a participant and always wanting a T-shirt ... So to see ... the participants with their T-shirt, with their badge, really walking proud to be a LYT member, that is priceless for me”**

[Ex-member]

**Many participants felt that through participation they had forged a strong and reliable network.**

**“It's not always a very friendly environment out there to young people... To know that you've got a bit more of a network is an important thing”**

[Parent]

**“LYT has had a big impact on me. [It] has been a support**

**network for me whenever I've needed anything”**

[Member]

**“[When I've needed help] the most willing people to help are people that I've met from here”**

[Ex-member]

## 5.3 Managing emotions

**There was widespread feedback of LYT having helped members with what for many was a very difficult challenge: managing their emotions.**

**“I've learnt to manage my emotions a lot and how to deal with my emotions under pressure ... Just by talking it out with people instead of hiding it away or lashing out, that's also with young people as well - I ... communicate my feelings better**”

[Ex-member, now Peer mentor]

***“I was a very ... emotional person. I still am. And I used to get angry a lot and I used to just give up and just not want to do it anymore. And I've been to three different colleges and I've always, like, given up ... just because of my mental health or I get depressed or whatever. But here it's like ... when I come here, I have to just be ready to work or ready to give my all, so it's really helped me”***  
[Ex-member]

***“[She] was involved in the Forum theatre project last year, and seeing how she's managing her emotions a lot better, being much more understanding of family situations - she had quite a difficult relationship with her mum - and that's improved hugely, and she also struggled with making friends and keeping friends, and that's something that's developed as well over the past year and a half”***  
[Staff member in a referring organisation]

***“I didn't really know how to ... apologise ... I knew ... if I was in the wrong, I was in the wrong but I didn't really know to express that and apologise and ... make the person my friend again. But through games here ... you learn how to accept and move on. And it's all about that. I mean, I've had run-ins with some of the tutors here and it's just taught me that ... we have work to do and leave your troubles at the door. And ... we're all one big family and we are here to support you, essentially. So it helped me then take what I learnt from being here back into school, in a respect where I can ... forget any troubles that I've had with the teachers, friends, and I could focus on what needed to be done, which was learn”!***  
[Ex-member]

## 5.4 Empathy and understanding

**Many commented that LYT had helped expand their understanding and promote open-mindedness.**

***“Understanding the different walks of life. That not every home is the same and though you may feel life's hard for you, it can be even harder for others, yet they still come and take part, because they need it, but for different reasons than you”***  
[Survey respondent]

***“Managing emotions, not only hers, being able to feel what somebody else is feeling or take their feelings into consideration ... it's really helped her to take care of her peers as well. If she felt something was wrong she would help in any way; she would try her best to do that”***  
[Parent]

***“I am ... more open to giving everyone a fair shot without judgement. LYT was so embracing with everyone, and I try to keep that up”***  
[Survey respondent]

One ex-member, reflecting on a project working with unaccompanied refugees, noted that:

***“I don't think I appreciated it as much at the time but I do now ... My issue as a child was 'Oh this boy's not talking to me. I can't be bothered to do all this school work'. They were like, 'I don't have a home, I speak a completely different language ...' And me worrying about a guy not liking me at school and they're worrying about, 'Well I don't really have family and these strangers are now my family' ... the impact of that ... was just crazy”***

## 6. ENHANCED SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Some stressed the positive value of mixing with people from different backgrounds

***“I think it was harder for me, growing up in this community, and being black and being a boy, always surrounded by the same people and you’re in that same stereotype. It helped me jump out of that***

[Ex-member]

***“It kind of got you away from [being on the estate all the time] ... There was something more to it ... Not the negative experience that you might have felt at home on your estate ... We were all from estates but it was a positive way of being with ... people from this community”***

[Ex-member]

***“Joining at such a young age ... just to be accepted ... not based on my age but on my ability was an achievement for me. From then on that’s given me the most confidence in everything I do. And what I particularly like about here is meeting people ... people who you would probably never come across in your lifetime because everyone has their circles and you stay in your circle range. But now I could just go anywhere, I could sit in an old people’s home, and talk to all of them about whatever they’re interested in. I can talk to them in a***

***different way than I would talk to somebody else. I’ve kind of gained that”***

[Ex-member]

And of this sense of community percolating, from the group out:

***“There is something about the teamwork and the feeling of community and belonging and creativity that is something quite special to be part of, so people feel they are really part of a community that is creating something. And then to be able to show that to others and have the audience appreciate and connect with it is really lovely”***

[Family therapist in a referring organisation]

There were some signs of parents feeling part of a sense of community, and potential scope to involve parents more in the organisation:

***“Look at the amount of parents you’ve got today [i.e.***

***attending the focus group] ...  
Because obviously they want  
the best for their children;  
they're people that want to  
use this service. I think they  
would be more than happy  
to get involved and to meet  
each other. I don't know  
what you'd want us to do but  
... if there was something you  
needed us to do I'm sure  
most parents would be  
willing"***

[Parent]

### **There was some feedback that LYT had helped to create, or foster, an enhanced sense of civic-mindedness.**

Research suggests that, "Young adults who had intensive arts experiences in high school are more likely to show civic-minded behaviour than young adults who did not. They take an interest in current affairs, as evidenced by comparatively high levels of volunteering, voting, and engagement with local or school politics".<sup>28</sup> And that "students who engage in the arts at school are twice as likely to volunteer and are 20% more likely to vote as young adults".<sup>29</sup>

LYT aspires to promote a sense of active citizenship along these sorts of lines and from the feedback to this review, there is strong anecdotal evidence (although, as elsewhere, not conclusive statistical evidence) of this influencing at least some participants.

Over three quarters of survey respondents 'completely agreed' that 'taking part in LYT has helped me ... feel that I belonged' (see appendix 1).

