



**Northern Ireland Theatre Association response
to the CAL Inquiry into Inclusion in the Arts of
Working Class Communities**

March 2014

1. Background to the Northern Ireland Theatre Association (NITA)

NITA is the representative body for professional theatre in Northern Ireland. Its activities are designed to build capacity and strengthen professional theatre infrastructure across Northern Ireland. It:

- Promotes Northern Irish theatre on a local, national and international scale on behalf of its members;
- Delivers tailored training;
- Collects and disseminates sector-specific information;
- Supports and facilitates networking amongst performing arts professionals;
- Facilitates informed lobbying and advocacy.

NITA's membership is drawn from across Northern Ireland and includes:

- Independent theatre companies such as Big Telly Theatre Company in Portstewart and Prime Cut in Belfast;
- Regional venues from the Playhouse in Derry~Londonderry, the Ardhoven in Enniskillen, the Market Place in Armagh and flagship theatres the MAC, the Lyric and the Grand Opera House in Belfast
- Northern Irish theatre festivals such as the Belfast Children's Festival;
- Individual members including actors, freelance designers and drama students from University of Ulster, Queen's University and Belfast Metropolitan College;
- Support bodies including Audiences NI and the Ulster Association of Youth Drama.

NITA currently has 61 members made up of 28 production companies, 13 regional and flagship venues, 14 individuals and 6 support organisations. Of these 61 members, 11 organisations receive annual funding through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (18% of members).

Separately 11 organisations receive National Lottery funding through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, (18% of members), although there is some cross over. The remainder of funding is sourced from a mixture of local authorities, again with their own requirements for community engagement, private sector sponsorship, and funding trusts and foundations.

These secondary forms of funding are frequently used to support key community engagement posts and projects within theatre production companies and venues.

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2. Comment on terms of inquiry

We welcome the Committee's interest in this area, and would be glad to give oral evidence during the inquiry. We encourage you to consider how the current work being carried out to include working class communities can be extended, and if you value its outcomes, seek to work with the Theatre sector to ensure them.

The arts are unique and powerful tools, which can act like a "door opening" for many; youth at risk, prisoners, disabled, unemployed, lone parents, those living in areas of significant economic, social deprivation and community relations tension. Many people from these areas and groups are likely to come from or identify themselves as working class communities.

Public investment in the arts is predicated on a social return for society, particularly those most at need. To that end the Arts Council's conditions of funding mandate that all artistic projects developed with public funds, also have a social component designed to ensure outreach and inclusion of hard to reach/TSN communities/or those often described as working class. All Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) are required by the Arts Council to complete the RFO survey annually, which monitors how funding has been used by arts organisations.

As part of this process they must outline what they have delivered, where and how many people and which socio economic groups they have reached. A copy of the RFO survey can be accessed here: <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/funding/rfo-survey>. This information identifies all work carried out in deprived areas and the methods employed to support access for such groups.

Whilst it is a condition of core funded organisations to specifically target work at and deliver projects for so called working class or hard to reach audiences, in this submission we have sought to highlight to the Committee some of the best examples of community engagement. This includes both projects funded through the Arts Council, and other projects and work designed for, by, or delivered with working class communities. For an authoritative breakdown of the socio-economic impacts of this statutory funded work, we would refer you to Arts Council of Northern Ireland's yearly digest and any further submission by them.

As a representative body of professional theatre it is also in the best interests of NITA and its membership to grow and develop the audience for theatre, and to support those seeking to ensure the arts are enjoyed by all parts of our society and in all communities across Northern Ireland. Many of our members benefit directly from the work of Audiences NI in their attempts to develop audiences for theatre across socio economic groups. By their latest estimation there's spare capacity to fill: 45% of seats for events per year remained unsold, worth an estimated £13.5 million. Widening audiences, and broadening appeal is therefore imperative to our membership, and much of the data shared by our membership is available to Audiences NI who publishes an [annual review](#), breaking down audience by demographic indicators.

In keeping with the terms of the inquiry we have sought to present some of the best examples of community engagement (outreach activity) carried out by our members, across both venues and production companies. This is not an authoritative list, and many more projects take place in working class communities across Northern Ireland than can be described in detail here. Moreover, some of our members have chosen to submit their own individual evidence to more fully describe the detail and impact of their work. NITA's submission is designed to complement this and give a more rounded snapshot of the work being carried out within our sector.

3. Summary of Findings

Theatre can contribute, and inspire social improvement, contributing to healthier lifestyles, education, and address social issues and unrest, but it cannot deliver these on its own. It works best when delivered in co-operation with community groups, and in close co-ordination with statutory services and agencies.

However, community engagement is too often considered as an end in itself, rather than a consequence of the creative product that inspires, or, has drawn from it. Theatre and the arts are the expression of a healthy society, and to be successful requires all parts of society to be empowered to be involved and contribute.

As such, successful community engagement with working class communities, by the theatre sector, cannot be divorced from the creative product that inspires it. For both to succeed both require your support.

Primary obstacles

Price

Price is often considered the primary barrier to inclusion for the arts, and theatre. Experience tells both venues and production companies that concession, free, or subsidised tickets can increase audiences from working class communities. Similarly having the ability to offer community engagement projects free of charge, or for a small fee, opens up the experience and participation in theatre to a wider audience.

Lack of value placed on the Arts

Despite Theatre and Drama being consistently the most popular artform (58% of all arts ticket sales), according to Audiences NI, it is amongst demographic groups typical of working class communities (Housing Exec Tenants, Small Town Renters and Poor Seniors and Solos) where booking rates fall below 1 in 5 households per year, highlighting that these groups may need to be engaged with or communicated with in a different way to increase these booking rates.

Community Misconceptions

Faced with communities with limited previous experience of the arts, our members report that amongst some working class communities there is a pre-conception that theatre or the performing arts is not relevant to them. This is particularly difficult when also competing with other activities and interest - especially amongst young people.

Four core recommendations

i) Increase aspirations within working class communities to produce professional arts and theatre, by creating opportunities for employment or work experience in *theatre* through bursaries and training targeted at working class communities.

ii) Greater support for subsidised tickets, and capturing of audience data at site-specific, pop-up theatre, and festivals as a means of measuring and increasing working class exposure to theatre in non-traditional venues.

iii) Theatre from the very start - exposing children and young people from working class backgrounds to the arts and creating a love for theatre. From early years settings through formal education and other youth environments quality arts should be alive and at the forefront of provision.

iv) Explore the Introduction of a 'Theatre Mile' to complement the existing community engagement work being carried out by venues by establishing free or heavily subsidised tickets, and community engagement programmes to support and foster involvement from working class communities within a mile of any public theatre venue.

4. Working Class Playwrights and Plays written for Working Class Communities

Theatre, however, is not merely about attendance or outreach to an audience, working class or otherwise. It is a dialogue with and about society, and as such creating a dialogue with working class communities relies on more than audience attendance or engagement. It requires theatre to develop product that speaks authentically to them, and about their experience. To do so it relies on the experiences of writers, producers, directors and actors who can impart this first hand into work designed for or about working class communities.

This is only a sample of working class playwrights, and plays produced about and for working class communities. We have sought to highlight some the best recent examples of the work that has been written directly tackling the history, opinions and experiences of those who identify themselves as part of working class communities.

Gary Mitchell (Playwright)

Playwright Gary Mitchell was born and raised on Rathcoole housing estate in North Belfast, living there until 2005 when loyalist paramilitaries intimidated him and his family out of their homes on the estate.

Mitchell's first stage play, *Independent Voice*, was produced by Tinderbox Theatre Company in 1993. In the same year, he became both the first Protestant and the first Northern Irish writer to win the Stewart Parker BBC Radio Drama Award.

In a Little World of Our Own (1997) was his national breakthrough and a subsequent 18 plays followed, as well as a significant number of radio plays and films. His most recent play being *Forget Turkey* (2012) and *Forget Turkey (We liked it so much we're going to Phuket again)* (2013) at The Lyric.

As well as winning the Stewart Parker Award in 1993, his achievements include the Aisling Award for Outstanding Achievement in Arts and Culture (2006) for his play *Remnants of Fear*.

