

DIRECTORS' REPORT SEPTEMBER 2019 – AUGUST 2020

The following narrative section of the Annual Directors' Report is provided as part of Lewisham Youth Theatre's Annual Accounts & Report.

Full Accounts are available to download from the [Charity Commission website](#).

Please also see a video of our youth led Annual Review, broadcast live from Catford Mews cinema on 29th October 2020: <https://youtu.be/0MNeXXNnaKA>

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Over the last year, Lewisham Youth Theatre has been challenged to re-design our programmes to meet the needs of our participants during a global pandemic, and to help our groups process and respond to conversations taking place across our society in the wake of George Floyd's murder. We are particularly proud of the organisation's resilience, flexibility and willingness to adapt planned programmes to innovative new working models.

PRIOR TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Prior to the Covid-19 lockdown in March, our planned youth theatre programmes were on track to meet the annual targets as laid out in our Strategic Plan. Continuing to involve young people in the development of the plays, our projects were focused on the theme of youth activism, and we were about to launch a season of plays about *what happens when young people take matters into their own hands*.

Our projects prior to March 2020 focused on developing this work and building young people's skills and access to take part in it. From September 2019 – March 2020, we delivered:

- **Outreach:** Projects and sessions helping young people access our core youth theatre work. We delivered a 4-week project with young carers at Carer's Lewisham, delivered 18 sessions reaching 334 young people in local schools and began a project with Abbey Manor College to support their at-risk students to engage in LYT.
- **Workshop Projects:** Introductory project for 11-14s in technical theatre and drama skills
- **Life Skills Project:** focusing on supporting 16-24s to gain life and employability skills
- **Research & Development:** Sessions with our Senior Acting Company and Juniors 8-11s to help develop new plays to perform in the summer term.
- **Members Committee:** In Autumn 2019, 36 Members Committee members planned and led the Annual Review, developed the #AintJustDrama campaign and helped to take-over the Greater London Authority's social media accounts for the day, and hosted a Christmas Event of masterclasses in props-making and accents.

Responding to the needs of our participants and oversubscription of groups, we had secured funding for additional projects in the summer term to engage new 12-14s and 16-24s in introductory drama projects.

By March 2020, we were well into our Spring Term, with approximately 100 young people aged 8-24 taking part weekly in:

- **Juniors 8-11s:** Two groups rehearsing new plays *Cosimo* and *Space Girl* written for LYT by Artistic Director Helen Stanley, with input from the groups.
- **Juniors 12-14s:** Rehearsing a series of scripted scenes with interweaving devised pieces about youth activism called *Playing My Part*.
- **Seniors 14-17s:** An introductory project delivered at the Corbett Community Library.
- **Young Touring Company:** 5 creative trainees were on tour to local schools with their Forum theatre play 'Live It Down' about peer pressure, reputations and living up to expectations. Prior to lockdown, they delivered 3 performance-workshops for 58 students in years 7-9.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

In response to the Covid-19 lockdown, as our staff were quickly transitioning to remote working from home, we set some key goals to ensure we could continue to meet the spirit of our funding agreements and our organisational objectives.

We would spend the Covid-19 lockdown creating opportunities for our participants to CONNECT with each other and their community; to CREATE and deepen their understanding of the arts and to creatively EXPRESS their experience of the current moment. We made plans to work with our groups to explore stories and characters that respond to the turmoil in the world around them; to write plays and perform together; to learn backstage skills like lighting, costume and make-up; and to develop what is essentially a new art form for the digital age. We prioritised providing continued support over the lockdown to participants who were already engaged with LYT, or who had already signed up for Summer term projects.

In the first week of lockdown, we sent out packs with creative activities to all our 8-11s group. We made contact with all our 12-14s and their families to plan for how they could film their scenes. And we stayed in contact with other participants to let them know our plans.

Within 2 weeks of lockdown, we were delivering online session via Zoom with all of our existing groups. Within 3 weeks, our performers aged 12-14 had delivered an online performance, sharing their filmed scenes live on Facebook during the Easter holidays.