Survey results indicate that a majority of respondents had participated in some sort of activism or influencing activity. And there were a number of examples of participants 'giving back' that the respondents (from a range of perspectives) attribute to LYT:

***"There are other young people as well who've been part of the drama group, and it's been nice in particular watching them perform as a group ... and they're children who've got quite serious mental health problems and they've been able to support each other. And now we've got several of them involved in the Youth Advisory Group at CAMHS, so they've continued that friendship and are trying to give something back to other young people who use the CAMHS service in Lewisham"***

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in a referring organisation]

**“They took what they learnt here – those skills – to be confident enough ... and with the leadership skills to actually set up between them and run this Year 7 drama group. And she loved that and they got a lot back from that. To be on the other side, almost as the teacher. And to see those Year 7s throughout the year grow in confidence the way they have in the time that they’ve spent here. So for me, it’s a proud moment for them to be able to give back ... They’ve recognised that was a good thing to have and how lucky they were to be able to do that ... and then to want to go on and share that with other youngsters is amazing**”

[Parent]

**“My recent experience with LYT volunteering and mentoring the younger kids ... was nice because I felt like I was giving back. I was in their shoes when I was their age and being able to help them learn their lines and being someone that they looked up to ... To see how much they appreciated it as well was actually really sweet ... It did help me gain some patience as well, which I didn’t realise I was lacking until I went through it! So I would definitely say it’s helped me recently in terms of that aspect”**

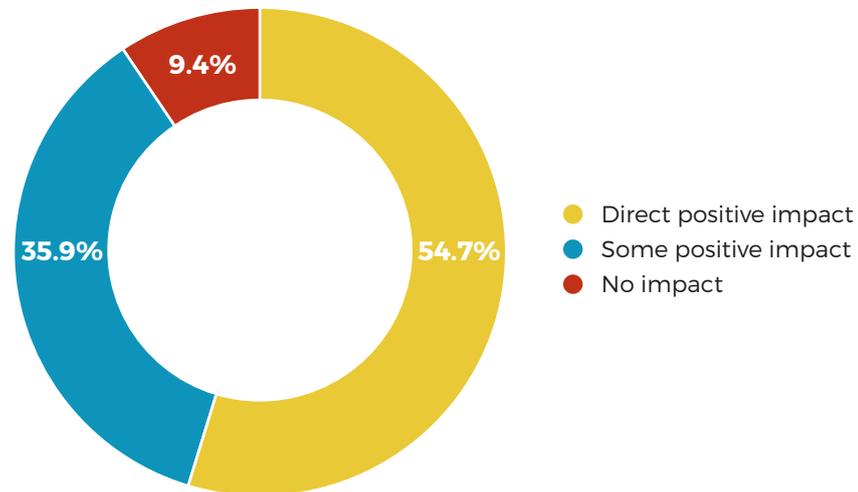
[Ex-member]

Note the recurring theme, too, of benefit going to those making the various contributions described, as well as those being supported through them.

# 7. DEEPER IMPACTS

**Over half of survey respondents signalled that LYT had had a direct positive impact on their lives.**

**Figure 3: Responses to survey question: ‘How much do you think taking part in LYT has had an impact on your long-term well-being and future life-chances?’**



Supplementing these survey findings, which themselves are notable, it is striking how many ex-member interviewees made reference to the significance of the impact that LYT had had on them and their life choices. This can no doubt partly be explained by the information-gathering context. Contributors were being

explicitly invited to consider the influence LYT had, and possibly group or interview dynamics might have encouraged this further. As noted, the respondents aren't necessarily representative. But even taking these caveats into account, the prevalence of this kind of feedback (as illustrated below) still feels conspicuously high.

**Feedback from many respondents spoke directly to a sense of participants' enhanced self-actualisation.**

The notion of participants developing, and being able to express, their sense of self in a fuller way as a result of their

involvement with LYT comes out in the following quotes:  
***“She kind of gained that confidence from doing the***

**stage work here ... That's what changed in her ... She kind of found herself ... 'This is me' ..."** [Parent]

**"LYT helped me not fear a group of strangers and not be scared to show them me"** [Member]

**Those are the children we give you. The broken biscuits ... You wouldn't [realise that] because when they come here they're whole, aren't they? At school they're not, because at school they just sit and they just wither. But they come here and they've got the spotlight on them and they change!**

[Teacher]

**"I'd say LYT helped me flesh out my personality, my way of thinking ... for me, I think that I couldn't see myself being me now without LYT. You know what I'm saying?"**

**Everything I've learnt here I take with me every day; it's a part of me which is shown from my every movement, every action, every word ... "** [Ex-member]

**Respondents gave numerous examples of how involvement had created a different life trajectory, not just in the specific sense of academic or professional choices, but in a more holistic way.**

**"She's just travelling in directions I could not have imagined when she first came to this group"** [Parent of current member]

**"What I remember at the time is I definitely felt a sense of belonging. It was a regular activity that I knew I was going to be doing and meeting some great people, building friendships ... It sounds ridiculous but it kept me away from my estate. When I see some of the people, what they were doing back then compared to what I was doing, I definitely know that being here was the better choice for me"**

[Ex-member]

**"I refer [children to LYT] because over the years I've**

**seen the tremendous changes that can happen for young people. I've referred young people who have been suicidal and I've seen them ... develop into such amazing young people who've been able to give back quite a lot to their community ... Two [young women] in particular I suppose I'm thinking about - I could have seen a really different trajectory for them. I could have seen them really struggling in life and yet ... the changes have been amazing ... which is a huge testament to the good work and sense of community and support they have from the project"**

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in referring organisation]

**“Making the transition to becoming Assistant Director. That meant a lot to me. It was my first job ... After 9 years of being an actor, to then make the transition as a Director; I had all of that behind me to share with them and try and recreate what I had. And that family type of vibe that I was brought into ... to try and pass it down to what was coming up ... and obviously this being my first job, it**

**made me realise how much I love to teach and – you know – give knowledge. And to try and direct people in a better way, cause I feel like – compared to a lot of my friends – I feel like I’ve kind of got away in a sense [from] what you’re easily trapped into”**

[Ex-member now teacher]

This comes through too, for example, in the case study below:

## Case study: B

*“When I first started the touring company I was really nervous and it was nothing compared to what I thought it was going to be! Everyone was lovely and friendly, so I’ve learnt to relax a bit when meeting new people.*

*“There was young people around my age who also had difficulties in getting back into stuff or doing something on the side. We had to devise a piece, a play that was Forum Theatre which is where the play is left on a cliff-hanger and the audience can get involved and make different changes and choices for one of the characters who is the protagonist, which was really interesting because in school I had never learnt about Forum so it was my first introduction to it. We went to different schools in the Lewisham borough and performed our play ... which was about being true to yourself, as we thought this could really connect with young people and could draw them in, which it did.*

*“I went to sixth form ... but didn’t really enjoy it so I dropped out ... there wasn’t one focus; you had to pick four subjects when really I just wanted to do drama, that was my main interest ... Also most of the subjects I picked were ‘sit down and listen’ whereas I am more of a get-up-and-do-it person, practical person ... I didn’t really feel free and just kind of felt sick of school ... I started working for [a supermarket], I didn’t really have any interest, was just working.*