Martin Lynch (Playwright)

Martin Lynch was born into a dockers family in Gilnahirk, Belfast. His first work, *We Want Work, We Want Bread*, was produced in 1977.

Martin is the co-author of the highly successful play, *The History of the Troubles (according to my Da)* (2003). Set against the last 34 years of the Northern Ireland troubles, it tells the story of how the troubles affected one ordinary Belfast man. It returned for another tour in 2011 and in 2013 on its 10th anniversary. This show is cited as being seen by 125,000 people (source: <http://martinlynchproductions.com/about/>).

Chronicles of Long Kesh (2009), tells the story of the infamous prison camp outside Belfast, played to sell-out houses at its premiere at the Waterfront Hall and followed by a sell-out tour of Northern Ireland. It returned for a tour across Northern Ireland to five venues in April 2012.

In 2013 he produced *Fifty Shades of Red, White and Blue*, the number 1 best selling spoof play of the book *50 Shades of Grey*. It played a sell-out run at the MAC in January 2013 and returned for another successful run at the Grand Opera House in August 2013.

In his own words he described his efforts to write to actively include and appeal to working class communities:

"I write with my ma watching it. If she would be interested, if she would understand it then I know an audience in the New Lodge or Ballybeen will. It is working class people that my work is trying to engage and promote a dialogue with."

Marie Jones (Playwright)

Marie Jones is a Belfast-based playwright, born into a working-class Protestant family and one of the most acclaimed contemporary playwrights.

Her best-known play is *Stones in His Pockets*, based on the idea of a Hollywood film company filming a movie in a small Irish village and the resulting impact on that community. The play premiered in the West Belfast Festival in 1996, followed by performances in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1999, Dublin, London's West End and Broadway. It won the Irish Times/ESB Irish Theatre Award for Best Production in 1999, two Olivier Awards in 2001 and was nominated for three Tony Awards in 2001.

More recently, her play *Dancing Shoes: The George Best Story* (2010) tells the story of George Best - from his childhood on the Cregagh estate, to a life of fame, fortune and controversy. It premiered at the Grand Opera House in 2010 with a record-breaking run of 23,000 people attending the show. It returned the Grand Opera House for a second run in August 2011.

Marie has also received the John Hewitt Award for outstanding contribution to cultural traditions in the arts in Northern Ireland.

Dan Gordon (Actor, Director, Playwright)

Gordon was born in Belfast and is best known in Northern Ireland for his portrayal of Red Hand Luke in the BBC Northern Ireland sitcom *Give My Head Peace*. He starred in the Marie Jones monodrama *A Night in November* in the Tricycle theatre in London and again in the Lyric Theatre in Belfast. He has also worked in dramas on BBC Radio 3 and 4, and in 2004 won the inaugural BBC NI Radio Drama Playwriting competition with *We didn't just build the Titanic you know*.

Amongst his directing credits is *The Hypochondriact* by Molière adapted by David Johnston for the Lyric Theatre, Belfast and *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* by Frank McGuinness, performed in a prison it was the subject of a four part documentary series for the BBC.

In 2009, he brought to life a piece he'd been writing about the Harland and Wolff Shipyards in Belfast. The play, provisionally titled *All the Queen's Men*, received its premier in an East Belfast church, known locally as the Shipyard Church. Now known as *The Boat Factory*, it toured venues and schools under the guidance and support of the Lyric Theatre and the Ulster Scots Agency.

He is on the board of the Lyric Theatre Belfast and the NI Actors Equity Committee, is an Artist in Residence for the Prison Arts Foundation, and a member of the Arts & Business Advisory Committee

Kabosh Theatre Company (various productions)

In 2010, Kabosh commissioned four playwrights for *The West Awake*, each choosing a location along the historic Falls Road beginning at St. Comgall's School, and taking in Conway Mill, Cultúrlann, the City Cemetery and Milltown Cemetery, to bring to life the rich history and vibrant heritage of this unique area of Belfast.

It was written by Kieron Magee, Jimmy McAleavey, Laurence McKeown and Roseleen Walsh, all of whom grew up in West Belfast, and is delivered through guided tours. The project contributes to

cultural tourism, whilst offering the citizens of Belfast an opportunity to be a tourist in their own city. Following its success in 2010, *Kabosh* presented the show again in partnership with Féile an Earraigh in 2013.

Their site-specific work also includes *Those You Pass on the Street (2014)* which explores the complexities of dealing with the legacy of conflict. It contrasts party political positioning with individual needs and challenges the view that any mechanism for dealing with the past is simply about 'whose side gets what'. It was written by Laurence McKeown, whose involvement in creative works began during his period of incarceration as a political prisoner (1976-1992), and had free performances in Skainos, Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich and the MAC in January 2014.

Hurricane (2002)

Written and performed by Richard Dormer, Ransom Production's *Hurricane (2002)* tells the story of Northern Irish Snooker star, Alex Higgins. It premiered at the Old Museum Arts Centre in Belfast in October 2002 and went on to success in the West End and Broadway. *Hurricane* returned for a run at the Grand Opera House in 2011, and several dates in The Millennium Forum, following Alex Higgins' death in July 2010.

The production was an instant hit and received critical praise, with his portrayal of Alex Higgins winning Richard Dormer The Stage award for Best Actor in 2003. *The Guardian's* theatre critic Michael Billington described his performance as one of his top five performances of all time when it played in London's West End.

Man in the Moon (2013)

Man in the Moon is Belfast playwright Pearse Elliott's newest play and focuses on the devastation suicide wreaks on one family, particularly on one son whose two brothers have taken their own lives. Pearse grew up in the Lenadoon Estate in West Belfast and the play, produced by Brassneck Theatre Company, confronts the issue of rising suicide rates in Northern Ireland's post-ceasefire, peace-process era, after the number of his friends and neighbours who have taken their own lives reached 30.

The play ran in the Grand Opera House at the end of 2013, followed by a tour of Northern Ireland. Following its success it returned for another run at the Waterfront Hall in March 2014.

5. Examples of good practice in community engagement (outreach work)

Big Telly Theatre Company

Big Telly is a professional theatre company, formed in 1987 and based in Portstewart. The company's range and scale of work is unparalleled, with its reputation for innovation built upon distinctive professional theatre productions which tour nationally and internationally; creative collaborations; and pioneering community-based participation projects.

A typical annual programme of work includes two original theatre productions which tour nationally, a year-long outreach programme with older people including five to ten productions and 700 workshops, at least three community-based events, and projects with five to ten local schools and one or two collaborations with the business community and an ongoing youth theatre creating site-specific and street theatre.

Projects

Recent projects working with or delivered for working class communities have included:

Spring Chickens Older People Programme: Big Telly's pioneering older people's creative arts outreach programme to increase creative expression and engagement within the older community throughout Northern Ireland. This year-round programme supports older people to develop confidence, combat isolation and play an active role within their communities.

The BOX: The BOX brings people from diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences together as artists, audiences and volunteers, working collaboratively on ways to make connections through the arts. A previously empty retail space on Portstewart Promenade has been taken over by Big Telly to embed their work more deeply within the community, form strategic partnership alliances, grow the company's audiences and participants and commercialise its services. This excellent space with high visibility within the community invites audiences and participants to experience the arts in new ways - facilitating collaborations and supporting marginalised/disadvantaged groups to deliver their key messages to the wider community and promote active citizenship and community relationships.

Big Sunday: During the last Sunday in September 2013, Big Telly and Portstewart Traders Association with funding from Big Lottery Culture for All revived Big Sunday. Local traders, many of whom do not normally open on a Sunday, opened their shops to hosted games and events. The event attracted approximately 4,000 people.

ASCERT (Hidden Harm): Big Telly design bespoke projects to deliver specific social/education objectives for disadvantaged young people. In this example Big Telly was approached by the charity ASCERT to devise and produce a YouTube style video to raise awareness of the issues surrounding Hidden Harm, the impact on young people and how they can get help & support. This element was part of a larger development project to roll out a recognised programme called 'Steps to Cope' which is about supporting young people living with parental alcohol misuse.