Following the April performance, we delivered a wide breadth of remote youth theatre activities for aged 3-24:

- **Remote Storytelling:** We trialled a [remote storytelling session](#) delivered live on Facebook for children age 3+ and their families.
- **Juniors 8-11s:** These groups continued to rehearse their plays over Zoom. Our designer helped create costumes and props that were delivered to their homes. We filmed via Zoom over the May half term and shared edited versions of [Cosimo](#) and [Space Girl](#) with friends and family at the end of the week. We continued to offer sessions with these groups after the planned end of their projects to provide sustained support.
- **Technical Theatre for 12-14s:** The Technical Production project offered weekly Zoom sessions where participants could take part in hands-on backstage tasks. Materials were posted weekly to participants for tasks including costume, set, props, and lighting. Extension tasks were provided for those who wanted to explore these areas further. Along with previous participants in our Technical Crew, they met with professionals from across the backstage fields for a Q&A and received masterclasses in make-up and lighting. A [short video showcased](#) their work during this period.

- **Juniors 12-14s:** Following their performance in April, we offered additional sessions for this group in June-July, replacing our planned Workshop Group project. They created [short spoken word pieces](#) about youth activism.
- **Seniors 14-17s:** A new group of participants came together on Zoom to create [spoken word pieces](#) responding to global issues of racism and climate change.
- **Seniors 16-24s:** The Acting Company explored how they could use Zoom as a creative medium, wrote monologues and created two films [Pear Tree House](#) and [The Lift](#) about life in lockdown.
- **Playwriting Project:** Redesigning our planned First Steps drama project, participants aged 16-24 worked with professional playwright Oladipo Agboluaje to learn the fundamentals of playwriting and start to write their own scripts.
- **Young Producers:** A new group, with several participants who had never taken part with LYT previously, learned about the role of a creative producer while planning and running [Opening Doors](#) – an online Q&A with leading artists from across the creative industries.
- **Arts Award:** Participants in the Juniors 12-14s, Technical Theatre and Seniors 14-17s group took part in additional sessions and mentoring to work towards their Bronze-level Arts Award (equivalent standard of a GCSE grades D-G). Those in the Young Producers project were able to work toward a Silver-level Arts Award qualification (equivalent standard of a GCSE grades A*-C)
- **Members' Committee:** Participants aged 12-17 created a powerful video statement in response to the Black Lives Matter movement called [Your Voice Matters](#).

Links to video content referenced can be found on our website:
www.lewishamyouththeatre.com/remote

MEETING OUR STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Key performance indicators are set out in our Strategic Plan 2017-2022 against each of our Strategic Objectives. A full strategic plan can be downloaded from our website:
<http://www.lewishamyouththeatre.com/publications/>

Strategic Objective 1: Improving transferable life skills of Lewisham young people

In general, participation indicators are slightly lower than targets due to our decision to provide continued support to existing participants during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Participation Indicators:

- 219 young people aged 8-24 took part in LYT's core projects
- 329 young people participated in interactive outreach sessions
- 261 households watched LYT live performances
- 76% of this years' participants face significant disadvantage, across a range of needs. For more information on how LYT defines disadvantage, please see the introduction section of our Strategic Plan 2017-2022
- 85% of participants in sustained projects have taken part in 3 or more sessions
- 31% of 'workshop' project participants went on to join a next step performance project within the year.

Participant Self-Assessment Indicators:

Due to remote delivery, the take up of answering evaluation forms was lower than in previous years. The figures below represent a total of 95 respondents.

- **Social/Emotional Skill:** 91% of all evaluation respondents reported a significant increase in at least one social/emotional skill (confidence, teamwork, communication and emotional literacy)
- **Creative Skills:** 74% of all evaluation respondents reported an increase in their creative skills

Qualitative Feedback:

Parent: "The regular meetings were central to her feeling secure and that the world was collapsing around her

Parent: "This experience has taught her resilience and opened her up to new and different ways of working. I have seen a passion in her to get involved and create and be a part of a team. It has shown her that there are different ways to get things done and not to give up at the first hurdle but to think outside of the box."

Participant: "I am not a very social person - don't really go out and make friends. This project has encouraged me to actually try more than I do. Try to get to know people and not be huddled in a corner and not speak."

Parent: "He has always been a little in his (autistic) twin brother's shadow so doing this without him has done wonders for his confidence and self-esteem."