*“The biggest surprise was that they don’t just leave you after ... When you leave school you are kind of on your own but [with LYT] it wasn’t just ‘Yeah bye see you later’ ... After the project I got invited to peer mentor on Senior Youth Theatre.*

*"I managed to get myself into a drama college course ... You get a qualification that's equivalent to two A Levels and the main focus is drama and, as much as I was in denial about going back to school, this was exactly what I wanted, just drama, three days a week - perfect for work so I still get to work and stuff ... It's a bit hard to believe that it's true, because if I said this to someone, like people listen to this they are going to be like 'Oh wow that's exactly what you wanted' and then it happened so yeah they are really supportive and they don't just let you go and be by yourself afterwards - once you are part of Lewisham Youth Theatre you are always part of it*

*"I just needed a bit of a boost and something to do with myself ... It's made me see what I want to do with myself; it's given me a path into what I want to do in my future ... Before, I didn't really feel like I had anything ... but now I have a lot more going for me ... I have got things going on in the future because of the choice I made to come here and if I didn't, I wouldn't have any of that and I would probably still be stuck".*

# LYT APPROACH AND WAYS OF WORKING

## 8. Culture and expectation

Explanations offered in this section are not so much generalised ones about the benefits of young people experiencing drama; more that there is a range of specific ways LYT operates that could help explain the kinds of results participants are describing.

### 8.1 Inclusivity with diversity

**Feedback strongly identifies that LYT explicitly believes in welcoming, and is set up to welcome, diverse individuals, and that this creates a positive context for participants' development.**

***"It's really been nice to witness how inclusive the group have been because it's a very diverse group in every way imaginable really ... It doesn't feel like it's something ... external; it's really inclusive"***

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in a referring organisation]

***"Looking at the list of students, they're so different. We've got really high intellectual students who [are] very very smart but actually this space provides somewhere that they can practise those social soft skills that they might not necessarily have ... Then you've got students who won't take GCSE but you can see they've become prefects, they've ... used drama more as a facilitator for [their] social and leadership skills ... being able to ... take responsibility for things, which I think is what LYT***

***does. You're dealing with ... such different types of student, and you're giving them social skills, you're giving them confidence about drama itself ... This is a space which is so important for them. Definitely"***

[Teacher]

***"You do get the sense that no-one is left out ... All the children involved and everyone seems to get something out of it. You always see that in every production"***

[Parent]

## 8.2 Psychological safety

**“At LYT we were all made to feel equal and valued. I felt leaders always encouraged respect, and so I never felt like I'd be laughed at or ridiculed (unless we were doing scenes that were meant to be funny ofc!) I got to know kids from all over the borough, and everyone always had respect for each other and treated each other equally. Even when people came as friends they included others without judgement”**

[Survey respondent]

**“It was a group effort, everyone helped each other”**

[Survey respondent]

**There is evidence that suggests ‘psychologically safe’ teams enable more effective functioning.**

Psychological safety can be defined as “a shared belief, held by members of a team, that the group is a safe place for taking risks”. It is widely identified as a condition that enables and fosters team effectiveness. In psychologically safe teams, there are high levels of interpersonal trust and mutual respect, which encourages openness and allows members to feel accepted and respected. Research has identified that “the teams with the highest levels of psychological safety were also the ones with leaders most

likely to model listening and social sensitivity”.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of youth theatre, more specifically, as providing a safe space is set out in research that pinpoints that it “involves opportunities to invest the self in a creative process of discovery but also provides a structure and set of conventions for self-expression and exploration of identity. It can be a safe space to practise taking the risks and responsibilities associated with adulthood and test out different ways of being yourself and responding to others”.<sup>31</sup>

**There was substantial feedback identifying LYT as a safe space, and as an organisation that invests heavily in ensuring that.**

Parents, teachers and other observers of the programmes stressed this:

**“There’s never been a time when she’s come to LYT and I’ve not been totally happy**

**and relaxed. Cause I know that she’s with a team that are really well set out and worked out. I have no worries”**

[Parent]

***“It’s the safety of the space that’s created by the staff who work here who are ... key to making the project work ... and it’s their sense of real commitment that is what I’ve seen ... The young people I’ve worked with have been invited into a family; that’s the impression that I’ve had. The young people we work with are really vulnerable, and one of the reasons that I do work with Lewisham Youth Theatre is just because I trust the people to be able to respond in the way that these young people need, and there’s an awareness of their vulnerability”***

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in a referring organisation]

***“Children, they don’t want to say what’s really in there do they? And yet you give them that ... To be able to just be really open, say exactly what they’re feeling ... They know that no-one’s going to laugh. If you’re in the playground, you don’t say anything, do you, because they will laugh at you. But here, you make it so safe”***

[Teacher]

***“It’s something that kids need, to feel comfortable and safe and be able to ... make new friends and be who they are, and explore who they are, and them grow up in a safe***

***environment”***

[Teacher]

***“I know when she’s here she’s safe; she’s secure, and I feel like she’s going to be looked after in the same way that I would look after her, that her needs are going to be met whatever they might be”***

[Parent]

***“I felt that she was safe ... I felt that she was in an environment where I felt comfortable. Leaving her and knowing that she would be treated well ... She felt safe and she fitted in despite [her disability]. So yeah, I’m happy”***

[Parent]

And participants emphasised it too:

***“Everyone came from different backgrounds but you weren’t judged on what you’d come from ... There was just a shared respect”***

[Ex-member]

***“Being able to work with new people in a friendly and caring environment. Listening to other people’s creative ideas and making a show as team. The staff are so helpful as well and are always there to help you no matter what the situation. You feel safe and happy and because of Lewisham Youth Theatre I have become a confident young adult”***

[Survey respondent]

***“It was a friendly, loving environment. Everybody can be themselves ... It was my peace zone”***

[Survey respondent]

Two questions in the survey explicitly sought less positive feedback and these provided the only source of negative feedback in all the information gathered. One respondent referred to a “negative atmosphere” (whether this is in reference to a specific occasion or a general feeling is not clear) and another recalled (but also didn’t elaborate on) “sometimes feeling out of place”.

Two respondents cited technical theatre work as hard, in a way that implied a lack of resolution. This contrasted with the vast majority of the feedback, which either (a) described difficulties faced in the sense of their presenting an obstacle that was ultimately overcome or (b) conveyed a feeling of being sufficiently supported that nothing was too difficult, at least in the (negative) sense meant by the question. (As one respondent noted, in this spirit, “setting up a tent at a festival was the most difficult task”.)