Outcomes of projects

Spring Chickens Older People's Programme: Over 7,000 older people, aged 50-103, from a wide range of independent older peoples groups, residential and care homes, assisted living and sheltered accommodation communities, health trust day care centres, community centres, church and council venues, from 25 of the top 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and 26 Areas at Risk throughout Northern Ireland, have engaged in this year round programme since 2007.

Queen's University's School of Sociology, Social Policy & Social Work have developed a new Community Development coursework module, using footage and evidence from the *Spring Chickens* programme as part of their *Imaging Solution Therapy* module. Through the '*Flexible Learning Programme*' students can volunteer, ensuring the social workers of the future will understand the impact of participation in a creative process for older people.

Many of the core Spring Chickens groups (Ballymoney, Irvinestown, West/East Belfast, Lurgan, Armagh, Coleraine) have for the first time delivered their own projects in local schools and with other cross-community, cross-culture and cross-border groups.

The BOX: The 'Windows' concept (as exemplified in Big Telly's space on Portstewart Promenade, The BOX) provide a framework for community interaction in a context that can build lasting relationships and break through barriers of prejudice and ignorance.

The BOX promotes cross-departmental relationships encouraging agencies/organisations to work together in order to achieve common goals. The idea of *The BOX* is that retail spaces are intrinsically neutral, shared spaces. In the Northern Ireland context these are valuable assets with potential to engage people from all backgrounds in shared activities.

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

In their own area Big Telly has noted that post-conflict funding has enabled each community to build its own purpose-built space. The greater the deprivation, the better the facilities, and the more reluctant the groups are to leave their own area. Although excellent schools and community relations work does take place, it happens within each community and does little to challenge the perception that the area is deeply divided.

Since 2011 there has been an interface/contested spaces programme which targets children and young people in interface neighbourhoods, but it does not appear to foster the use of neutral premises.

Older people are particularly vulnerable to becoming isolated, through loss of friends and family, loss of mobility or reduction in income. There is a need to address not just the practical, but the emotional and psychological implications of the growing numbers of older people within our communities to allow and support them to maintain their personal dignity and respect.

From the groups Big Telly has worked with they have noticed that while individuals may be very active within their own groups they are not necessarily involved in their wider community. It appears that access to wider community networks like schools, and other community settings, aren't seen as accessible to older people's groups. Big Telly's projects challenge older people to lead and manage a variety of projects within schools, community centres and public spaces, making this work, and their leadership role as visible and impactful as possible.

Many of these issues that older people face can also be attributed to young people as well as those from disadvantaged communities.

Cahoots NI

Cahoots NI is a professional children's touring theatre company based in Belfast. The Company concentrates on the visual potential of theatre and capitalises upon the age-old popularity of magic and illusion as an essential ingredient in the art of entertaining. Each production is at the centre of a body of outreach work designed to maximise artistic potential, customise the individual theatre experience and extend the imaginative life of the piece beyond the actual event.

Projects

Recent projects working with or delivered for working class communities have included:

Lights, Camera, Math 'a' Magic: a one hour show delivered to Key Stage 2 students throughout Northern Ireland free of charge - sponsored by Danske Bank. The show is a multimedia, interactive performance that explores maths through magic. At the end of each performance pupils are presented with their very own Math 'a' Magic book that explains how many of the tricks worked. This is accompanied by teacher notes. Since 2008 this project has reached over 23,000 children from hard to reach or "working class" communities.

Home Visits: a project created with the Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children whereby Cahoots NI performers go to families homes across NI who are affected by cancer. These visits are free of charge to the families. The length of time of a visit is flexible as it is up to the child to select how many magical tricks they wish to see from The Magic Menu. At the end of each visit the family are left with a Magic Set for them all to learn some magic together. The hope is that when Cahoots NI return, the family will be able to demonstrate some tricks for the Cahoots NI performers. The project to date has reached 78 families, is open to all including families from working class communities.

The Family Hoffmann Christmas Show at Castle Court Shopping Centre, Belfast: During Christmas 2013 Cahoots NI performed six 15 minute shows daily for two weeks in Castle Court Shopping Centre free of charge to the public. More than 3153 shoppers took the opportunity to take a break and be dazzled and delighted by the incredible and magical Family Hoffmann who combine elements of cabaret and vaudeville.

Outcomes of these projects

Home Visits: "The families embraced the theatrical performances and were most appreciative of this very unique family experience at this difficult time in their lives. These children and their families often miss out on so much during this period of their child/ brother/ sister's illness due to the need for isolation to reduce the risk of infection. These visits provided a unique, fun experience for the whole family... Some of the words used by the children to describe the visits included 'cool', 'deadly' and 'amazing'." **Lynn Wilson - NICFC Care Worker**

Lights, Camera, Math 'a' Magic: "My class was really excited after your visit and pupils who had no interest at all in numbers were asking if they could do the tricks and where they could get more ideas. I have used the book in various ways. Sometimes I perform a trick, we talk about why it might work (thinking skills) and then look at the Maths connected with it... At other times I get individuals to prepare, perform and explain a trick... Skills such as calculating, Mental Maths, communicating, estimating, looking for patterns etc. are all addressed in this book and in such a way as to keep the pupils interest and to give them an incentive to complete a challenge. Thank you for a great resource." **Lesley Hunter Creavey Primary School, Antrim**

The Family Hoffmann: “Brilliant show! Highly entertaining as ever can’t figure out the tricks! Great to be in the shopping centre where the people are who perhaps don’t visit the theatre!!”
Audience Member

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

A lack of adequate financial resources to extend our offering, particularly having the ability to offer projects free of charge or for a small fee to the public in order to open up the experience to a wider audience. Bringing the work into the communities rather than expecting them to travel to you is also a great advantage but is limited by our resources.

DU Dance (NI)

DU Dance is a professional dance development company based in Belfast working with communities across Northern Ireland. The company's work focuses on young people, particularly those in socially disadvantaged areas, with an aim to introduce people to dance and the creative arts whilst advocating dance as a tool for facilitating positive personal development, skills enhancement alongside promoting community cohesion.

DU Dance receives £46,075 in core funding from ACNI (32% of total income). This does not support any project work delivering outreach to working class communities. Total projected expenditure for the year is £145,609. Core funding amounts to 40% and project/outreach 60% of income.

DU Dance provides all its activities free of charge to participants. Project funding has to be raised for all activities - this comes from a mixture of public sector funding (ACNI, local authority grants), lottery funds, trusts & foundations and sponsorship. The company is also commissioned to undertake projects or works in collaboration with other partner organisations to deliver activities.

Projects

DU Dance provides access to innovative contemporary dance workshops and projects across communities, which may often have limited or no dance provision, challenging traditional views of the relevance and value of dance. Performance is an integral part of their work and they provide high-quality artistic experiences which challenge and inspire through four parallel programmes of work - two for marginalised young people, one intergenerational, and one cross-community programme with three youth dance groups supported long-term.

DU Dance performances and workshops mainly take place at a community level - not in traditional arts venues - and all work has an outreach element. Since April 2013 they have carried out 15 projects and undertaken 33 performances with both young and older people involving 1,542 participants, a total audience of 20,554. These projects have taken place in Armagh, Ballymoney, Belfast, Castlereagh, Dungannon and, Newtownabbey Council Districts in arts and sports venues, schools, parks, and youth and community centres.

Participants have come from working class areas in Andersontown, Ballyhackamore, Ballymacarett, Ballymote, Blackstaff, Beechill, Bellevue, Botanic, Callan Bridge, Castlevue, Chichester Park, Cliftonville, Duncairn, Falls, Fairhill, Fortwilliam, Glebe, Glencolin, Highfield, Island, Killymeal, The Mount, Mullaghmore, Musgrave, New Lodge, Rostulla, Seapatrick, Shantallow West and Waterworks.

DU Dance organise and facilitate the *Primary Dance Festival* that brings together primary schools from across Belfast to perform and share their work in a professional theatre space. They also deliver a youth dance event *Unanimous* that is supportive and non-competitive - bringing together youth dance groups from across Northern Ireland to share a range of styles of dance.

