



Understanding the impact of Travelling Light's Youth Theatre

A summary of what children, young people
and families think about Travelling Light's
Youth Theatre.



Travelling Light Theatre Company has been creating theatre for young audiences for 35 years. Alongside its professional productions, a programme of participation and community work involves over 1,600 children and young people each year.

About the evaluation

Between March and December 2019, Travelling Light commissioned Evaluation Consultant, Nell Farrally, to co-ordinate a collaborative evaluation process. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand what children, young people and families think about Travelling Light's Youth Theatre.



The evaluation approach

The evaluation adopted an illuminative approach to understand what is important to youth theatre members, rather than Outcomes Evaluation, a more common approach to evaluating arts participation programmes for children and young people.

This approach was selected to foreground young people's voices and experiences, rather than any pre-defined intended outcomes for participants. A range of qualitative methods were designed to enable children and young people to contribute data to the evaluation, including focus groups, small group interviews, collage making and drawing activities. All activities were audio recorded and the audio transcribed.

Each of Travelling Light's 6 Youth Theatre groups took part in the evaluation: 4–6 year olds*, 7–10's, 11–13's, 14–19's, Louder Than Words (for children with additional needs aged 7–16) and ActionSpeak (for young people with additional needs aged 16–25). In total, 53 children and young people took part in the evaluation, and 20 parents/carers and 6 youth theatre practitioners completed written questionnaires.

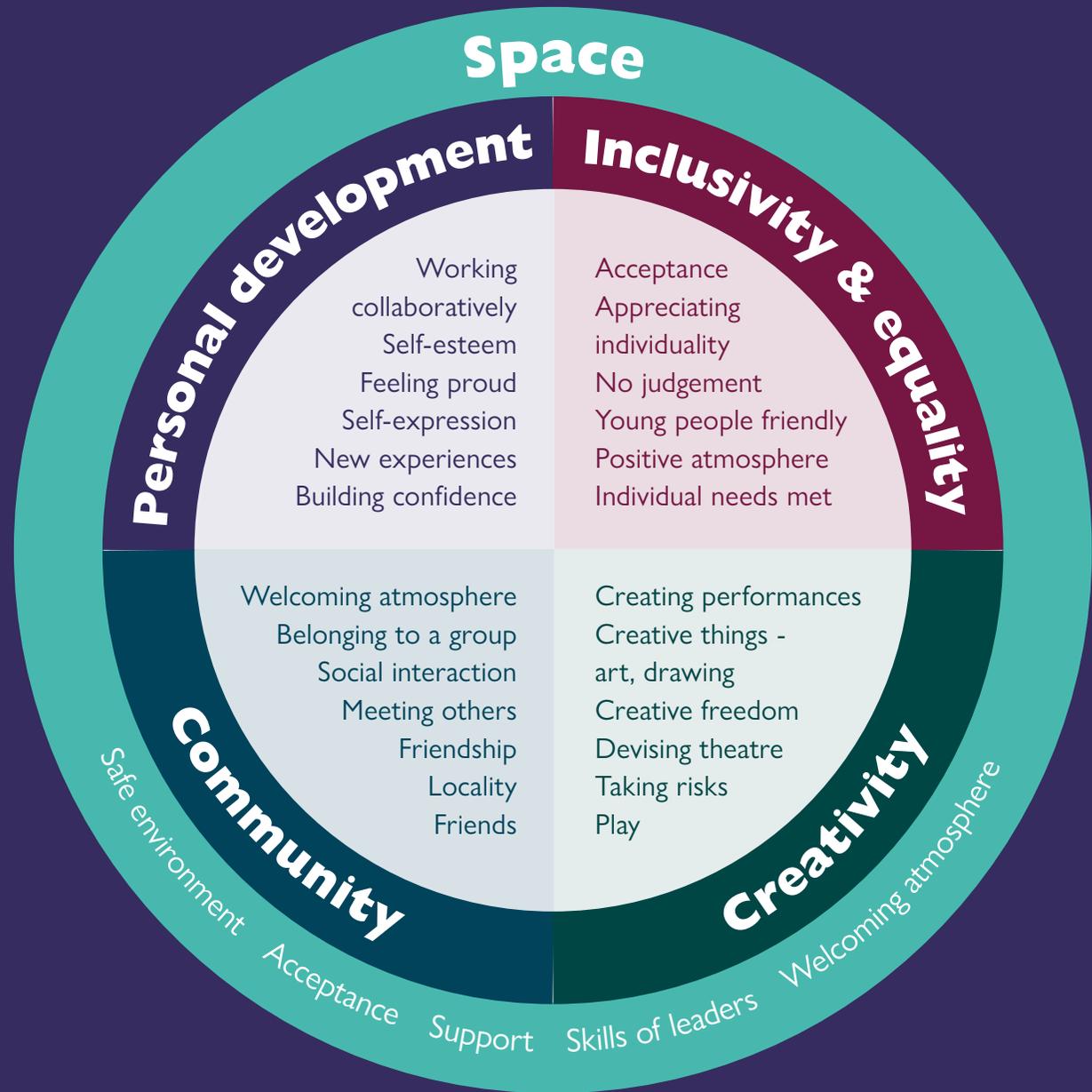
* The decision was made to discontinue the 4–6 year olds youth theatre group at the end of the summer term 2019.