Some feedback describes the culture in ways that suggests that it is so pervasive as to be intangible.

One analysis suggests that, “policy makers, the media, and often researchers themselves have personalized ‘at-riskness’, locating it in youth, their families, and their cultures. Even though this approach sometimes succeeds in getting needed services to children and families ... looking at children and families through a deficit lens obscures a recognition of their capacities and strengths, as

well their individuality and uniqueness”.<sup>32</sup>

This seems to be a thing LYT is avoiding. LYT operates to a developed, outcome-focused theory of change, and sets and tracks objectives relating to participating individuals. It invests heavily in supporting vulnerable young people who face challenging life contexts. But the feedback suggests the organisation wears all those things lightly. Whatever ‘lens’ is being deployed, it is underplayed, so that those involved see the changes that are happening (to them, and others) as almost osmotic:

***“It’s not that you are actively trying to encourage ‘talent’ but I think that you’re bringing it out of people - people that don’t even realise they’ve got it. You know; you’re really just bringing people out of their shells and just getting something that’s naturally there and just helping it grow ... To me, Lewisham Youth Theatre is all about getting people from the local community and regardless of their existing skills - cause a lot of the time it may not appear that they’ve got the skills, because it’s just overshadowed by the fact that they’re withdrawn, introverted, and that they just need help coaxing out of their shells and to really show themselves in the true light ... whether they feel that they’ve got the skills to begin with or not, they gain the skills with LYT ... And that’s what it’s all about”***  
[Ex-member]

***“We can see it in them ... they’re just going about***

**doing what they love to do. And so it's not hard work; it's not like a tick list: 'If I do this I'll build responsibility, I'll build teamwork; I'll be ambitious' - it's not a tick list for them. But just through the course of doing drama ... I can see that change over those four years, that all these things definitely have happened to her, which is wonderful"**

[Parent]

**"There's always some sort of growth somewhere. Even if it's not consciously with us at the time, it will come to us at a later point"**

[Ex-member]

This approach has its magic effects:

**"The confidence [comes] over time ... there's something that happens, and I don't know how to explain it; there's something that happens that makes the participants - especially during the intensive week - become not just a group but a little family. And I don't ... know how it happens but I guess it's just a bit of magic as well. But having the facilitation ... makes that happen ... which then gives them the sense of achievement"**

[Teacher and ex-member]

### 8.3 Professional standards, individualised expectations

**Participants identify a self-reinforcing culture of mutual respect and expectation framing, and so influencing, the way members understand and behave in the space, creating a 'chain of support'.**

This notion comes from the following exchange between ex-members in one of the focus groups:

**EX-MEMBER 1:** When I think of other theatre companies where you muck about, this is the first one for me where it was like, it needs to be taken seriously ... Those types of things made you want to do better. I want to be better, supporting each other ... [It's about the] work ethic and

being on point when it came to it.

**EX-MEMBER 2:** Everyone had their time to do something. So if you respect my time when I do my thing, I'm going to respect your time when you do your thing.

**EX-MEMBER 4:** If someone else mucks up, it's not funny ... this is very serious! If you muck up, you're killing everyone here. So it was like everyone kind of chipped in ... That's

what I mean about the family thing.

EX-MEMBER 3: Chain of support.

EX-MEMBER 4: Chain of support, there you go. It was like, 'Yeah man, just you can

do it'. Even when someone might be like, 'I can't get this'.

EX-MEMBER 3: We'll go over it.

EX-MEMBER 4: Yeah. Most definitely.

EX-MEMBER 5: That's pretty much it really.

**Some ex-members had strong recollections that LYT exhibits high expectations, and strongly valued that in terms of its positive influence on them.**

***"I think a sense of ... professionalism. I think that's something that I gained as well, which is something that I use at [football] coaching. You know, young boys coming in and they just come up to you like, 'Yeah, my man sent me down here' and you just have to stop them and be like, 'Could you go to Chelsea and say that? You want to go to Chelsea Football Club? And say "My man sent me down ..."' You're just not going to be able to do that. If you start it here, I've just allowed you to make that mistake. Now you can approach me differently ... And it felt like being here [LYT], although we mucked about, it was like, when it's showtime, it's showtime. We're doing a tech rehearsal; there's lights; it's so different, but it's what you would have to do for a professional company. And I think that's something else that I've gained ... professionalism"***

[Ex-member]

***"Taking responsibility was a big thing because ... I had a few years in secondary school where I was very rebellious and I didn't want to listen and I didn't want to do what I was told. In school, out of school, anywhere, I just became ... very closed off***

***and ... hard to get through to. So being here helped me take responsibility for my actions, because I was late to rehearsals a lot of the time. And one time I was coming back from my friend's house and I was on my way here and I was stuck in traffic. Fair enough, I didn't leave much time to get here but I blamed it on the traffic anyway. And [the tutor] was like 'But that's no good; you might as well not come; you've missed half an hour of the session' ... I was like 'But I'm stuck in traffic; I know it's my fault but I really want to come'. And she was like 'Well, you've let everyone else down; you have a play to do; you have rehearsals; you knew that you had rehearsals today, so come next week, or if you don't come next week then you're out of the project'. That was a massive wake-up call and I was like 'Wow, maybe I really need to start taking responsibility for my actions because I'm letting my whole team down' ... I was letting everyone else down and my responsibility was to come and rehearse and make sure that the play went smoothly ... I mean I love [the tutor] for it but it was hard ..."***

[Ex-member]

**“If you’re late here, even though you’re not getting paid, you will get, ‘Why are you late?’ It’s a professional environment ... discipline ... It lets you know how to move on in the world ... I think that LYT really does do it ... Each and every one of them do it from their hearts”**

[Ex-member]

**Standards are consistently high, but at the same time individualised, so it’s about people finding their level, or more likely reaching just above their level.**

Counterpointing the feedback above about intolerance for lateness, there is clearly a measure of individualised expectation that takes into account members’ different progression routes, and gives some allowance to their often chaotic lives:

**“I think with my daughter, that she’s perhaps not got a huge amount of resilience exactly but it’s certainly helped to sort of build a little bit of that. To know that she managed to make it one day but not the next, but that she could still come again, and to persevere a little bit more, which was a huge challenge to actually get involved in the first place ... Because of the supportive nature and she’s been able to miss a few**