Recent projects working with working class communities have included:

Peer Leadership training project: From March to May 2013 DU Dance undertook a four-week Peer Leadership training project involving two young professional dancers, one unemployed young dancer through the DEL Youth Employment Scheme and two young dancers as volunteers. The training involved daily yoga sessions, physical, communication and leadership skills and all the participants completed a certified First Aid Course. The programme built the capacity and skills of all of the dancers as facilitators/group leaders and peer role models. The Youth Employment Scheme also involved a two week work placement with the company in May.

As part of the Peer Leadership training programme a new piece of work was devised, *Escape*, with a short performance and workshop which toured to 10 schools and community centres across Belfast with an audience of 785 and workshop participants of 378. This project was a capacity building programme for the five young adults, two from Dungannon and three from Belfast, and involved a further 26 young people in our youth dance groups Sutemos in Dungannon and Merge Cru in Belfast.

Outcomes of these project:

The young adults came through the groups they worked with, and were themselves from diverse community and cultural backgrounds: two currently unemployed, three in educational courses and one in employment; one polish, two from opposite communities in west Belfast and two are from rural locations in Co. Tyrone. The project has built their capacity and skills as group leaders, given them transferable skills and assisted them to become peer role models.

The project successfully engaged with young people from minority cultures and from areas of Targeted Social Need, bringing them together to work physically and creatively. The project was particularly successful in enhancing the skills of the five youth leaders, building their self-esteem and confidence. The youth leaders took on guided responsibilities - arranging, organising and assisting younger members of the group. This was particularly evident leading up to performances when the work became more intense and younger members needed more support from the more confident peer leaders.

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

Working in hard to reach communities demands long term networking, partnership building, collaboration and time to build trust, relationships and a good track record of delivering excellent work at a community level. This requires: time and funding for development work and taster sessions; time and funding for long term projects which demonstrate a commitment to the area; and time and continued funding to enable the sustainability of projects to demonstrate a lasting impact and for results to be seen at an individual and community level.

DU Dance is core funded for up to three years only. We have no guaranteed or continuous funding for our project work. Every project we undertake we have to raise sufficient funds in advance for. This means no security or sustainability for projects at a community level.

Engaging with individuals who may not be part of an established “group” or “community” is particularly difficult when also competing with other activities and interests – especially amongst young people. We are also faced with barriers engaging with communities with limited previous experience of the arts and dance; pre-conceptions that dance is not relevant to them and communities where there is a lack of value placed on the arts or priority given to the arts in areas of increasing deprivation.

Prime Cut Productions

Based in Belfast Prime Cut Productions is Theatre Company in residence at The MAC, and is one of Northern Ireland's leading independent theatre producers. Established in 1992, the company has produced some of the island's most memorable and thought-provoking theatre, and is committed to providing audiences with challenging and outstanding theatre which reflects and interrogates some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Prime Cut Productions delivers a consistent year-round Community Engagement Programme, which provides opportunities for access to, and participation in, the arts for working class communities, young people, older people, disadvantaged people, and people from minority groups.

Tailored Outreach Programmes are developed and delivered in conjunction with each theatre production. Each year Prime Cut also run one special large-scale community engagement production working alongside a wide range of community groups from across Belfast and Northern Ireland.

All of their projects involve areas of 'Targeting Social Need' or TSN areas. The nature of Prime Cut's work means that it is dictated by the issues that the participants bring to the project. As a consequence this allows participants from working class communities to explore and gain a greater understanding of their own community, and those of neighbouring communities and Northern Ireland in general.

They are currently working with a wide range of groups from across the whole of Belfast, including Tigers Bay, the Shankill, the Indian Community Centre, Short Strand, Pitt Park, Walkways, Sailortown, East Belfast Mission Mens and Womens group, Hammer Youth Club, and the Men's Shed project in North Belfast.

Projects

In the previous year Prime Cut Productions projects with working class communities have included:

Kaleidoscope: brought communities from across Belfast together, exploring their relationship with the city centre. It culminated in an interactive immersive showcase in the city centre on the 31 March 2013 which drew more than 100 people to share the experiences and stories explored by the participants over the 9 month project.

In April 2013 Prime Cut completed its evaluation of the project. In total the project brought together six community groups, involving more than 50 participants ranging in age from 8-76 years from areas across Belfast. The fact that this was so well received and successful is a testament to those involved, especially in the face of the extreme difficulties posed to the project by the civil unrest and local drug related activity happening at the time.

Participation included individuals and groups from the following communities; John Paul II Youth Club and Grace Women's Group Ardoyne: North Belfast Interface Network (BT15), Dee Street Community Centre, Knocknagoney Community Centre (BT4), Lower Shankill Community Association (BT13).

A selection of audience feedback about Kaleidoscope included the following comments:

"It was one of the most interesting evenings I've ever had on the streets of Belfast. It was emotional, and provoked reactions in me that I didn't expect. It made me look at the city and the inhabitants in a different light - and it really caught the conflict of loving/hating a place in equal measure."

"I liked the notion of performance in a public space. It was also good to get a new view of a city centre space with which I am very familiar, by stopping and learning and looking at things."

"Enjoyed the 'immersive' aspect of feeling like Belfast had become a film set or a theatre stage. Enjoyed the knowing looks between participants. Enjoyed being able to project my own thoughts onto what I saw."

A selection of participant feedback:

"Such a great experience to be part of it, made me aware of what actually goes on on the streets that you wouldn't usually notice and the kindness of people that is in need, brilliant would do it all again."

"I really liked the night before the play and the play itself, it was very exciting and helped me think I'd like to do more acting in the future. The acting coaches and the people involved and the people that helped were very professional and really made the whole process thoroughly enjoyable and I can say I can't wait till next year till we do it again!!"

"Kaleidoscope was a brilliant experience just to understand what goes on in Belfast and to hear stories from other people and their experiences in the city one of the best projects I've took part in because what my roll was in the play gave me a real insight on what I want to do work ways! Thank you everyone!"

Audience and participant reactions can be viewed on the following links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMDyChiDA-A>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwURdD1Zlf8&list=UUapFwRal2RR3coc-_sQJFVw&feature=c4-overview

The Conquest of Happiness: A Europe wide project with participation in the City of Culture and the Belfast Festival at Queen's. The performance of *The Conquest of Happiness* brought participants from across both Belfast and Derry~Londonderry together to form a people's choir and linked up with community choirs from Mostar, Sarajevo and Ljubljana. Participation involved equal participation across both catholic and protestant working class communities. Participation was open to anyone, and was widely advertised across both cities.

The first performances of *The Conquest of Happiness* took place in Derry~Londonderry as part of the City of Culture. This brought together participants from community choirs that had been formed throughout the city. The groups were brought together under Donal Doherty, a renowned musical conductor who works with a wide range of ages, cultural backgrounds and musical experience.

Between April and November 2013, Prime Cut's Outreach Manager worked across Northern Ireland developing community choirs (The People's Choirs) that formed the outreach section of *The Conquest of Happiness* and are an integral part of the show. Over 300 people from across Northern Ireland were involved, ranging in age from 10-65. Total project participation in Derry~Londonderry included an Adult Choir: 53 (Age Range 20-74) and a Children's Choir: 41 (Age Range 8-16). Total project participation in Belfast included an Adult Choir: 112 (Age range 27-73) and a Children's Choir: 63 (Age range 8-10) from Holy Cross Boys and Girls Primary Schools.

Prime Cut has continued to work with a number of organisations from across Belfast regarding *The People's Choir*, having started working with the groups at the end of July. Many of the adult choir have never been involved in a professional production before and have expressed their excitement at being involved. Participants from post code areas in Belfast included: BT4, BT5, BT6, BT7, BT12, BT14, BT15, BT27, BT30, BT36, BT37, BT38 and BT41.

Throughout the time working together, the members met other people from a wide variety of backgrounds, got the opportunity to work with professionals of the highest quality, learned seven songs in a variety of languages: French, German, Arabic, Serbo-Croat, Hebrew and have been given the opportunity to take part in a large scale high profile performance event. Many choir members formed friendships with the cast and crew and these have been sustained.

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

The biggest challenge working with hard to reach communities is the time that it takes to develop a relationship and trust from the community leaders and then the participants. Work that is undertaken in Hard to Reach/TSN or working class communities has to be specifically designed to suit the specific issues that are pertinent to the particular community that you are working with. It is vital that projects within these communities are longer in duration than many of the funders permit in their applications.