Evaluation findings

The key findings of the evaluation are that Travelling Light's youth theatre groups are valued enormously by the children and young people who take part.

This diagram illustrates the 4 areas participants value most about Travelling Light: Creativity, Community, Personal Development, Inclusivity and Equality, with a fifth area showing how Travelling Light achieves the things people value – by creating a space for them to happen.



Creativity

The most dominant themes which feature in contributions to the evaluation are different aspects of creativity, such as play, self-expression, creative freedom and creating devised theatre.

Although children and young people enjoy the act of performing, they seemed to emphasise the creative process in devising their own work over the experience of performing to an audience. Travelling Light creates opportunities for children and young people to be creative, to try things out, and to express their ideas without fear of being judged – by adults or by their peers.

This opportunity for creative expression, and particularly creating their own devised theatre, is something which members haven't found elsewhere – in their school curriculum, extra-curricular school opportunities or within other drama and youth theatre groups they have experienced. The younger children have a holistic view of creativity and imaginative play, of which "doing drama" is just one part.

"I think the most important thing is the creativity of it ... we don't like have just a script of something. It's completely original, so it means we can basically do whatever we want with the plot."

Youth Theatre participant



Community

A few people specifically used the term “community” in their contributions to the evaluation, but there are many more themes that emerged during the evaluation and can be included in the over-arching concept of community.

The following themes emerged as important to young people: the important of friends, meeting new people, opportunities to interact with young people of the same age, social interaction

beyond school, social interaction with children from different backgrounds, being part of a group, a sense of belonging, and the bonds created through devising theatre together.

“The social aspect is really important to her. She really struggles to access social interactions on her own and ActionSpeak has become the highlight of her week.”

Parent



Inclusivity & equality

There are different aspects of inclusivity and equality in the evaluation contributions.

For the groups of children and young people with additional needs, both children and young people and parents value how everyone is treated with acceptance. Every endeavour is taken to enable children and young people to participate in the way which is right for them.

For children and young people in the other groups, acceptance

and lack of judgement are equally important – from their peers and from the group leaders.

The egalitarianism in the devising process is another aspect of inclusivity which is recognised by children and young people.

The relatively low cost of youth theatre is valued by children and young people and parents/carers.

“There’s a real attitude of acceptance... it’s important to me that he’s with people who genuinely appreciate his character and personality and sense of humour, and barely notice his learning disability.”

Parent



Personal development

Children and young people in the older groups are aware of how youth theatre contributes to their personal development such as increasing confidence and working collaboratively with others.

Some recognise this as specifically relevant to their future careers, whilst others spoke about these concepts in a more general way – just as something which is important to life.

Many aspects of how youth theatre supports children and young people's development fits well with positive youth outcomes such as communication, teamwork and self-esteem.

“It’s like confidence – because I used to be really, really shy and then like I actually started acting like I’ve got less shy, and not just like when I’m acting – when I’m talking to everyday people, like more confident.”

Youth Theatre participant



Space

Creativity, Community, Personal development, Inclusivity and Equality are encompassed in the diagram by Space. Travelling Light creates the space for the other things to happen – both physical space and conceptual space.

The physical space concerns providing a place where children and young people can come to in their local community where they feel welcome and safe. Equally important is how Travelling Light creates the conceptual space which enables children and young people to feel acceptance, lack

of judgement, and confidence to take risks in their creativity.

It is Travelling Light's ethos, and the atmosphere which the Travelling Light staff and group leaders create, which provides the structure and space for the creativity, community, personal development, and inclusivity and equality.

“My child feels well catered for and cared for when she is there. I feel that the adults must be very skilled at keeping a safe space for the children for her to have such positive feelings about going.”

Parent



Recommendations & Actions

The evaluation report makes several recommendations for Travelling Light staff and board to consider when determining the future development of the youth theatre groups. These include:

- Communicating and celebrating what is special about Travelling Light youth theatre, particularly the emphasis on creativity and devised theatre.
- Maintaining Travelling Light as a space and place for children and young people within the context of a professional theatre company, particularly when considering the company's artistic development and future plans.
- Balancing adults structuring and scaffolding of children and young people's ideas with supporting their creative freedom. Developing an ongoing evaluation and a Quality Framework to support how young people's voice can be considered in planning.
- Considering how Travelling Light's participation programme can offer a range of opportunities for children and young people whose families do not have the practical resources to support them to take part in theatre activities or to attend regular after school groups. This may include a greater focus on holiday activities, work in schools and free open access drop-in activities at community events.
- Continuing to review Travelling Light's approach to how it supports and includes a diverse range of young people in its programmes. This includes:
 - Exploring best practice supporting young people around gender identity.
 - More support and activities in the holidays to meet the needs of members with additional needs who benefit from a consistent routine.
 - Continuing to work with partners to develop the programme to reflect the needs and diversity of Travelling Light's local community of Barton Hill.





Travelling Light

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Photos by Camilla Adams



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
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Registered Charity Number: 1065012