**things and then come in for a few things and stuff. I think that’s helped her ... realise that that’s not the end of everything. You know, if you can’t make it in one day. And sort of persevere a bit more. Yeah, I think that’s definitely helped her”**

[Parent]

**“Everyone’s going through different things and you need to accept that and work with it. I’m quite strict when I’m teaching but ... you need to understand where people come from and their background and history”**

[Ex-member, now a tutor]

**“LYT is very understandable ... Everyone gets treated the same but if someone has an issue it gets dealt with”**

[Ex-member]

## 8.4 Fostering young people’s leadership

**Although members are structurally involved in organisational decision-making processes, this feature came through less strongly in the feedback. The emphasis was more on LYT facilitating and enabling young people’s creative and decision inputs.**

**“LYT is more kind of there to facilitate and make it happen but also ... keeping them grounded. So yeah, it’s very youth-led, very very youth-led, and that’s what I really love about LYT as well”**

[Ex-member]

***“You can just see at the end of [the productions], the emotions of all the kids, and they’re hugging each other and they’re really proud of what they’ve done and because I know how much they’re involved in it right from the beginning, from the ideas to the planning, the production, the direction and everything, I think they’ve really got a sense that it belongs to them and that’s why they’re so proud of it”***

[Parent]

***“I think [my son] sort of takes ownership of his own stuff now, if that makes sense, because that’s what they do here. Because of the developing of everything from the bones upwards. And because they feel, you know, it’s their thing, I think that sort of translates as well. You know, you take responsibility for what you’re doing, your actions; you know what you choose to do”***

[Parent]

***“It came from us and it wasn’t told what to do, you were giving us free rein”***

[Ex-member]

And the facilitation role operates to the extent of recognising and fostering young people’s talents, including when they might not have seen that potential themselves:

**EX-MEMBER 1:** I did music. But I never really thought about that until [a staff member] phoned me and was like, we need some music! Make me some beats! ... That was something totally new for me and it opened up a door of like, ‘Your music doesn’t

actually just have to be on the radio’. And I was just like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ ... I was only doing music as songs. But this is instrumental and it adds to the setting and gives you the feeling and ...

**EX-MEMBER 2:** You [LYT] obviously trusted that he could do it without even knowing whether he could. And that gave you [ex-member] the opportunity to just experiment with something you wouldn’t have done.

**EX-MEMBER 1:** [LYT] actually has made a massive impact on my life ... Thank you!

It’s not clear why participants’ more structural involvement in decision making, through participation in Members’ Committee for example, didn’t feature more strongly in the feedback. It may be that this is simply seen as an integral part of the overall experience, and not considered as something separate for example. But it remains an important area to capture and so could warrant some specific further investigation and articulation, to show the extent of the alignment between LYT’s approach and the Big Lottery Fund aspirations around ‘people in the lead’, for example.

# 9. THROUGH, IN AND OUT THE DOOR

In terms of how LYT operates, perhaps the most striking element of the feedback relates to the sense of the investment that LYT makes in its members, and their wellbeing and prospects, not only during their time of involvement but also notably after.

## 9.1 Through the door

In recruiting participants, LYT is efficient and conveys a sense of professionalism.

*“I’ve referred quite a few young people over the years ... and as soon as I contact her, she will contact me back. We’ll think about the best way to engage individual people ... I can encourage them to attend but I think [the staff member] has been really proactive in calling them, texting, or helping them have the confidence to come through the door in the first place. So I think the referral process is really an important aspect of the project”*

[Child and adolescent psychotherapist in a referring organisation]

*“When you e-mailed, I responded and you responded almost immediately. And that’s what I would hope for because the children rely on consistency, and I want to be able to offer that”*

[Teacher]

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## 9.2 In the door

Parents in particular identify that LYT offers high quality standards of support.

*“If something cropped up in her mind she would always be able to talk to a member of staff and it would be tackled straight away ... Staff have always helped*

*with everything”.*

[Parent]

*“The communication’s been brilliant, you know, from the minute I contacted you guys,*

***you were straight back to me. You know, getting him on board, he was involved, I get text messages ... I know what's happening ... There's letters, I know where he's going to be, what he's got to do, what he's gonna learn, what he's got to bring to***

***wear ... He knows what he's doing"***

[Parent]

***"LYT are brilliant, reliable, professional; they listened to us and adapted the project to our needs. And they have had a particular impact on our children" <sup>35</sup>***

### Many particularly valued the theatre trips.

Nearly half (48%) of survey respondents reported that they had been to see a play

with LYT. The value of this came up a number of times in interviews and discussion:

***"I think what I liked most ... is that LYT was much more than just devising and performing shows: there were always opportunities to do more outside of this, such as visiting theatres and productions and projects such as the Arts Award"***

[Survey respondent]

***"I like the idea of going on trips ... as a whole theatre company. It doesn't matter where to - could be somewhere like ... the National, go to see a play ... Before I left, I went to see a Forum theatre company - Cardboard Citizens - we went to go and see one of their plays ... That was really, really fun; I really loved that. So I like the idea of going on little trips and outings, just as a company ... You know, people being quite close"***

[Ex-member]

***"You took us to see a theatre show. It was an Australian dance company. There was no words; it was just movement. And I'd never [seen anything like it] ..."***

[Ex-member]

This value was the subject of discussion in one of the

ex-members' focus groups:

**EX-MEMBER:** Taking them to see theatre shows is amazing.

**LYT:** Why is that important?

**EX-MEMBER 2:** Round here really, whose parents are going to take them to the theatre?

**EX-MEMBER 3:** It's nice to see different things ... just to see what other people do.

**EX-MEMBER 4:** I agree with that. Going to see a show in theatre is a different kind of experience you'll get from film. And the subject matter is probably something different. It's often something new to you or presented in a different way. I think it's really good in opening up people's perspectives ... It just opens up your imagination.

**EX-MEMBER 2:** It expands your creative side ... It gives you more things to share and bring to the table.

**EX-MEMBER 4:** And I think it adds to the whole confidence thing ... going in and seeing professionals produce a great show and then going back and doing the same thing. I think it kind of fills you with

confidence. Like we've created our own full-scale production. And you can look at where you are and how what you're doing could translate into something else.