In engaging with these communities, there has often been little if any previous engagement with the Arts, and perceptions of the Arts is often seen as of little relevance to members of these communities. The issues that we are able to address through project work are challenging beliefs and views that have been passed down through generations, and so to truly address these, ongoing and sustained work must be embedded into any programme of work with Hard to Reach Communities.

Replay Theatre Company

For over 25 years Replay Theatre Company has worked to promote inclusion and social, economic and geographical accessibility within its artistic programming for young audiences aged 0-18. Replay creates innovative, high quality theatre productions and multi-disciplinary arts projects to entertain, educate and engage the imaginations of children aged 0-18 throughout Northern Ireland.

Annually Replay tour an extensive programme of theatre productions, drama workshops and arts projects directly to a range of settings including schools, youth and community centres, theatres and arts venues. Their touring work provides opportunities for children of all ages, from all backgrounds and abilities, in both rural and urban areas, to experience theatre and the arts as audience members and participants.

Annually Replay engages more than 10,000 children and young people from all backgrounds through their creative programme including young audiences from deprived areas and socially excluded communities. Replay's administrative base is in the Ballymacarrett ward (ranked 18 out of 582 in the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010) and whilst they work closely and regularly with children and young people from the local area, the company tours extensively throughout the province to work with young audiences from all backgrounds in a diverse range of settings which are local and accessible to them.

If the NIMDM index is used to indicate 'hard to reach' communities, Replay's programming in the last 12 months has engaged communities in areas of high deprivation including the Ballymacarrett, Falls, Duncairn and Shaftesbury wards in Belfast. Replay's partnership with Sure Start NI has enabled the company to work specifically with children from families living in deprived areas in Belfast and throughout the whole region, particularly in the North-West.

Projects

Replay strives to support accessibility in all contexts, removing real and perceived barriers to participation and engagement for its young audiences, their families and carers. Replay creates work for young audiences of all ages and backgrounds including groups with limited provision and access to Arts and Cultural activities and experiences.

This ambition and commitment has led to the creation of dedicated programmes for underserved and disadvantaged young audiences including:

Replay's UP project: provides accessible, bespoke programming for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties in Special Schools.

Bliss: the UP Project was developed from Replay's first performance created for children and young people with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties *Bliss*. Using a very broad-ranging and experienced range of artists comprising a sound artist, a video artist, a choreographer, a writer, a composer, a designer, a director and performers *Bliss* is performed to up to 6 audience members at a time, plus accompanying teachers/parents/carers. Somewhere between multi-sensory room and theatre, BLISS takes its audience on a magical journey of sound, lights, music and movement.

BABBLE: developed in collaboration with local Belfast nurseries and follows on from Replay's highly successful early years piece, *WOBBLE* (created in collaboration with Assault Events in 2011). Mixing live voices and video, *BABBLE* is performed inside Replay's brand new special Bubble – a portable indoor performance space to an audience of babies and their parents.

Outcomes of the projects

Annually Replay's wide-ranging creative programme directly engages over 10,000 children and young people, providing them with access and opportunity to arts and cultural experiences as participants and audience members.

Each production or project in the company's creative programme has aims and objectives that are unique to it and its target young audience/ age group therefore producing outcomes specific to this. These outcomes impact on its young audiences' life experience and personal development (confidence, self-esteem, learning, social interaction, speech and language development), with particular projects supporting outcomes such as increased community engagement or interest in arts and cultural activities or the improved mental health and emotional well-being for participants.

Feedback from BABBLE, for babies up to 18 months:

"We LOVED Babble. My 15 month old was enthralled and so chilled. Thank-you for making his first theatre experience so enjoyable." **Parent**

"It was perfect for the age-group and really beautiful, with superb sounds in the singing which are excellent for language development. It was amazing in itself but also has fantastic potential for expanding the children's sensory development with its combinations of soft textures, visuals and sounds" **Sure Start Coordinator**

"Babble is very different from anything else provided for this age group. Replay have created a show which demonstrates lateral and innovative thinking on how to support the development of communication in very young children. It was extremely well received and challenged parents to think of how music and voice contributed to their infant's mental health and emotional wellbeing whilst assisting speech and language development."

Sure Start NI Project Lead for Speech, Language & Communication

Feedback from BLISS, (2012), a production for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties:

"The show was amazing from the beginning, the cast captured the attention of the children. I thought that the whole show was magical and catered so well for pupils with PMLD – there are very few things out there that can stimulate and captivate pupils with PMLD...So much work went into the whole thing, a real multi-sensory, rewarding experience. We can't thank you enough."

Teacher, Knockavoe Special School, Strabane

"Pupils were very engaged, laughing, smiling, questioning, anticipating and enjoying characters, costumes and props. Very engaging for the majority of the pupils – some found it very relaxing. The close proximity of the action made it most suitable – if it's too far away from them, it's not for them. The individualisation of songs etc. was lovely!" **Teacher, Roddensvale Special School, Larne**

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

Since 1988 Replay has worked to promote inclusion and social, economic and geographical accessibility within our artistic programming for young audiences, creating work which is tailored to each audience/ age group and provision for underserved groups with limited to no arts provision such as children with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

As a touring production company, Replay make it as easy as possible for audiences to see our work by; touring extensively throughout NI to a wide range of locations and settings taking work directly

to audiences in their locality; pricing tickets according to audience needs; and subsidising these costs through grants and other funding streams to make it more affordable. With council-run public venues operating on a full cost-recovery system, work such as Replay's Early Years programming (which has lower audience capacity numbers and therefore lower box office potential) experiences difficulty in reaching wider community audiences as some venues are precluded from bringing this work to their venue if the production cannot break even or yield profit despite the demand and popularity of work of this kind amongst their customers.

Aspects such as the uptake of our programme are beyond our control however the company markets its work equally to our customers ensuring that information is distributed to all schools and venues throughout all of NI.

Replay believe that access to arts and cultural experiences is a basic human right for all children and like other arts organisations we are committed to ensuring that our work is as accessible and inclusive as possible however we cannot do this in isolation. We welcome solutions that support and enable young audiences from all backgrounds to access and participate in the arts.

Sole Purpose Production's

Founded in 1997, Sole Purpose Production's remit is to bring quality theatre to working class and marginalised communities, urban and rural, contributing to social change and exploring the dynamics of human relationships.

Projects

In 2013, through a combination of workshops, theatrical walking tours and productions, Sole Purpose Productions reached an audience of 1,939 people throughout Northern Ireland. Themes included the women's history in Derry/Londonderry, underage drinking, new writing and the history of the LGBT community's involvement with the Miner's Strike (a play that strikes at the heart of the working class struggle).

Outcomes of these projects

The majority of their work takes place within Derry City Council, ranked third most deprived LGD out of 26 LGDs in Northern Ireland. Its work encourages and enables working class communities to engage with, enjoy and participate in the arts. Its ticket prices are kept low, and are sometimes free, to enable people of all incomes to attend, and all its venues are accessible.

Kabosh

Established in 1994, Kabosh is an independent theatre company resident in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast. They are committed to presenting theatre in non-traditional spaces and challenging the notion of what theatre is and where it takes place. Their work takes place under four main strands; site-specific projects; cultural tourism product; social Cohesion engagement; and international touring all of which takes significant inspiration from, and collaborative development with communities in working class communities.

Projects

Over the past 11 months (March 2013-February 2014) Kabosh has specifically engaged with working-class communities on the following projects:

The West Awakes: A 3-day revival of a political dramatic walking tour of the Falls Road. Originally produced in 2009, Kabosh commissioned 4 playwrights, including 2 community playwrights living in West Belfast, to write a 15-20 minute piece about a location on the current political walking tour. The tours have been revived for a minimum of two performances each year since 2009.