Parent: "During the period of the social distancing LYT delivered a laptop to my address for [my son] to continue his studies with LYT and also school. [Now, he] is so much more assertive, and his public speaking is much better."

Strategic Objective 2: Increased ambition and access to further opportunities

Participation Indicators:

- 81 young people performed in productions
- 81% of participants in sustained projects have completed their project (79% of in need participants completed projects)
- 85 young people took part in approximately 209 hours of one-to-one mentoring, including support to complete their Arts Award Qualification.
- 29 young people received support to access next steps at LYT and beyond
- 81 young people engaged in 21 interactions with professional theatre companies, including trips to see theatre, backstage tours, masterclasses and panel discussions with industry professionals
- 17 young people completed the Bronze Arts Award qualification, 3 completed the Silver Arts Award qualification, and 4 young people received AQA Unit Award Accreditations

Participant Self-Assessment Indicators:

- **Resilience:** 82% of all evaluation respondents indicated an increase in resilience, saying they had significantly improved at 'following through with my plans' and/or that they had gained 'more pride in myself'.
- **Ambition:** 91% indicated an increase in ambition. 68% said they had significantly improved in 'knowing what I want and working to achieve it.' 73% reported that taking part gave them 'more knowledge of opportunities available to me.'
- **Leadership:** 62% indicated an increase in leadership capabilities. 54% said they had improved at 'helping others to do their best'. 36% of all respondents reported they had gained the 'ability to lead others'.

Qualitative Feedback:

Participant: "I feel that this project increased my determination to make a change in the world. To actually make a difference. It gave me more motivation to do that."

Participant: "I wanted to try something new with this - I felt that I was able to adapt and grow as a person. By doing this project I realised that I can try anything new and I shouldn't feel nervous."

Participant: "I have increased my leadership skills, this project helped when giving and receiving feedback during the project. You can always do more to make changes and help others to make changes - the process of giving feedback really helped with that."

Young Producer: "[It's given me] independence, responsibility, just being on our own to do something, making our own decisions – that's what we all have to make in life in general. It really helped me to look for more opportunities and understand more about the creative industries. As a young person this event opened my eyes to more opportunities in the creative industries and I can carry the creative skills I have learned to inspire others."

Parent: "The experience of joining something completely new where he didn't know anyone was a big step for him, but the fact that he did it, has made doing new things seem less daunting."

Volunteering: This year, 18 volunteers and placement students gave up their time to support on our projects. Several continued to volunteer during the lockdown from their homes all over the world. One volunteer went on to paid sessional work in the summer term.

54 youth theatre members volunteered as part of Members' Committee, peer mentors on projects, technical and backstage crew and front of house crew. 2 members took part in Year 10 work experience at LYT, and one was involved in a bespoke volunteering projects.

Next Steps: Over the past year, we have supported participants to take part in next steps and opportunities around London, including:

- 9 took part in a focus group regarding youth campaigning with the Blgrave Trust
- One acted in 'De-colonial Salon' - a professional theatre development workshop
- One took part in the Young Agitators at the Royal Court
- Two took part in a creative careers day with Lionsgate film
- 12 took part in a training workshop with corporate trainers Maynard Leigh Associates
- 4 received free auditions with Mountview drama school
- Auditions with the National Association of Youth Theatre's Playing Up programme
- 4 participants submitted their spoken word pieces and music to Lewisham's Re:Sound competition, and one won the Spoken Word category
- 5 received paid roles filming with TED Learning

Other opportunities that we were not able to pursue due to the Covid-19 lockdown included participation in a lighting competition at Rose Bruford College and tours and masterclasses at RADA, Mountview and BRIT School.

Congratulations to our members moving on to exciting next steps:

- Abbie starting at BRIT School in Technical Theatre
- Angel going onto a BA in Drama, Applied Theatre & Performance course at University of East London
- Kirsty starting at Oxford University
- Kwabena starting at the BRIT School
- Nicole starting at University of Liverpool

Strategic Objective 3: Sharing our expertise and working practice

Partnerships: LYT continues to receive referrals through local partnerships. This year, our partners have included:

Baseline, Carer's Lewisham, Lewisham Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS); Lewisham Children's Social Care, Lewisham Early Intervention Service, Looked After Children's Service, Youth Offending Service and the Medusa Project.