**EX-MEMBER 1:** It's all experience and life is all about experiences. And you have created a lot for us.

### **Various respondents have noticed, and welcome, a sense of continuing programme development.**

***"A lot of theatre companies stick to their own - 'This is what WE do' - whereas you're like, 'We're quite interested to know what YOU do'. You're ... flexible ... I just love that you always look for new things to try. You're not just like 'We just do plays; we just do scripted***

***stuff; we just do improvisation' ... At school you learn a syllabus, and you know what you're going to do ... It's not like that [at LYT] ... and that's a beautiful thing. Not to have that structure"***

[Ex-member]

***"What was good at the last performance was that you had the older children helping behind the stage. And that's made my daughter now want to be behind the stage. Now she's thinking 'Oh, that looks interesting; I've done the front bit, now what's it like being at the back'. So that was a change; we didn't do that on her first performance***

[Parent]

LYT now offers one-to-one advice and guidance mentoring sessions for all young people involved in the Step Up programme (for young people over 16 who are not in education, employment or training) in setting and achieving goals as well as providing ad hoc mentoring for participants across the programmes in order to support their engagement and progression. Some

respondents pointed specifically to the expansion of this element of the programme, as part of an extended support package:

***"I know you have always taken that seriously but as you work with more severe needs you have adapted that side of your work"***

[Social worker]

**“Recently volunteering with the younger group ... I can see what LYT is focusing on now, which wasn't really the focus back when I was their age. The fact you were looking at if they've got any health issues, any social anxieties, that wasn't something that you were looking at back when I was young. And I think that's great that you really are trying to pick up on those and see if they need any extra help. You know, look out for this signal, for that ... help them out in this situation. It wasn't like that when I was young, and to see that you guys are doing that now, I think it is really good - a really positive thing ... And the fact that you're asking for more volunteers as well ... means that more people with extra needs can have more focus on them”**

[Ex-member and recent mentor]

# CATFORD TALES

Between 2014 and 2015, young people from Lewisham Youth Theatre took part in a project to find out about the history of Catford. They researched in Lewisham Archives and interviewed local people. From this research and the testimony collected, they created 'Catford Tales' and performed the verbatim site-specific theatre piece in and around Catford Town Centre with 60 community members of all ages. This represented a step up in terms of LYT's ambition and many recalled it fondly.

Member

" Catford Tales ...That had a really big impact on her. Just the way it was set up and the way she developed ... what she was learning about how she was putting the performance together. She experienced things that she wouldn't have normally done or chosen to do herself, like the singing, the dancing "

Parent

" I took part in Catford Tales which was something that was completely different for me because I had never experienced any other drama outside GCSE drama lessons ... I've built experiences that I'll never forget and it's all been thanks to LYT "

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" I think you've got more adventurous, definitely ... Like Catford Tales; it was so good when it was in the theatre and then it was like massive and it was all round Catford and stuff. I just hope that you guys get what you deserve, so that you can carry on being adventurous and get bigger and better every year "

Parent

" They did Catford Tales, which was a huge project to do. And they used like all the resources to do that, in terms of going to the archives and educating the young people about the heritage and about Catford and I'd say that was a huge development in their corner because a lot of places don't do that; they don't just take the time to look at the area that they were actually in and also build this big production about it "

Ex-member

**Most of all, there was a strong and widespread sense of LYT going the extra mile to support its members.**

***“I think LYT cover so much and do so much more for the young children. And a lot of that’s not seen; you put in extra time ... you cover everything”***

[Parent]

***“I had ... child protection meetings and [a LYT staff member] went to all of them with me ... she took that time out to do that for me ... I felt like people were there for me and people believed in me”***

[Ex-member]

***“There was a lot going on in my family life and I’d just be like walking around Catford really distressed and I’d just ring the bell and then someone would come and I would just talk to that person, whether it’s any one of them, and I’d leave here feeling like it’s a big relief”***

[Ex-member]

***“It’s definitely helped her get back into education. She was out [of mainstream education] for such a long time ... And now she’s managing - early days - to get into a very supportive environment ... And what’s fantastic as well is that she has been offered some mentoring support by [LYT] if she wants to do that ...***

***Which is another thing that’s so brilliant about LYT cause you really want to see the young people succeed and develop, and I’ve been really aware of the support that they’ve been given in that way ... to help actually achieve what they can achieve, and support them. And she’s had brilliant support like that”***

[Parent]

***“And I will say that Lewisham Youth Theatre go above and beyond ... the girls got support as well outside of shows and all that, from LYT ... You know, everyone is so supportive... and I’ve seen it first hand with both my kids. When they lost their mum, I could see it - I saw the amount of support there was for my girls and LYT does go above and beyond what they’re set up to do for the kids. Always have done***

[Parent]

This short quote - from an ex-member facing very challenging life circumstances - conveys so much:

***“They gave me a strategy, I went with it and it helped”***

[Ex-member]

## 9.3 Out the door

This extra mile extends further after members have notionally left, with numerous examples of LYT providing continuing professional and emotional support to ex-members.

**“When it comes to, like, helping you to move on ... they don't just say ‘OK, so you're finished here, go!’ They take a lot more time to help you to move on to your next level, or if you fall, they'll help you again to get up”**

[Ex-member]

**“[LYT] introduced me to the Princes' Trust ... I joined the Princes Trust and then I started working with young people that were disengaged. And now I'm a deputy head working with those young people, so there's a very direct link professionally to working with LYT”**

[Ex-member]

**“I've just auditioned for drama school ... All the direction that I was given over the years that I was here really helped me when I**

**was working on my monologues - different ways that I could learn them, different ways that I could put movement in, different ways that I could explore the different emotions ... And I've actually been in contact with LYT in regards to my audition, and the door is always open if I need help to find a monologue, if I need help to practise a monologue, to get direction on anything ... There's always someone willing to talk”**

[Ex-member]

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## Case study: C

*“I played every year up until - I'd say - 2013 ... And in 2013 I got pregnant ... And then, after I had my daughter, I took 2 years out of ... acting ... and I said to myself ‘Well what do I want to do now?’ I don't necessarily want to be an actress anymore; I want to ... work behind the scenes - not as a director but as a ... facilitator, cause I've done a lot of that in the past, and I ... wanted to revisit it. So I came back on a whim. I was like ‘Let's go and see what LYT are doing at the moment’... I was welcomed ... and they was like ‘We actually have a job for you’ ... She asked me if I could be a peer mentor on one of the projects that she was doing ... so I came in as a peer mentor/facilitator and ... directed some scenes, done some games and stuff, so that was really fun. So I'm sort of on that wavelength; I want to teach.*”