Shankill Stories: Kabosh partnered with the Shankill Womens Centre, the Spectrum centre, Shankill Library, and the Shankill Area Social History group (SASH) to create a social history tour with short theatre pieces along the Shankill Road as part of the July celebrations. Kabosh created an oral archive in collaboration with 37 individuals who took part from across the Shankill Community. A smartphone app will be launched in April 2014, featuring research undertaken by the SASH group during the project. The app will allow locals and visitors alike to discover the fascinating history of the Shankill Road.

It's in the Streets: Kabosh in association with Healing Through Remembering, staged an original drama on the Day of Reflection, June 2013, in ten exterior locations across Belfast city: Linenhall Library, City Hall, Skainos Centre, Spectrum Centre, Culturlann and Cornmarket. Performances were free and fully accessible, performed by local actors. This work is part of Kabosh's on-going projects looking at conflict resolution.

Hostel: A revival of Fionnuala Kennedy's play, *Hostel*, exploring the playwright's experience living in a hostel after the birth of her child. This revival was commissioned by First Housing in association with UNISON as part of Derry~Londonderry City of Culture 2013. Both performances were free and followed by a facilitated discussion. The Derry~Londonderry performance was attended by residents and service users of First Housing in Derry. The Belfast performance was attended by invited participants of the Shankill Stories project.

Belfast By Moonlight: A site-specific production staged in the historic St. George's Church, High Street, Belfast, as part of the Ulster Bank Belfast festival at Queen's 2013, celebrating the 400th anniversary of the foundation of Belfast. Kabosh offered discounted tickets to participants in the Shankill Stories project.

Built to Contain: Developed from an intensive oral archive period and facilitated discussions a new script was developed, the resulting 20-minute radio play was performed by the NIACRO participants and recorded in the abandoned C-wing at Crumlin Road Gaol. It will be shared on national radio stations and via the web.

Those you Pass on the Street: A flexible touring production of a new play dealing with the past and staged in the Skainos, Culturlainn and the MAC. Each performance was free and followed by a facilitated post-show discussion. The main audience were members of marginalised working-class groups currently working with Healing Through Remembering delivery partners.

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

The primary barrier has been securing investment to provide subsidised access to Kabosh productions post initial engagement. Funding that allows for development of the process rather than focussing on product; and including placements and presentations in quantification of active participation.

Additionally, projects that effectively engage working class communities alter from the initial stages of a funding application to the development of the final engagement or production; often attendance is less than expected; the direction the artistic elements differs from the original intent, and as a result outcomes need to be reassessed. If this flexibility is not facilitated then the engagement is more form-based than truthful, and fails to reflect the needs and experience of working class audiences or participants.

Not all projects are suitable for a community-based engagement element – it should not be forced as an outcome of all projects. It would, however, be advantageous for investment in subsidised tickets and travel so that groups and individuals previously worked with can be encouraged to attend other company output.

There is a need to examine the outreach activity of our arts venues and bodies with respect to how they make a meaningful contribution to social inclusion within working class communities; including the degree to which they can help tackle particular social issues.

We urge the Committee to make recommendations for improvements in policies, delivery mechanisms and collaboration among key stakeholders, which will maximise the potential of our arts venues and bodies to realistically address social inclusion issues in both urban and rural working class communities and across communities in Northern Ireland.

We would encourage funding for paid internships and placements within professional arts organisations for interested individuals from disadvantaged communities. Investment is also required for local practitioners to visit 2nd level education in working class communities and give practical examples of how a career in the arts is possible.

We would also encourage the Arts Council and other funders to look at simpler mechanisms for revival of effective projects dealing with pertinent social and political issues, in order that they can be toured into working-class communities on a regular basis or in new areas. For example, *Those you pass on the street* – this is cost-effective, proven product that requires resources to remount.

The MAC

The MAC is Belfast's newest arts venue, since opening in April 2012 it has attracted more than 500,000 visitors for theatre, exhibitions, workshops, tours and learning and participation programmes or to simply enjoy the venue as a shared space in the city centre.

Their ticket buying audience profile includes a wide cross-section of Belfast and Greater Belfast communities. This includes bookers from working class communities within the following postcode areas taken from their top 50 ticket buyer post code analysis:

- BT5 (Ballyhackamore/Orangefield/Orby/Clarawood)
- BT6 (Cregagh Road/Castlereagh)
- BT7 (Donegal Pass/University/Holylands /Markets /Lower Ormeau/Annadale/Ormeau/Ballynafeigh)
- BT11 (Riverdale/Lady/Suffolk/Turf Lodge/Andersonstown)
- BT14 (Fortwilliam/Antrim Road/Cliftonville/Old Park/Westland/Sunningdale)
- BT36 (Glengormley/Newtownabbey)
- BT37 (Whiteabbey/Fernagh/Jordanstown/Monkstown)

Projects

The *Learning and Participation* programme is one way they make the venue a welcoming space that is accessible to the largest number of people possible. The MAC allocates approximately 20% of its funding received from the NI Executive towards outreach activities.

Recent projects working with or delivered for working class communities have included:

- The MAC Family Room
- Family Fun Workshops
- Summer Schools in Dance, Rock and Drama
- Seasonal holiday activities
- the DEN - dedicated youth space - designed by young people
- Creative school workshops
- Gallery talks and tours
- School competitions
- Passport to the MAC transport scheme - subsidised travel for those schools for whom transport costs are a barrier
- The MACCommunity and MACtivists volunteer programmes are all crucial to the way in which the MAC embeds itself in its surrounding communities to engender a sense of ownership with a view to building audiences and greater access in the longer term.

The MAC worked with DCAL economists to devise a matrix based on the level of free meals in schools to determine the level of social deprivation within its participating schools. In this way they have tangibly targeted schools and communities in socially deprived areas engaging them in MAC learning and participation projects ultimately giving communities and young people who normally would not engage in the arts the opportunity to fully experience and participate.

Outcomes of these projects

Based on their customer research, the venue is being used by a very broad demographic of Northern Ireland's population, with 21,130 people taking part in their learning and participation programmes

in 2012/13. Customer feedback shows that the MAC is experienced as an accessible venue (in the broadest definition) that isn't elitist or snobbish.

Schools: 182 schools attended performances, participated in workshops and/or had a tour of the venue and 241 primary schools registered for the Masterpiece for the MAC competition.

18 primary and post primary schools out of the top 40 with the highest percentage of Free School Meals have participated in various ways through their workshops/performances/Passport to the MAC scheme. Their Learning and Participation Officer (Schools) has worked with 10 schools in the most socially disadvantaged areas of greater Belfast to directly promote ways in which the schools can benefit and have easy access to MAC programmes.

Families: They are promoting their family room, workshops and family shows to community groups, Sure Start groups and community nurseries in areas of social deprivation.

Community: The MAC has established a baseline for the number of members from ethnic minority backgrounds who used the MAC in 2013/14 with the aim of increasing participation rates from within this demographic group. They are now designing and delivering programmes to achieve this. They now promote the MADE festival (festival for 14-18 year-olds) in areas of social deprivation, working with community groups to engage young people in arts activities and events in the MAC. There are currently 100 active MACTivists (MAC volunteers).

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

Peoples' misconceptions about the arts and the lack of confidence that can come from these mistaken assumptions.

The Playhouse

The Playhouse, based in Derry-Londonderry, is one of the busiest art centres in Ireland with an annual programme including theatre (approximately 150 performances to an audience of 15,000), education and community relation projects (the vast majority of which impacts upon Working Class communities). 60-70% of the arts programming of The Playhouse impacts directly and positively on Working Class communities, therefore 60-70% of core funding from the Arts Council supports the education & community relations programme.

Projects

The Playhouse delivers multiple theatre, education & community relations projects that impact positively upon Working Class communities. More than 3,000 people per year participate in the Playhouse's education & community relations projects. These include:

Artskills: A multi-year DEL & DSD funded programme that use Open College Network accredited arts training to promote essential skills literacy, confidence and capacity for people with a literacy deficit. The majority of the participants involved in the project have not succeeded through formal school education, and are from areas of significant economic and social deprivation. The project is delivered in Derry- Londonderry (urban and rural) and Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal area.