Local Primary Schools: Holbeach; Prendergast Primary; Rushey Green; St. Marys CofE School

Local Secondary Schools: Abbey Manor; Bonus Pastor; Forest Hill; Prendergast Ladywell; Sedgehill; Sydenham School; and Trinity

As well as opportunities offered to our participants listed on the previous page, we have specifically also worked with external delivery partners who have provide a pathway for our participants to widen their horizons and access further opportunities. Our Pathways partners include: English National Opera; Frantic Assembly; National Theatre; Oliver's Island film company, Open Clasp Theatre Company; Orangetree Theatre; Royal Academy of Dramatic Art; Rose Bruford College and the Young Vic.

Press & Consultations: This year, LYT's work was highlighted in several campaigns:

- In December 2019, we took over the Greater London Authority's twitter and Instagram accounts with the Members' Committee's #AintJustDrama campaign highlights of the campaign can be seen on our [Instagram page](#).
- Executive Director Victoria Shaskan wrote [The Theatres That Never Closed](#), an article about LYT's response to the Covid-19 lockdown, on Medium.
- Trustee and former member Dani Mosely published an interview in The Stage highlighting LYT's work: [Who from Catford gets to be like Julia Roberts?](#)
- In August, the Junior and Senior groups' spoken word pieces were featured in two videos on BBC Children in Need's facebook page as part of International Youth Day 2020: [Video 1](#) and [Video 2](#)

Strategic Objective 4: Sustainable Resources

Staff Training & Development: Over the last year, staff have attended training in safeguarding and trauma-informed approaches.

Increased & Sustained Resourcing: Although the organisation remains in a strong financial position moving into the 2020/21 financial year, the global pandemic has decreased our fundraising capacity and yield. We are nevertheless grateful for the support of recent donors towards the immediate needs of our participants:

- BBC Children in Need Booster Grant – towards the technology access costs and additional staffing to ensure those in need can access our programmes
- Greater London Authority through the London Community Response fund – towards the continued delivery of the Technical Theatre programme in Autumn 2020
- Sumner Wilson Charitable Trust – towards the running costs of our programmes
- Lewisham Micro-Commission – towards projects in summer 2020

Increased Individual Giving: We are particularly grateful for the donations of individuals over the Covid-19 period, particularly as part of our Aviva Community Fund Crowdfunding campaign, which allowed us to exceed our 2019/20 target, with over £7000 received from individual donors.

We particularly want to thank Renewal Group and Grahame Anderson for each sponsoring a laptop to be used by participants to access our online sessions.

Fundraising Targets: We currently have secured £219,810 towards our budgets for 2020/21, which accounts for 93% of our budget for the coming year.

Our non-operational reserves of £70,755 represent over 3.5 months running costs.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In Autumn 2019, we welcomed Amy Lewis as our new Participation Manager, replacing Sheryl Malcolm who had been with the organisation for over 10 years. In February 2020, we welcomed Ania Straczynska as our new Programmes Administrator. Both have been instrumental in keeping our programmes running over lockdown.

In August 2020, several of our multi-year funds came to an end, causing us to pause our Step Up programme for 16-24s. We were sad to say goodbye to Emma Hewitt as the programme manager. We look forward to re-assessing the needs of Lewisham young people aged 16+ in light of the current circumstances and considering how we can best provide opportunities for them going forward.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

The driving principles of our work over the next year will focus on:

- **New plays/content:** developing new work that promotes the voices of young people, with plan to bring plays to full development in 2022 (Lewisham's Borough of Culture year);
- **New models:** developing new models of working that allow young people to take on more responsibility for roles as playwrights, directors, producers, designers and technicians;
- **Exploration not Production:** Focus on exploration of performance opportunities (eg mixing live and online performance) rather than putting on full productions;
- **Developing relationships for 2022 and beyond** to build collaborative partnerships with other youth theatres nationally (and possibly internationally) towards a season/festival of work in 2022 that is created, produced and delivered by young people.

This Directors' Report can be compared to the key performance indicators and annual goals set out in our full strategic plan, which can be downloaded from:

www.lewishamyouththeatre.com/publications