*"And then literally ... two months ago - [a staff member] told me about [a project where] they take on young people over the age of 18 who want to work in the theatre, sort of as a facilitating type of role. So they take us on and they train us ... and if someone comes up to us with a problem, how do we address it and how do we deal with that, so that's how we got trained. So that's what I'm doing at the moment ... so I've been training, I've been working really hard ... and it's going really well. So I'm doing that at the moment. I've also managed to land a [part time] job ...*

*"I love [my current mentor]. She's amazing; she's helped me through so much that I've battled over the past two years. Then again, in 2013, when I was pregnant, I was at a completely different stage, and my mentor then was amazing, and she helped me through so many things. So, it's like two different times, two different mentors ..."*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## R 1. More of the same

It's difficult to pinpoint recommendations when the feedback overwhelmingly points to LYT effectively delivering a service that brings benefit. Hence there was various feedback along the theme that LYT should do

more of what it does. As one parent put it: "If you could get bigger and help more kids and, you know, they all love it so much so you know, if you could be bigger. 'Give them more money!' That's the only thing, I think".

## R 2. Review the theory of change

This report describes overlapping effects that can be categorised and understood in different ways to the framework I have used in this report, but it might still be worth reviewing the

organisational theory of change in the light of these findings to ensure that key themes are appropriately captured.

## R 3. Set out practice and aspirations around young people's leadership

One area where I might have expected to see more feedback was around the extent to which LYT encourages and incorporates young people's leadership in its ways of working. Given its importance to the organisation and its

stakeholders, one possible follow up from this review could be to explicitly set out current practice and identify future aspirations, and produce (and then implement) an associated development plan.

## R 4. More collaboration and peer exchange

This was highlighted by a couple of people in the survey.

## R 5. Consider ways to further develop community links

Findings may point to an overall sense that LYT has reached a point of maturity and development – as shown through Catford Tales for example – where there is scope to think more about its place in the community. This might involve for example:

- Considering the feasibility of building on current work by more proactively encouraging young people’s community engagement, so that their voices are more clearly heard in policy and political discourse, for example.
- Considering options for involving parents more closely in the organisation.
- Considering opportunities to develop links with local creatives – along the lines that one respondent set out in the survey: “There are many budding young writers in Lewisham – we should use them. Wouldn't it be brilliant to put on a really big production and include young Lewisham musicians as well”.

## R 6. Consider expanded early years provision

The idea comes not from respondents’ feedback but from the background literature, notably that “[In] London... 32% of schools [are] taking in new cohorts where more than half of pupils aren’t ‘school ready’”.<sup>34</sup> This report identifies that “Lack of social skills, delayed speech and lack of resilience are the most commonly-cited issues” and notes that “Both primary and secondary school leaders say that low self-esteem is in part responsible for pupils not being school-ready”. I am

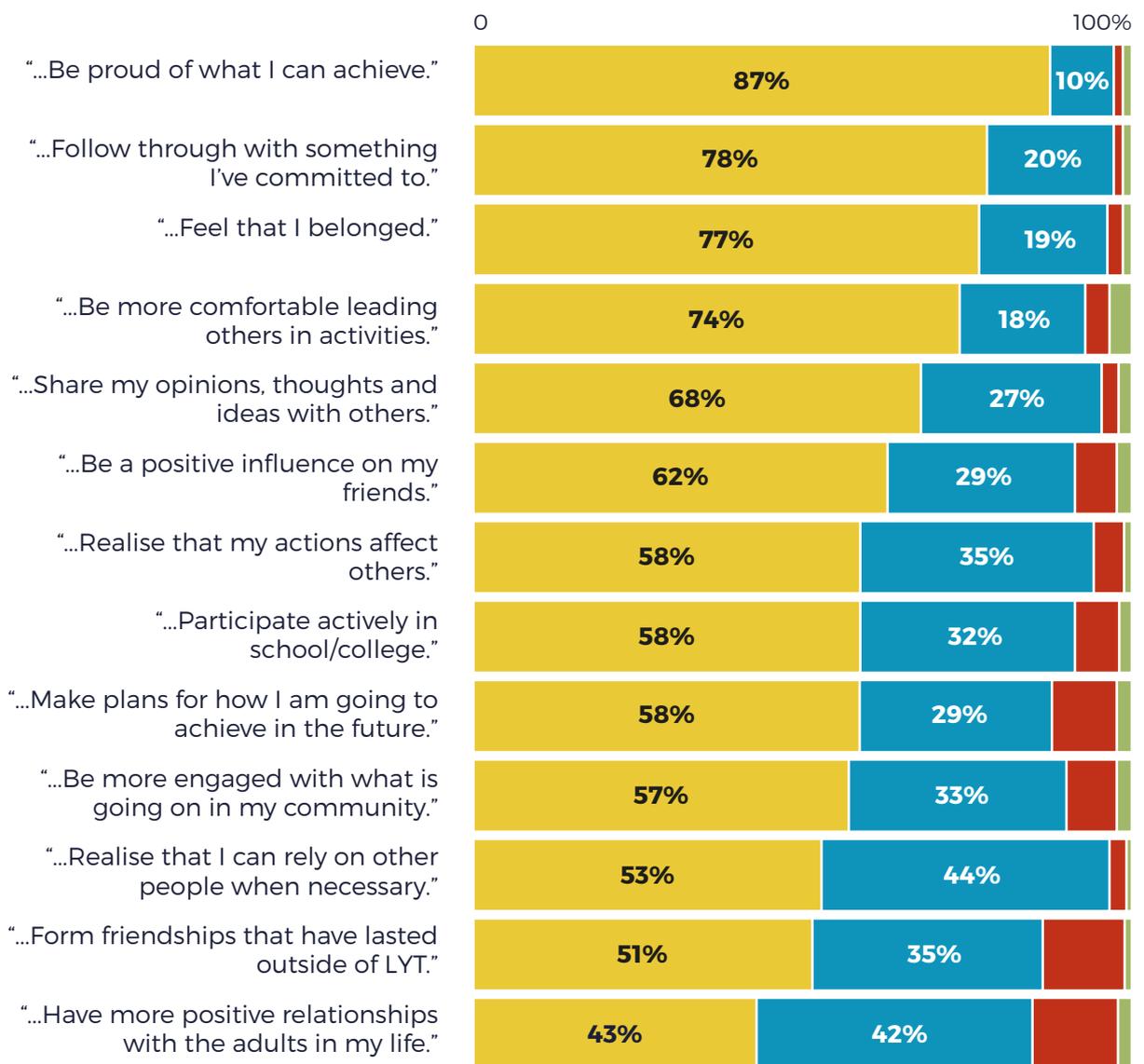
floating this, as other suggestions here, as ideas to consider: orientation to this age group might not be practical, but findings show that these are all areas where LYT could potentially make a positive contribution.