International Artist Residencies: Funded by Henry Smith Charity and Esmee Fairbairn Foundation the Playhouse delivers a series of artist's residencies in areas of Northern Ireland experiencing significant community relations issues. The artists invited to Northern Ireland have significant experience of using artistic processes to explore and heal community division in other parts of the world that have/are experiencing conflict, for example South Africa, Afghanistan and Colombia. Work takes place in areas such as Ballysally (Coleraine), Fountain Street (Strabane) and Tigers Bay (Belfast), which are among the most deprived in Northern Ireland.

One current example project is US theatre practitioner Teya Sepinuck & Spanish theatre practitioner Alessia Cartoni, who are currently working with the Ballymurphy Massacre families in Belfast to enable them to present their stories theatrically for cross community audiences with the aims of building understanding, empathy, reconciliation and peace through the Theatre of Witness Project. An audience of more than 50,000 people have watched films created through the Theatre of Witness Project (screened on BBC Northern Ireland).

Street Talk: Following a successful pilot project in Summer 2012, the Playhouse are currently rolling out their Street Talk project. This project works with young people who are adjudicated offenders (or are at risk of becoming adjudicated offenders). They use Open College Network arts training to develop engagement, motivation, creativity, confidence and capacity. The project has been successful in re-engaging young people with formal education and they work closely with PSNI Neighbourhood Officers to improve relations between young people and the PSNI, with the aim of decreasing instances of anti-social behaviour and other types of crime.

Theatre Performances: The Playhouse commissions and produces theatre that is relevant to the heritage and lives of people from working class communities. A recent example was *Tilles*, a play written by an ex shirt factory worker about life in Derry's Tillie & Henderson's Shirt Factory - once the largest shirt factory in the world, so significant it was referenced by Karl Marx in his book *Das Kapital*. *Tilles* inspired a local cast of actors (many of whom had themselves worked in the shirt factories) to perform to audiences in excess of 2,000 in the Millennium Forum, a significant majority of whom were former shirt factory workers from Working Class backgrounds who were not regular theatre attenders. Other recent plays produced/co-produced by The Playhouse include *All There Is*

exploring drug use & mental health issues amongst young people, *Over The Wire* exploring the burning of Long Kesh jail in 1974, and *Re Energize* exploring rock music, loan sharking & paramilitarism in Rathcoole, Belfast. An audience of more than 7,500 people per year attend plays that explore themes from working class communities.

Audience and participant feedback includes:

Theatre of Witness Performance of *We Carried Your Secrets*, Derry Londonderry 22/10/2009:

"I found the play very interesting as it was an insight into REAL people's lives and it was REAL stories. It also gave the troubles from different points of views as the people were all from different backgrounds. It was a good REAL history lesson." **Male 17 from catholic background**

"I am a 16 year old girl from a protestant background. I have always had a knowledge of "Bloody Sunday" and paramilitaries but to me really they meant nothing. I think this was because I hadn't experienced them or really didn't want to know about paramilitaries/wars in depth. But, tonight really made me open my eyes and understand what a tough world it is. I am so thankful to these people for coming and sharing their experiences with me and the others and my heart really does go out to them. Be strong. Becka" **Female 16, from protestant background**

Theatre of Witness Performance of *I Once Knew a Girl*, Enniskillen 10/11/2010:

"Occasionally I see something and I wish all my family and friends could have been with me. This is certainly one of those. It's the performance EVERYONE should see, especially those who are now contemplating taking up the gun and the bomb. It's the performance all boys/men, girls/women need to see, need to experience, need to feel the pain. Thank you. – one abused as a child, wife of recovered alcoholic, mother of emotionally damaged son. God Bless!"

Artskills Project participant:

"I didn't know you could laugh, learn and grow all at the same time, until participating in the Artskills course at the Playhouse...I am capable and with new determination, I will get that Job."

Key challenges and barriers to the involvement of working class communities:

The arts are unique and powerful tools to unlock the interest, motivation and capacity of many different types of people to engage constructively in social, progressive, creative activities. They can be like a "door opening" for many youth at risk, prisoners, disabled, unemployed, lone parents, those living in areas of significant economic, social deprivation and community relations tension. Many people from these areas and groups are likely to come from working class communities. The arts are fun, accessible and stimulating.

The largest barrier we have faced to reaching people from "hard to reach" communities has been from "community gatekeepers" who restrict access to local people from "outside groups" for whatever reason.

6. Conclusions - Barriers to Inclusion

Price

Price is often considered the primary barrier to inclusion for the arts, and theatre. Experience tells both venues and production companies that concession, free, or subsidised tickets can increase audiences from working class communities. Similarly having the ability to offer community engagement projects free of charge, or for a small fee, opens up the experience and participation of theatre to a wider audience.

This however runs in contradiction to the need for venues and production companies to operate on a sustainable basis, and is often limited by significantly reducing operating budgets as public, and private, subsidies are reduced. This can lead to a 'double edged' exclusion for low-income households that are a prominent feature of working class communities. For instance, many council run public venues operate on a full cost-recovery system, as such it places the imperative on production companies to find alternative forms of subsidy to attract audiences from working classes, or other un-catered for communities.

Without this additional subsidy, venues are precluded from producing or receiving work that cannot break even or yield profit, despite the demand and popularity of work or its likelihood to appeal to a working class or marginalised audience. This can be an additional hurdle for touring productions which require more resources and whose ability to deliver work is limited by the level of subsidy available to them, or the communities who would benefit. As such working class communities, particularly into rural areas, are limited in their access to theatre or community engagement projects.

As a consequence the limitation in subsidised tickets and community projects can cause a disconnect for working class communities from theatre and the arts.

Lack of value placed on the Arts

In an environment where theatre venues and companies must compete with other forms of mass entertainment, it is often assumed that working class audiences place a lower value on the arts in favour of other forms of cultural expression or entertainment media.

Despite Theatre and Drama being consistently the most popular artform (58% of all arts ticket sales), according to Audiences NI, it is amongst demographic groups typical of working class communities (Housing Exec Tenants, Small Town Renters and Poor Seniors and Solos) where booking rates fall below 1 in 5 households per year, highlighting that these groups may need to be engaged with or communicated with in a different way to increase these booking rates.

However, this paints an in-complete picture at best, audience participation data is only regularly collected at venues, and does not take account non-traditional theatre spaces where working class communities are more likely to encounter theatre.

It can therefore be hard for production companies to assess the reach of their performances due to a lack of access to box office data from the venues they perform in. Community participation is more easily assessed and recorded, but again due to incomplete data, and other previously described barriers it is difficult to assess how theatre (outreach) community engagement projects correlate to audience development within working class communities.

Theatre performances and community engagement in non-traditional spaces, such as Big Telly's *The BOX* project, Replay's *Babble*, Prime Cut's *Kaleidoscope* and Cahoots' *Family Hoffman* have shown

that when theatre is presented in non-traditional spaces it becomes more accessible to audiences in working class communities.

Community Misconceptions

Faced with communities with limited previous experience of the arts our members report that amongst some working class communities there is a pre-conception that theatre or the performing arts is not relevant to them. This is particularly difficult when also competing with other activities and interest - especially amongst young people.

Often this preconception comes from a lack of confidence or familiarity, sometimes what is termed as 'threshold anxiety' must first be addressed and overcome. Once the individual or group has explored theatre or a performance in a manner that is approachable and accessible to them, they progress further into exploring the relevance of theatre to their lives and their community.

In areas familiar with community engagement projects, other problems can arise such as engaging individuals who may not be part of an established "group" or "community", in other cases there can emerge "community gatekeepers" who restrict access to local people from "outside groups" for undetermined reasons.

Lastly having established relationships, familiarity and trust, continuing ongoing engagement through theatre can be difficult once a successful project comes to an end. The lack of sufficient subsidised ticketing can hamper continued attendance, and simpler mechanisms for revival of effective projects dealing with issues within working class communities, are needed.

According to Audiences NI's own initiative to reach new audiences *Test drive the Arts*, 74% of re-attending Test Drivers had increased how often they were going to the arts, with 96% indicating that Test-Drive played a part in this increase. Community engagement can be successful, but successful projects need to be more easily identified, sustained and replicated.

7. Recommendations for action or inclusion in the Committee's Report

i) Recommendation: Increase aspirations within working class communities to produce professional arts and theatre, by creating opportunities for employment or work experience in theatre through bursaries and training targeted at working class communities.