(Or LYT could expand their definition of youth upwards: as one survey respondent put it, “If ever there is funding for 25+ I'd love to take part ... But mostly keep up the good work!! You guys are amazing!!! Love you all!!!!”)

# APPENDIX 1

Survey responses: Thinking about your time with LYT, how much do you agree with the following statements?

*"Taking part in LYT has helped me ..."*



● Completely Agree      ● Somewhat Disagree  
● Somewhat Agree      ● Completely Disagree

# APPENDIX 2

Survey responses: looking back over your time at LYT, how valuable to you were these aspects of taking part?



# END NOTES

- 1 defined for the purposes of the report as “significant or lasting changes in people’s lives, brought about by a given action or series of action”, from Chris Roche, *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change*, Oxfam, 1999
- 2 defined as “The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention or set of interventions”, from OECD, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*, 2010
- 3 Christine Gilbert, Robert Hill & David Woods, *Lewisham Education Commission Report*, 2016
- 4 Lewisham Council & Mayor, *The Health of Lewisham Children and Young People*, 2015
- 5 *ibid*
- 6 *ibid*
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- 8 John Copps and Dawn Plimmer, *Inspiring Impact - The Journey to Employment*, 2013
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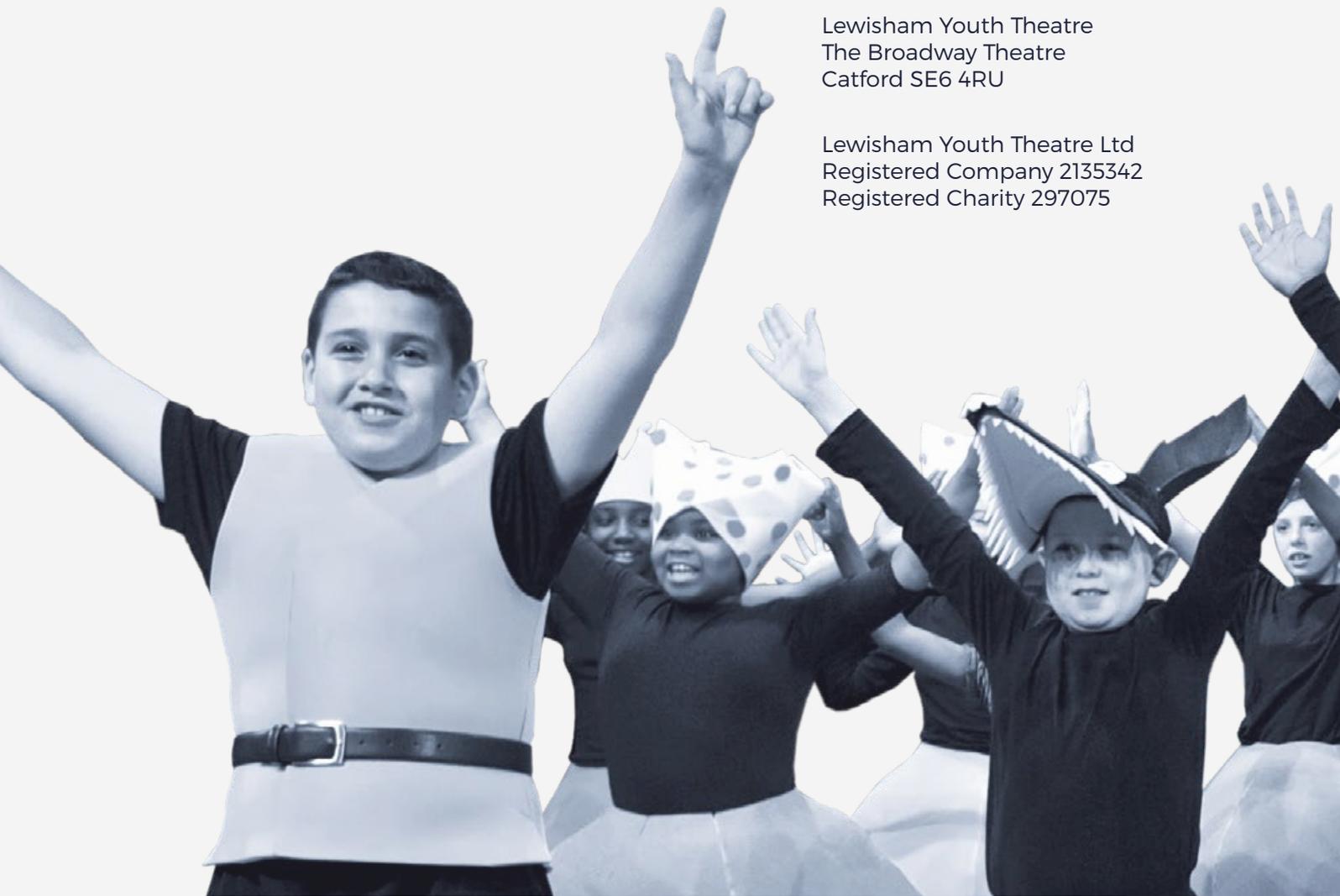
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- 24 BoingBoing Theatre Company, 2016
- 25 Jenny Hughes & Karen Wilson, *Playing a part: the impact of youth theatre on young people's personal and social development*, *Research in Drama Education*, 2004
- 26 *ibid*
- 27 *ibid*
- 28 James S. Catterall, with Susan A. Dumais, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson, *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies*, National Endowment for the Arts, 2012
- 29 Cultural Learning Alliance, *The Case for Cultural Learning: Key Findings*, 2011
- 30 from Charles Duhigg, *Smarter, Faster, Better*, p47-65, Penguin Random House, 2016
- 31 Jenny Hughes & Karen Wilson, *Playing a part: the impact of youth theatre on young people's personal and social development*, *Research in Drama Education*, 2004
- 32 Bonnie Benard, *Turning It Around for All Youth: From Risk to Resilience*, 1997
- 33 Headteacher from Sandhurst school, quoted in *HeadStart Lewisham Evaluation Creative Arts: Project report*
- 34 *The Key*, State of Education Survey Report 2016

For more information on this report and  
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