Consultation with NITA's membership identified a need to encourage aspirations for greater involvement in the arts of representatives from working class communities.

It is important to pique interest in the arts from these communities to deliver the next new writers, producers and performers in both amateur and professional theatre in Northern Ireland. By developing the interests and skills in these areas, we can create a gateway and audience for work that is representative of that community and talks to that community and which can also pave the way to increasing broader participation or interest in theatre from those communities within non-traditional spaces, festivals or venues.

NITA delivers an annual professional development opportunity, supported by The National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Creative and Cultural Skills, funding three placements per year. The NITA Technical Theatre Placements are designed to facilitate professional development of technical theatre practitioners by providing bursaries for successful candidates to complete a technical theatre placement over six weeks with a NITA member (either venue or production company) and be mentored by a professional from within the technical theatre sector.

Successful candidates receive a bursary that is equivalent to the standard ITC weekly rate for the duration of their placement. Working from this model, a funded bursary could be established for writers encouraging more people from a wider range of backgrounds to apply for these opportunities. The aim would be to address the lack of "champions" for the Arts from working class communities, particularly encouraging more involvement from protestant working class communities and young people.

Martin Lynch, playwright and NITA Member, identified his struggle in casting actors from a Protestant background for his production of *The Titanic Boys* at The Grand Opera House in 2012:

"I wanted to cast protestant actors. Boys from the same backgrounds as those that worked on the ship, but their simply wasn't any. You cast the best actors, but you hope for cultural references. I was seeking young Protestants for the part.

...There is a gap, however, in the protestant working class community that is more apparent... the catholic working class community was more willing to talk about their own community, and use theatre as another outlet for what they had to say. So it is to be expected that we now have a young men and women from the Falls and the New Lodge coming though as actors, and writers. There are some green shoots in the Protestant community but they have some ways to go."

ii) Recommendation: Greater support for subsidised tickets, and capturing of audience data at site-specific, pop-up theatre, and festivals as a means of measuring and increasing working class exposure to theatre in non-traditional venues.

The experience of NITA members suggests that the true level of engagement in the arts of working class communities is difficult to gauge as audience data for non-traditional or non-ticketed events is currently limited. This is further exacerbated as anecdotal evidence suggests that these are the types of activities most likely to be accessed by working class communities as they often do not have the same access barriers that more traditional venue based programmes are associated with.

Comprehensive data for traditional ticketed venues does exist and is captured and presented in the annual audience audit undertaken by Audiences NI, the audience development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland. However this is only part of the picture. In order to assess the real gaps in provision and develop initiatives to target these gaps then further advances need to be made in the area of audience research into non ticketed and non-traditional activities.

In addition to research, another area for consideration is investment in short term events in communities that can have a catalyst effect suggest as pop-up theatres and venues. Investment in local festivals is also an effective means to reach all communities as the diverse range of arts available in these festival programmes attracts equally diverse audiences. NITA recognises that specific events in the arts calendar or temporary initiatives must be part of a wider approach that includes opportunities for longer-term engagement. The purpose of short-term interventions is to capture imaginations and engage new audiences for the first time while offering deeper engagement where appropriate for those wanting to participate further in the arts.

Another important way to ignite participation is to offer incentives and target specific audience groups. Test Drive the Arts supported by DCAL and ACNI has proved successful to date. This should be built upon with the development of community ticketing schemes. This would address a current issue identified by NITA members as often engagement work such as workshops by professional companies cannot be followed through by offering ongoing access to participants to events through subsidised tickets.

iii) Recommendation: theatre from the very start - exposing children and young people from working class backgrounds to the arts and creating a love for theatre. From early years settings through formal education and other youth environments quality arts should be alive and at the forefront of provision.

The experience of NITA members as the direct delivery organisations of theatre in all communities, is that barriers to access must be addressed from the earliest age.

If we aspire for theatre to be made by and for working class communities then young people growing up must feel that the arts is an acceptable and accessible activity with opportunities for them to creatively express themselves considered the norm not the exception.

Significant barriers surround adults who perceive the arts as not for them. To create writers, directors, actors from working class communities then creativity in children needs nurtured and should be the starting point. Young people need supported to tell their own stories and the result will be that barriers will not emerge in the first place.

Other European examples where the arts is not perceived to be the exclusive right of the middle classes has at its core a high societal value of arts as part of play, education and health. These countries also have higher investment in arts for young people. The result is communities where it is as normal to go to the theatre as it to the cinema or to write a poem as it is to play soccer.

There are already excellent examples of NITA members working in partnership with organisations such as Sure Start to expose the youngest members of our communities to the arts and in so doing also engage with many parents and carers for the first time. Further investment in early years work is necessary and requires a joined up approach by statutory agencies.

Activities delivered directly in schools are also a proven effective method of reaching all

communities however pressures in the delivery of the core curriculum is making this an ongoing challenge. NITA continues to recommend cross-departmental strategy between Department of Education and Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure including the move from STEM to STEAM in recognition of the importance of the arts in education.

In the provision of youth theatre, local authorities have an important role to play in ensuring low cost opportunities for young people to participate in theatre projects. Some training opportunities have a necessary cost however there should be bursaries available to ensure that talent is not lost due to financial barriers.

Training for support workers involved in early years and youth provision is critical as often they make the decision on what programmes participants can access. In particular the arts as a core part of training by accredited early years and youth work providers should be considered.

iv) Explore the Introduction of a ‘Theatre Mile’ to complement the existing community engagement work being carried out by venues by establishing free or heavily subsidised tickets, and community engagement programmes to support and foster involvement from working class communities within a mile of any public theatre venue.

Theatre can learn from successful community engagement from other sectors where previous scepticism from working class communities has been replaced by active support; for example within retail Asda developed the “Asda Mile”. So called Community Champions, instore colleagues, who are designated contact for community groups, are set aside resources and staff hours to support the community within the surrounding area of a store.

This could be adapted for theatres by pro-actively reducing all ticket prices to zero, or a nominal fee, for communities within one mile of a venue. This would require Executive support for such a subsidy, but could encourage active participation and audience development. Furthermore ‘Community Panels’ could oversee or input into the programming of venues to ensure content appeals to the communities the venues serve.

8. NITA Membership

Organisation	Location
Accidental Theatre	Belfast
Agent 106 Theatre	Belfast
Aisling Ghéar	Belfast
Ardhowen Theatre	Enniskillen
Audiences Northern Ireland	Belfast
Belvoir Players Studio Theatre	Belfast
Big Telly Theatre Company	Portstewart
Braid Arts Centre	Ballymena
Brass Neck Theatre Company	Belfast
Bruiser Theatre Company	Belfast
Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre	Cooksown
Cahoots NI	Belfast
Down Arts Centre	Downpatrick
DU Dance NI	Belfast
Dumbworld	Antrim
Echo Echo Dance Theatre Company	Derry/Londonderry
Equity	Glasgow
Fahy Productions	Belfast
Grand Opera House	Belfast
Green Shoot Productions	Belfast
Greenwood Theatre Company	Hollywood
Irish Theatre	Louth
Irish Theatre Institute	Dublin
Kabosh	Belfast
Lyric Theatre	Belfast
Maiden Voyage Dance	Belfast
Market Place Theatre & Arts Centre	Armagh
Millennium Forum	Derry/Londonderry
Newry & Mourne District Council	Newry
Prime Cut Productions	Belfast
Replay Productions	Belfast
Sole Purpose Productions	Derry/Londonderry
Spanner in the Works Theatre Company	Belfast
Stage Beyond	Derry/Londonderry
StageCrew	Belfast
Star Theatre Company	Belfast
Terra Nova Productions	Belfast
The Alley Theatre	Strabane
The MAC	Belfast
The Playhouse	Derry/Londonderry
The Studio Theatre Company	

The Theatres Trust	London
Theatre at the Mill/Courtyard Theatre	Newtownabbey
Tinderbox Theatre Company	Belfast
Ulster Association of Youth Drama	Belfast
Ulster Theatre Company	Limavady
Waterside Theatre	Derry/Londonderry
Write2Perform	Belfast